Bluefin   About Us   Partners   Client Services   Gallery   Store

A Chat With Author John Huntington

Author John Huntington

Recently, we had a chance to chat with the author John Huntington, of Show Networks and Control Systems. Here's our conversation:

Bluefin: What drove you to write this edition book?

Networking has been in the book since the first edition in 1994, but it's now becoming more and more prevalent in our industry, so I wanted to update and expand the book. My former publisher wasn't interested, so I self published this new edition, which has been great!

Bluefin: Is it really the next edition, or does this one break out on its own?

It's a bit of both, but I would say that this edition really does "break out" from the others. There is a little bit of text surviving from the first edition (mostly on older protocols), but I reorganized the whole book even from the last edition, and went through and reviewed or revised every single sentence.   I cleaned up the design, and added a bunch of visual aids and a glossary. There are about 30 pages of totally lot of new stuff--and something like 40 new diagrams--that is all new, on topics like VLANs, default gateways, and other critical networking stuff that was never there before.

Bluefin: How did you come up with the title?

My working title (selected by my readers on my blog
http://www.controlgeek.net/2012/1/13/survey-says-new-book-
results-from-my-readers.html) was "Networks and Control Systems for Live
Entertainment", but at InfoComm this year (http://www.controlgeek.net
/blog/2012/6/16/controlgeek-the-teacher-online-learning-studio-at-
infocomm.html) I spoke to several people who thought that the "live
entertainment" part was too restrictive. So on the plane back from Vegas I
changed it to "Show Networks and Control Systems". I ran it past a few
friends and colleagues and that was it--I didn't have a publisher or
committee to ask for approval.

Bluefin: Who designed the cover?

My friend Netta Rabin (http://nettarabin.com/) who does book design for a
living. My original idea was to continue the tradition of a shot from behind
the operator at a show, which I did for the first three editions. I got
permission to shoot a photo from inside the control booth of Disney's World
of Color but, after 3 months of waiting, they told me that they do not allow
images of their stuff to be on book covers. So I gave her a bunch of
pictures to think about, and she picked a documentation snapshot I took of
the *Gravesend Inn*. I didn't even have a RAW file of it! But she did a great
job, and I'm happy that Disney rejected me--this cover is way better than
what it would have been had they approved my photos.

Bluefin: The pictures and graphics?

Aaron Bollinger, a former student, did all the excellent graphics
(http://piratechnical.com/). Most of the photos from older editions came
from manufacturers. This edition, if I wanted a photo of example gear, I just
shot it myself.

Bluefin: What got you into theater and shows?

I have no idea, but I've been doing it since 8th grade. I originally wanted to
tour with Led Zeppelin (http://www.controlgeek.net/2008/9/3/entertainment-
technology-led-zeppelin-1977.html), but then I went to school for theatre
and kind of fell into that. Since then I've worked on live concerts, broadway
shows, the Metropolitan Opera, theme park attractions, you name it.

**Bluefin: What are you working on now? What are your current
projects?**

The book has been taking up all my time! :-) But I did get some storm
chasing in this spring (http://www.controlgeek.net/2012/6/16/storm-chase-
wrap-up.html). Starting right now I'm back at school, upgrading my courses
to match the new material in the book. And gearing up for some new
upgrades to the *Gravesend Inn*. http://www.controlgeek.net
/the-gravesend-inn/

**Bluefin: What people have most influenced your life
professionally?**

Dr. John Bracewell (who you know!) was a role model for me, because he
is interested in both science *and* art. I was lucky that my first job out of
college was working for Bran Ferren, because we got to do all kinds of
fascinating stuff. I was lucky to be involved at the end of the mechanical
special effects era in film, (http://www.controlgeek.net/2008/11/6/its-not-a-
fcking-hologram.html) plus we did all kinds of crazy control system stuff, like
time-code controllable 35mm film projectors for Pink Floyd. The best boss I
ever had was Steve Terry, who was then at Production Arts Lighting and is
now VP of R&D at ETC. My friend and former employer George Kindler,
who, sadly, died a few years (http://livedesignonline.com
/news/george_kindler_obituary/index.html) was a great influence as well.

He was a "go to" guy on just about every big Vegas attraction or show.

Bluefin: Are there any new books that have grasped your interest in our industry?

Most of what I do is adapting and importing stuff from other industries, so I mostly read books from outside our industry. I just read Andrew Blum's "Tubes" which--though not a technical book--is excellent. http://andrewblum.net/

Bluefin: If you had to do it all over again, would you change anything in your latest book?

Ask me in a year :-) I can't think about it any more at the moment.

Bluefin: Do you have to travel much concerning your book(s)?

I did make a west coast swing through Disney in January on my way to a kayak trip in Baja, Mexico. http://www.controlgeek.net/2012/2/25/wrapping-up-my-pacific-trip.html

Bluefin: Did you learn anything from writing your book and what was it?

Most of what I knew about networking was by trial and error and wikipedia, so in preparation for the book, I took a Global Knowledge Cisco CCNA "Crash Course" that was excellent. I eventually passed the first part of the Cisco certification exam this year.   The other thing I learned, sadly (but not unexpectedly) is that the lighting market has been very slow to adopt all the new network technologies (like ACN). http://www.controlgeek.net/2012/6/9/global-knowledge-cisco-ccna-boot-camp-and-entertainment-netw.html

Bluefin: Do you have any advice for other writers?

I was thinking when writing this nearly 500 page book that I don't know how I could have done it without a sabbatical from my job as a Professor at City Tech! Books take an enormous amount of time, and I wrote the first edition while working full time at Production Arts. A colleague asked me about this recently, and I suggested that he start a blog and just start writing stuff. When he has enough content, then put that into a book. I did that for this edition of the book--I worked out some of the newly included technical topics (like VLANs) in blog entries, and then cut and pasted that text into Framemaker to edit and expand it into a book chapter.

Bluefin: What were the challenges (research, literary, psychological, and logistical) in bringing it to life?

I would say that about 90% of what's in the book is somewhere on Wikipedia :-)   What I do is put it into a context for our industry.

Bluefin: Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

Thanks! And thanks for asking these good questions!

John's Book is available here

< previous   next >

Bluefin Home   About US   Clients • Services   Picture Gallery

We Provide Production Management
Lighting • Sound • Video • Staging • Audiovisual Services
For Special Events, Corporate Meetings, Political Events and Parties

(877) 2BLUEFIN
(877)225-8334

Special Events • Meetings • Press Conferences • Corporate Parties • Political Events

(877) 2BLUEFIN
(877)225-8334