

**Alan Pierce**

pierceaj@optonline.net

## Air Hollywood

Two years ago, I met the general manager of Air Hollywood, Robert Shalhoub, at a digital conference.

We discussed many of the new and emerging technologies that play a role in today's digital experience. Shalhoub described how the Air Hollywood studio that he manages uses technology, props and airplane mockups to create movie scenes that couldn't be shot on a real airplane. He then invited me to join him for a special behind-the-scenes tour of the two Air Hollywood sound stages.

The studio is the largest aviation-themed movie studio in the world. They own the props and mockups needed to accurately depict everything you will find at an airport, including many different model airplanes and mockups of their cockpits.

Most of Air Hollywood's planes are assembled in sections with larger-than-usual aisles to provide the needed space for the camera equipment used to shoot a movie. Since the airplanes are assembled in sections, it is possible to remove just about any physical part of the mockup, including the outer walls, to get the camera into proper position to catch the action. Studio customers are allowed to change the sets any way they want. They can even blow them up, as long as they restore them to their original condi-

tion. For example, in the filming of the pilot for the television show *Lost*, the roof of the plane was made



Marvin Fisher

up of green screen gym mats so the movie makers could combine the actors' physical action with simulated footage to create the visual reality of a plane out of control and about to crash.

The photo above shows my wife, Shelley, and me sitting in the cockpit of the mockup used to film the Leslie Nielsen movie *Airplane*. The realism of this set is nothing compared to Air



Removable airplane sections aid camera crews

Hollywood's mockup of the cockpit of a Boeing 777. All the instruments match what you would find on the real airplane. On the set, most of these instruments are back-lit reproductions or computer monitors that can be activated to mimic what real controls on a 777 would show if filming took place in the air, rather than on a sound stage.

Words alone can't describe how they use technology, props and plane mockups to create the simulated reality that you view in the movies or on a television show. You can visit [www.airhollywood.com/company/news-video.html](http://www.airhollywood.com/company/news-video.html) to view some short videos shot at Air Hollywood by *Access Hollywood*, ABC's *Eye on LA*, CNN *Headline News*, *Tech TV* and Fox News's *Good Day Live*. The synergy between this column and the videos should give you a total picture of the technology behind the filming of movies that involve airplanes.

## Recalling the Facts

1. Why is it easier to film a movie on a mockup of a plane rather than a real plane?

2. When you see an airplane or airplane terminal on television or in



Air Hollywood

## Exterior of a model airplane

the movies, what visual cues help you determine the type of plane or the location of the terminal? ☺

*Alan Pierce, Ed.D., CSIT, is a technology education consultant, technical writer, and public speaker on technology issues.*