A personal view on IFC Denver 2006
Passion, perhaps the most important software on the market

By Martin Derksema

IFC Denver was a great event and I am glad that it was possible for me to come over from Holland and experience it. You can read reviews about this show everywhere on the internet now. This article will be a personal view on the Denver event. The most important phenomenon that I experienced in Denver was an enormous amount of passion for Flight Simulator. Being there was like flying through an airspace vibrating of passion. It made me think that passion is probably the most important software on the flightsim market.

IFC is the spiritual child from Mark Silcock. When, like me, you have had the pleasure to spend some time with Mark you would probably agree with me that Mark is a walking volcano of passion for Flight Simulator. Wherever I met Mark in the Double Tree Hotel in Denver I saw him explaining his vision to people, with never dying energy and enthusiasm. Even in the middle of the night, sitting on the smoking bench in front of the hotel, he went on doing his ‘missionary’ work.
The vision

I will try to give you a short explanation of Mark’s vision. It all starts with the fact that Mark is a passionate flight simmer himself. He thought that Microsoft Flight Simulator is a superb product with an enormous potency. In addition, he saw the large amount of passion and knowledge around MSFS, living in the minds of add-on developers, hardware manufacturers, cockpit builders and millions of flight simmers all over the world. At the same time, Mark noticed that Flight Simulator did not get the worldwide attention other popular pc-games get.

In fact, he got the feeling that the world of flight simmers was like a hidden universe inhabited by lone rangers. A separate world where people do their secret thing in the anonymous atmosphere of their loft, garage or boys room. Some sort of subspace that seemed not to have many connections with the real world.

Also he noticed that both add-on developers and users lived on islands and did not communicate much with each other, at least not outside the virtual environment of Flight Simulator specialized internet forums.

This is where Mark’s vision and mission started to develop. He knew that millions and millions of people were involved with Flight Simulator and he wanted to show the world how big this passion is. And how real it is.
An example of how passion becomes reality …

**Energy and knowledge**

If you are a simmer you will probably know how hard it is to explain to not-simmers why you are so passionate about it. When you speak with someone who knows nothing about Flight Simulator and tell this person that you spend hours and hours with it, you often will be looked at as if you are a rather pitiful human being that refuses to grow up and plays with toy aircraft.

But when you invite this person to sit next to you during a flight he or she will be amazed about the realism of the software, your knowledge about flying and your dedication. That is the effect that Mark is aiming on, but on a much larger, even worldwide scale.
Let’s make Flight Simulator as big as it is!

Unity

If you want to show the world how beautiful, intelligent and challenging Flight Simulator is, you have to speak with one voice. Therefore, an important part of Mark’s mission is to bring all party’s together to create one big vibrant ocean of Flight Simulator related energy and knowledge. That is why he took the initiative to start organizing the IFC Conventions. Join each other, communicate with each other, share knowledge, work together, and show the world that you are there: those are the basic principles of Mark’s vision. And it works!
The vision works!

Mark started with the IFC Conventions only a couple of years ago. And already the IFC Conventions are the biggest Flight Simulator conventions in the world. With shows in Europe, the United States, Australia and – in the near future – Asia. This growth and expansion proofs that Mark’s vision is virile and has all the power necessary for success. Both in Blackpool and in Denver I personally experienced that on the IFC Conventions there is a very strong and positive interaction between visitors and exhibitors and also between the exhibitors themselves. The exhibitors leave their islands, shake hands, sit together and start communicating, brainstorming, exchanging ideas and discovering new possibilities to make Flight Simulator bigger and bigger.

Mark’s vision is not a theoretical but a very realistic concept that works. It works because it is based on passion, and that is a force with which you can make dreams come true. And also it’s the one thing that we all – designers, publishers and users – have in common. One of the most beautiful things I saw in Denver was the connection and interaction that grew during the
show between all important parties: flight simmers, add-on developers, hardware manufacturers, cockpit builders, real life pilots and – not in the least – the development team of Microsoft.

*The smoking bench in front of the Double Tree in Denver where Marks held spontaneous midnight motivation sessions.*

**Flight simmers**

The first time I dived into the vibrant world of IFC was in Blackpool 2005. I never participated in an event like this before and it opened my eyes. Before IFC, flight simming was a beautiful but rather lonely activity for me. I had some friends in the Flight Simulator world and I wrote reviews for Dutch websites, but I did not have the feeling of being a part of a community. IFC Blackpool changed that. For two days, I talked with people like me. With the same passion and the same desires. Also I spoke with lots of professional people in the Flight Simulator world and listened to their ideas and visions. After IFC I knew one thing for sure: I am part of a community that is driven by passion and I love to be part of it. In fact, and
to be honest, now and then in my real life I notice that I am missing that IFC feeling. Really, when you are in the opportunity to visit one of the IFC Conventions don’t hesitate but do it! It is so good to be surrounded with people who are as passionate as you are for one weekend. To illustrate the effect that an IFC Convention can have on people I tell you the story of Shelby, a young woman that sold IFC merchandise on the show in Denver. A story that touched me deeply and makes clear what I mean when I say that passion is the most important software on the flightsim market. Nobody can tell the story better then Shelby’s mother who wrote this e-mail to IFC:

"Hi Mark and the team at IFC, I just wanted to thank you for a great time at the 2006 Denver Convention. Thank you for the boost it gave to Shelby. She had a blast! She had quite a year last year medically; we were not sure if she would be with us this year. She has had some problems this year and had been rather down. Letting her participate gave her the boost she needed. She is trying to put together a system for flight sim, with Ken's help and the spare room is becoming her cockpit. Letting her participate has given her something to keep her mind off things and given her back her spark! Her newfound friends mean more to her then they know. You all have been her much needed angels".
Community thinking

So, the most important goal that Mark Silcock has set for himself is to create a passion driven, worldwide flightsim community. He wants to bring all the players on the stage of Flight Simulator together and wants to make Flight Simulator as big as can.

To have a good vision is one thing. To develop a good idea at the right time is another thing. I think the right time is the moment on which the world is ready for it. Because, let us be honest, there have been times in which the world was not even ready for the idea that earth was round and not flat. I think that Marks vision is born on the right time. Because I see that lots of people don’t only listen to his ideas, but also start doing something with it. Like Microsoft for example. They have also started with building a community round Flight Simulator. On their presentation in Denver Microsoft admitted that the Flight Simulator division lived an invisible life behind the stages for years. But now they want to step into the
footlight and face the world. In the Flight Simulator development team there is even created a new task: the job of community builder. So Microsoft also wants to start communicating with the world and also want to bring parties together. Their new website proofs that they are serious about that. It will be a platform where users, publishers and real life pilots meet each other. So, there is a strong base of understanding between Microsoft and IFC. And this is only one example of the synergy that is starting to develop. I mean to say that Mark is not alone in his aspirations, but can count on strong forces that are going in the same direction.

Microsoft reveals the plan to create a strong Flight Simulator community.

Connection between Flight Simulator and real life aviation

As I said, IFC wants to create a community with everyone and everything that is related to Flight Simulator. That also includes real life aviation. The synergy between Flight Simulator
and real aviation was clearly visible in Denver. In several ways. First of all: at the other side of the street there was the trainings centre from United Airlines. People who visited the convention got the opportunity to spend some time in a real simulator, under the supervision of a real aviation teacher. United’s training centre being so close to the hotel also meant that many real life pilots were staying in the hotel. And visited the convention. This resulted in a very spontaneous interaction between real pilots and simmers, which was very enlightening and interesting for both parties.

Also IFC has its own champion of the real life pilots: captain Mike Ray. He was there in Blackpool and he was there in Denver to promote his excellent manuals. Mike Ray is a retired United Airlines pilot with an inner gold mine of aviation experience, which he very generously shares with everyone who wants to listen. Also he is a very educated man with a great sense of humour. In fact, he might be the John Cleese of the aviation world. Not only in his manuals and seminars, but in every conversation you have with him, he builds a bridge between real life aviation and Flight Simulator. He is a walking advertisement of what Mark means with bringing forces together. Hope to see you in Birmingham, Mike!
Mike Ray: generous with his knowledge and blessed with a great sense of humour.

A very special event on IFC Denver was the appearance of captain Meryl Getline, the first female captain in the history of the United States. She has her own website (http://www.fromthecockpit.com/) which is very interesting to read, she wrote a book about her life and career and she writes a weekly column for USA Today. Her visit to IFC Denver was her first acquaintance with the universe of Flight Simulator. She was pleasantly surprised about what us flight simmers are doing with our valuable spare time. She even wrote a column about it in USA Today and also she is going to write for the MSFS website.

Captain Meryl was pleasantly surprised about the world of flight simmers.
Pilots are driven by the passion for flying. Flight simmers are driven by the same passion. It is beautiful to experience how those two sources of passion melt together to become one big firework of aviation enthusiasm. And it is typical for the IFC atmosphere that I like so much.

**Being there**

I love Flight Simulator for years already and this love is still growing. I think it’s great that Mark Silcock started to create a stage on which everyone’s passion for Flight Simulator can flourish. His vision is not easy to accomplish but I really believe he will manage. And I hope that his efforts will lead to success. If a man sets a goal for himself, he has to start in his mind with being there already. I think this must be the way in which Mark is approaching his goal too. Therefore, I close this personal impression with a quote from ‘Jonathan Livingston Seagull’, a great novel by Richard Bach:

"No, Jonathan, there is no such place. Heaven is not a place, and it is not a time. Heaven is being perfect." He was silent for a moment. "You are a very fast flier, aren't you?"

"I... I enjoy speed," Jonathan said, taken aback but proud that the Elder had noticed. "You will begin to touch heaven, Jonathan, in the moment that you touch perfect speed. And that isn’t flying a thousand miles an hour, or a million, or flying at the speed of light. Because any number is a limit, and perfection doesn't have limits. Perfect speed, my son, is being there.”