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Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a on Saudi TV’s 50-year journey and his vision for SBC
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AFRICAN ENTERTAINMENT CHANNEL SET TO LAUNCH FROM ABU DHABI

Tanzanian media conglomerate, Clouds Media Group will launch an African TV station, Clouds TV International, on June 15. BroadcastPro ME can reveal. Based out of Abu Dhabi, the main focus of the channel’s programming will be African content, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, with some programmes from North Africa as well. Commenting on the channel’s operations, Joseph Kusaga, Managing Director, Clouds Media International FZ-LLC and Clouds TV International, said: “We don’t have a real production base to twofour54. They have literally carried direct-to-home through Yahsat. The group also intends to launch a radio station soon. As most production houses in Africa do not possess HD cameras, the content will be produced in SD format. The channel is technically finalised and is presently being played out internally with around 50% of the content ready for viewers. I would like to thank the team at twofour54 for their continuous support on this project, especially Paul Baker, Executive Director, intaj – twofour54 and Jamal Al Awadhi, Head of Commercial at intaj – twofour54. They have literally spent countless hours working with our team here in the UAE as well as Tanzania to ensure that we got this right. I expected this level of care only for the big names at twofour54 such as CNN and FOX but was pleasantly surprised to receive the same level of attention. I look forward to expanding our relationship with twofour54 from playout to content production in the coming months,” added Kusaga. The channel will be distributed over satellite and IP as well as carried direct-to-home through Yahsat. The group also intends to launch a radio station soon.

Joseph Kusaga, MD of Clouds Media Group.
BSA partners with Anyware Video

UAE-based SI Broadcast Systems Arabia (BSA) has signed a partnership agreement with Anyware Video to distribute its solutions in the MENA region and Pakistan. The products will include Anyware’s playlist servers and channel-in-a-box solutions. With this partnership, BSA will add channel-in-a-box solutions to its portfolio, Irfan Gondal, BSA’s MD said.

“We will represent Anyware locally and have their demo kits available for MENA clients. We will also start integrating their solutions in our projects. The addition of Anyware will enhance our product offerings for regional clients.”

Cinegy expands to Middle East with Promedia Qatar

Cinegy has expanded into the Middle East through a partnership with reseller Promedia Qatar, which is a subsidiary of OMNIS INTERNATIONAL UAE and provides technology-enabled solutions in MENA. “Cinegy complements our solutions offering within the region and helps us with our strategic expansion into the media and broadcast industries,” commented Abdalnasser Muneer, Corporate Marketing Manager, Promedia.

Headquartered in Doha, Qatar, Promedia also has offices in other parts of the region including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Riyadh, Khorab, Jordan, Oman and Iraq.

Endemol signs TV deals with Egyptian broadcaster

A new deal between Egyptian broadcaster CBC and Endemol will see the launch of a new format in the region, according to a report in WorldFist. Endemol is producing a 13-episode version of WorldFist’s My Life for CBC.

Endemol Middle East has also renewed its deal with CBC for Star Academy. The contract will see Endemol produce 16 additional episodes of Star Academy for CBC, marking the format’s tenth season in the region. In addition to this, a 24-hour pan-Arab Star Academy channel will feature live action and the 105 daily access shows that include each day’s highlights.

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Endemol has signed TV deals with Egyptian broadcaster.

AMT EXPANDS TO AFRICA WITH CATS

Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media Trading (AMT) has teamed up with CATS (Creative Arts Technologies) in Kenya to make broadcast equipment available more easily to productions in East Africa.

The team presently offers multi-cam production and technical support to two of the biggest shows that are broadcast live on TV once a week for the duration of four months.

There are no distributors in East Africa for broadcast equipment, Chinted De Wit, Partner at CATS told BroadcastPro ME.

“In the past, we have sent requests to Kaveh Farnam, CEO of AMT but we now want to make it easier for people to test the equipment and access it,” stated De Wit.

Most of the productions in East Africa are undertaken by people trained by CATS, claimed Ayaz Rajput, Head Trainer at CATS.

“As a result, when people eventually want to invest in equipment, they tend to come to us for advice. We are an engineering service provider. It’s not an expertise we can teach people. We will now serve as an advisory committee and keep some demo equipment from AMT for people to test.”

Owing to the laws in Kenya, AMT will not have an office in the country but will look to serve this market through a representative.

Speaking about the deal, Kaveh Farnam, CEO of AMT said: “This is an excellent opportunity for us to expand our business into Africa. We have always worked with the objective of educating and creating brand and product awareness in the market and this partnership will help us achieve that in Africa.”

Saudi Arabia to regulate YouTube content

The General Commission for Audiovisual Media of Saudi Arabia will monitor the quality and quantity of content produced in the Kingdom on platforms such as YouTube via a code that will include guidelines on alcohol, tobacco, nudity and sexual acts, said Dr Riyadh Najm, the Commission’s President. It will also promote private-sector-led investment in the media industry. Najm said that his organisation would soon issue a manifesto to organise or regulate the work of YouTube channels. It will include rules and conditions that would be in accordance with the nature of society and laws in this context.

Hollywood and Bollywood productions choose Abu Dhabi

Walt Disney’s Star Wars has begun shooting in Abu Dhabi. This is the seventh instalment of the popular sci-fi movie series but the first under the Walt Disney brand.

Kan Wors, Chairman of Disney’s film unit, confirmed some secondary scenes have already been shot in the emirate. UK-based Pinewood Studios will be the primary location of the film, where most of the shooting will take place.

“The challenge is to have pictures that can travel,” Horn said, emphasising the importance of the faster growing international box office.

“We’ve learnt that these tentpole movies are most desired all around the world. So we need to go to different places that give us the right look and feel,” said Horn.

The film has a scheduled release date of December 18, 2015, and is the first of a planned third trilogy in the franchise.

Big-budget Bollywood production, Bang Bang, is now shooting in Abu Dhabi. The film, an action-thriller, began shooting in early May.

A Fox Star Studios production, Bang Bang, is directed by Siddharth Raj Anand. Andy Armstrong of the Amazing Spider-Man 2 fame will design the action sequences in the film.

The movie is scheduled for release on October 2, 2014.

From left: Kaveh Farnam, CEO of AMT, with Chinted De Wit and Ayaz Rajput from CATS.
WASP3D TO POWER EGYPTIAN ELECTIONS

WASP3D will provide on-air news graphics to ERTU (Egyptian Radio and Television Union) for the coverage of the upcoming presidential elections in the country. Egypt’s state broadcaster awarded the contract to WASP3D in April for a turnkey solution for election presentations in news programmes. WASP3D will provide ERTU with the option to use its WASPi Mimosa touchscreen-based module, which allows for an analysis-driven, user-interactive presentation.

Commenting on the project, Deependra Rathi, VP, MEA, WASP3D said: “We designed the solution for ERTU within a very tight timeframe. It’s a very prestigious project for us yet challenging because of the political situation in Egypt. The project entails taking bulky live and historic data from multiple sources and packaging and presenting of the content more interactively.”

Rathi added that WASP3D assembled a team of highly experienced project managers, system designers and engineers as well as graphics artists for this project, and was supported by its local partner SI Systems Design. A team from ERTU will travel to WASP3D’s headquarters in Noida, India to receive hands-on training while a part of the training will also be held in Egypt at ERTU’s headquarters.

New MD to head Fatafeat

Discovery Networks Central & Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEEMEA) has appointed Amanda Turnbull as the new Managing Director for its Arabic cookery network Fatafeat. Turnbull will be responsible for the strategic and operational management of Fatafeat and be the primary point of contact for day-to-day business development. She will manage the Fatafeat team from its new office in Dubai Studio City and work in partnership with the senior Discovery Networks CEEMEA team in London and Warsaw. Amanda will report into James Gibbons, SVP & Country Manager, Emerging Business, Discovery Networks CEEMEA.

“Amanda will be responsible for the strategic and operational management of Fatafeat, spearheading the network’s ad sales and overall business goals in order to cement its position as the number one food channel across the Middle East,” commented Gibbons.

Turnbull added: “This is an exciting time in the channel’s history and I look forward to working closely with the entire Fatafeat team here in Dubai and in Cairo to take the business to the next level.”

NEW PRODUCTION ASSET MANAGEMENT MODULE: VSNEXPLORER PAM

The new VSNEXPLORER PAM makes the production environment more efficient with tools to manage and follow media along the whole creation process. Its new sequence management features allow for comprehensive control of all associated media in the database, enabling improved distributed workflows and online storage use optimization.

- Integrated with Adobe Premiere, FCP 7, FCP 10 and Avid Media Composer.
- Drag and drop media and sequences to timeline.
- Send sequences and associated media to LTO.
- Smart production storage management functions.
Al Jazeera America restructures

Al Jazeera America has laid off dozens of employees as part of its restructuring plans. The cable channel is disbANDING its sport unit and is cutting its daily social media show The Stream to once a week.

At least 20 The Stream staffers were laid off, it was reported in The Hollywood Reporter.

Kate O’Brian, President, Al Jazeera America, said that the decision will affect “some staff, freelancers, independent contractors, and other project-oriented individuals who have been with us for several months. The new cuts are the result of restructuring after a launch that required considerable resources.”

Emirati filmmaker Ali F. Mostafa, who is renowned for his film City of Life, has begun filming for his next film, From A to B. Co-produced in partnership with twofour54 and Image Nation Abu Dhabi, the film is a comedy drama that follows three childhood friends on a road trip from Abu Dhabi to Beirut. The team will shoot in the UAE and in various locations across the region for the film.

Speaking about the film, Mostafa said: “I appreciate twofour54 for supporting the development of this film and Image Nation for co-producing it – they are responsible for turning this idea into a reality.

“Those two organisations are committed to building a film industry in the UAE, and without them, From A to B would never have happened.”

Mohammed Al Mubarak, Chairman of Image Nation, added: “With acclaimed Director Ali F. Mostafa at the helm, we’re sure From A to B will follow the success of our past local feature films, that include box office hit Zizou and film festival favourite Son Shahid.”

Al Jazeera standardises news production with Sony XDCAM HD 422

Al Jazeera Media Network, which broadcasts to more than 250 million households across 130 countries, is standardising its news broadcasting on Sony’s XDCAM HD 422 camcorder range.

The broadcaster selected the PMW-500 and PMW-200 camcorders with supporting accessories to standardise their global news production on HD technology. The camcorders are being distributed to Al Jazeera’s news bureaux in 50 countries across six continents, where they will raise the technical quality of broadcasts on its six news channels.

This purchase means that, in future, field operations across the Al Jazeera network will be standardised on Sony’s XDCAM 422 50mbs format.

Al Jazeera has previously used Sony camcorders and equipment, and the upgrade to the XDCam HD 422 format allows for seamless integration with their current editing workflow, using existing equipment, as well as rapid adoption by staff familiar with Sony’s camera range.

EMIRATI DIRECTOR EMBARKS ON NEW FILM PROJECT IN ABU DHABI

Filmmaker Ali Mostafa on location with the team.

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Pay-TV in MENA rises to 4.35m: IHS report

The MENA pay-TV market has quadrupled in the last 10 years, according to a report released by research firm IHS. It said that the number of Arab households paying for TV subscriptions hit 4.35m at the end of 2013, and is growing faster than in any other emerging market.

Dubai-based OSN and beIn Sports Arabia (formerly Al Jazeera Sports) enjoy the maximum number of subscriptions. The overall pay-TV market grew by 14.13% in terms of subscriber numbers in 2013. There were just 1.33m households paying to receive such services in 2004.

"The Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain) account for two out of three pay-TV households (or 66% of the total),” IHS said in a statement.

"There are huge disparities in the uptake of pay-TV services across the region, where UAE has the highest penetration rate at 85% and Egypt the lowest with just 2.4%.”

ASBU selects Eutelsat to cover MENA region

Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) has concluded a multi-year contract for Ku-band capacity on the EUTELSAT 21B satellite to cover the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. The capacity will be used for broadcast content exchanges between ASBU member broadcasters in a region extending from Morocco to Bahrain and from the Mediterranean to Yemen, Sudan and Mauritania and also extending their footprint to Europe.

Pay-TV network OSN has invested in 15 brand new shows including the OSN-produced reality series Musahane Karim, starring George Kordahi. These shows will be broadcast on OSN’s Arabic channel, OSN Ya Hala HD. Based on the popular international format You’ve Got Mail, OSN’s Arabic adaptation will see George Kordahi’s return to television after four years. OSN will bring new brand new and exclusive dramas across OSN Ya Hala HD, OSN Ya Hala Shabab HD and OSN Ya Hala Drama HD. Popular Turkish show Hareem Al Sultan also returned with Season 4 last month on OSN Ya Hala.

15 new shows on OSN Ya Hala HD

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SHARJAH TV UPGRADES WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY WITH AXIENT

Sharjah TV has recently purchased an Axient wireless system from Nicolas M Kyvermitis Electronics Est, the distributor of Shure Axient in the Middle East. Sharjah TV’s newly acquired wireless system consists of six channels of AXT600 receiver units, six AXT100 Axient Bodypack Transmitters and four AXT200 Axient Handheld Frequency Diversity Transmitters with KSM9 capsule.

The complete system, including Spectrum Manager, show link access point, Rechargeable solution, Antenna distribution and a road-ready wireless Ethernet switch, offers a whole range of Axient features.

The system continuously scans for problems, while maintaining a list of back-up frequencies in order to provide a clean and compatible frequency whenever required. Using a data backchannel, Axient uses its unique frequency diversity feature to seamlessly switch channels before interference becomes audible, either automatically via a manual alert. The system also precisely tracks battery life in hours and minutes to within 15 minutes' accuracy.

Participant Media to co-finance documentary on Malala Yousafzai with Image Nation

Image Nation Abu Dhabi has announced that it has attracted funding from American production company, Participant Media, for its forthcoming documentary about the life of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot by the Taliban while campaigning for women’s access to education.

Directed by Davis Guggenheim, the project has a budget of several million dollars, and is likely to be released in early 2016. Although originally conceived as a drama, it was later scripted as a documentary film.

"It’s a strong vote of confidence in the quality of the film we’re making,” commented Michael Garin, CEO of Image Nation.

"We didn’t seek Participant Media. They wanted to be a part of this, and they came to us. It’s very nice and very unusual.”

This will also be the first time the Abu Dhabi based entity has wielded complete creative control over a major international film, in addition to providing financing.

The film is in production, and is likely to be released early in 2016. Although originally conceived as a drama, it was later scripted as a documentary film.

Pink Rain offers 3D experience for DEWA

Dubai-based Pink Rain Production has created an animated presentation for DEWA. The content was screened on a panoramic 3456 x 1080 pixel curved high resolution LED screen at DEWA’s Wetex stand. Rami Al Khatib, Managing Director and Founder of Pink Rain commented: “DEWA awarded Pink Rain a project to create awareness about its strategic development initiative. We created a film that gave the audience a 3D experience with 2D content using post production tools in our studios. Made with After Effects and 3D Studio Max, the film was screened in a dark zone during Wetex.”

Pink Rain has the highest penetration rate at 85% and Egypt the lowest with just 2.4%.”

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Shure ANNONCES MEA OFFICE

Shure IMEA has opened a regional office in Dubai.

Shure’s Dubai office is headed by Fredrik Skee, General Manager Shure MEA. The new Shure office will be responsible for managing the Shure distribution centre in the region, as well as providing application support, training and seminars for the complete Shure and DIS product portfolios across the Middle East and Africa.

The new office will also see Jan Villumsen join as Systems Business Manager and Chicco Hiranandani as Senior Manager while Remina Santos Castro will handle customer service and support.

Speaking about the office, Markus Winkler, MD of Shure MEA said: “The establishment of the new MEA office in Dubai will increase the presence of the Shure brand and enable us to further develop the market in the region by strengthening the relationships with our local distribution partners.

“As part of this commitment, we will shortly begin holding regular seminars and training sessions. We look forward to welcoming existing and new customers to one of these sessions in the near future.”

Dalet acquires Amberfin

Dalet Digital Media Systems has signed a definitive agreement with Advent Venture Partners to acquire Amberfin. With combined revenues of more than USD 55m, the acquisition significantly broadens the Dalet product offerings, which are built around an open, IT-centric technology framework. The new portfolio will offer end-to-end solutions that include comprehensive MAM capabilities along with state-of-the-art image processing, media transcoding and distribution.

Kudelski Group buys Conax for USD 250m

Digital security and convergent media solutions company, the Kudelski Group has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Conax AS from Telenor Broadcast Holding AS. Headquartered in Oslo, Conax is a global provider of content protection for digital TV services. Conax’s customer base will benefit from the Kudelski Group’s portfolio of products, including its next-generation OpelTVS, middleware, multiscreen/OTT solutions and SmartTVs.

Imagine Communications acquires Digital Rapids

Imagine Communications has acquired Digital Rapids. This acquisition will create a comprehensive portfolio of processing and compression solutions for TV Everywhere. Digital Rapids’ software-based workflow management, transcoding and encoding solutions will integrate with Imagine Communications’ existing mezzanine quality origination encoding, adaptive bit rate (ABR) transcoding technology and content delivery network software to create an end-to-end, TV Everywhere solution for optimised file-based and live video stream distribution across a variety of platforms.

TDA renews mediumwave transmission stations

Algeria’s national broadcaster Télédiffusion d’Algérie (TDA) has selected TRANSRADIO and Ampegon to modernise two mediumwave transmission stations. The project was offered in cooperation with TRANSRADIO and Ampegon.

Thorsten Goecke joins Atlona EMEA

Atlona, an AV distribution solutions company, has appointed Thorsten Goecke as Director of Business Development for the company’s EMEA commercial division. In his new role, Goecke will work to extend Atlona’s partner network and brand awareness in the European AV installation market. Prior to joining Atlona, Goecke was EMEA Channel Sales Director for Iron Technologies. He also served as MD for Gefen Distribution GmbH in the European pro-AV market and sales manager for SDI GmbH.

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Saudi TV's golden milestone

Saudi Broadcasting Corporation marked its 50th anniversary with a grand celebration on April 20, 2014. In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a, President of Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, talks about the journey of Saudi TV and Riyadh Radio over the past five decades, the organisation’s priorities and his vision for the media entity.

Last month, hundreds of Saudi nationals working in the broadcast sector gathered at King Fahd Cultural Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Saudi TV and Riyadh Radio. Abdulaziz bin Mohieddin Khoja, Minister of Culture and Information, and Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a, President of Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, were some of the dignitaries who participated in the event.

The evening began with a spectacular stage performance that combined drama and audio-visual elements, and took the audience on a nostalgic journey, recreating those days when Riyadh Radio and later, Saudi TV were introduced. This performance was interspersed with footage from some of the best programmes and musicals broadcast over the years on Saudi TV and it immediately created a feeling of oneness with members of the audience, who began to clap and sing along as some of them were played on screen.

Entirely produced in-house by SBC staff, it encapsulated the broadcast entity’s journey over the last five decades. At the end of the presentation, all of the six previous Ministers of Information who had led the broadcast entity since its launch, were commended for their contributions.

Perhaps one significant difference between Saudi Arabia and some of the other GCC countries is that its media entity is primarily manned by Saudi nationals – be it on the programming side, operations or even those serving their delicious native tea. What is even more comforting is the stability the organisation enjoys, with most of the management having served in different departments over the years and worked their way up the ladder.

The same is true of Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a, who was appointed the first President of Saudi Broadcasting Corporation last year by royal decree. Last month, Al Hazza’a also completed 40 years in the media industry. The golden jubilee of Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, therefore, served as a double celebration for the President.

“I have also completed 40 years in the media this month. I feel at home here; it is a familiar environment for me,” says Al Hazza’a, who began his career as a news editor in 1975 in Saudi Arabia and then moved on to work in radio, TV, the press and the ministries in various roles, acquainting himself with every part of the business all the way from content, engineering, operations and more importantly, the management side of the business.

“I was associated with Saudi Press Agency and was General Director of TV news for 15 years. I was in the thick of the newsgathering process at one point, when we covered the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War and other major events in the region. I understand politics and how the ministries operate while I have also been in operations. Today, the experience I have gained over the last 40 years working in the media in Saudi Arabia has helped me hugely in this position,” he says.

Saudi Arabia is like no other GCC country. As Al Hazza’a points out, “our country is so large, it’s almost like a continent.”

“We have 13 provinces, which needed to be connected,” he says.

As a result, every project that the government entity has had to undertake to equip each of those provinces and connect them and build the broadcast infrastructure from the ground up has been massive and runs into millions of dollars.
SBC’s President Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a addresses the audience at the 50th anniversary celebrations. “We have started building centres in each province. We have radio and TV studios as well as OB vans deployed all over the nation to cover events. These are all HD. We have the 24/7 Makkah and Madinah channels that are already in full HD. Achieving these goals involved long-term planning and a phased approach. With the support of our staff and others directly or indirectly involved in our projects, we have successfully moved towards fulfilling these goals,” he says.

Therefore, the 50th anniversary of SBC was indeed worthy of celebration, according to the President. “We have come a long way in the last 50 years and this occasion gave us an opportunity to look at the past and plan for the future. As you saw, the turnout was great. It was an overwhelming experience. But it was an opportunity to see what the journey was like. Our past is built on a solid foundation from where we have a good view of the future,” he says.

As part of the celebrations, attendees were privy to a small exhibition of photos spanning fifty years of Saudi TV’s existence and a showcase of some equipment – now obsolete – both from the radio and the TV side of the business. While the latter gave us the opportunity to view some really old broadcasting technology, the former offered us a quick view of some of the milestones in SBC’s history.

In the meantime, Al Hazza’a is well aware of the need to move with the times, both in terms of the technology as well as audience expectations. “We are dealing with a more vocal audience today – a new generation with different aspirations. Our viewers have now become our partners and have a greater role to play in our growth. They no longer merely receive content but also generate content. Their needs influence what we offer not just in terms of programming but also how we offer it – i.e. the platforms we use.”
use to reach out to them. We no longer control the viewers; they also seem to exercise some control over us,” he explains. Al Hazza’a himself is very active on Twitter with 35,000 plus followers and responds personally to the queries he receives on Twitter. “You have to understand your audience and what better way than to be amongst them to hear what they say,” he says. “We have hundreds of channels that are competing for the viewers’ attention. Our people are now well travelled; they are educated and their minds are open, so as they’re exposed to more, their expectations are much higher.”

When asked how SBC can possibly take its content forward when the religious and cultural norms of the country demand a more conservative approach, Al Hazza’a makes one point clear: “We are at the heart of the Islamic world and this places a huge responsibility on us. We are very proud of this identity and do not desire to become someone else.”

“In fact, when Saudi nationals travel abroad, they tune in to these channels to stay connected to their home. Muslims all over the world love to watch the holy mosques.”

“We also have a Quran radio station. We have religious programming through our TV station but our role doesn’t end there. We realise we have to integrate Islam into a more modern society and we are aware that we need to make religious programming more appealing to the younger audience, so we have to constantly reinvent our offerings. We are looking to encourage a cultural dialogue to bridge the gap between different religions. Islam is our first priority and it is our responsibility to show it in a good light.”

Besides religion, Saudi TV has also invested heavily in sports content and this has attracted a huge local audience as well. “The idea is to make the content we broadcast from Makkah and Madinah hugely popular,” claims Al Hazza’a. “In fact, when Saudi nationals travel abroad, they tune in to these channels to stay connected to their home. Muslims all over the world love to watch the holy mosques.”
“We are in talks with training centres abroad to bring in experts to conduct workshops and training programmes in all fields of radio and TV from content creation to production and editing. This facility is due to open in August 2014.”

Abdulrahman Al Hazza’a, President, SBC

provide more palatable to a younger generation and I believe we have begun taking steps on that front.”

Also, the broadcast entity is evolving on several other levels.

While the attempt to make content more attractive is one, the entity is also due to open a huge training centre in Riyadh in August 2014 to upgrade the skills of its staff before opening it out to the public.

“We need to train our staff to make the maximum use of the technology that we have deployed,” says Al Hazza’a.

“The project is underway and is located just across the street from our headquarters. We have two HD studios and radio stations as well as a training lounge there.

“We are in talks with training centres abroad to bring in experts to conduct workshops and training programmes in all fields of radio and TV from content creation to production and editing. This facility is due to open in August 2014. It will cater to our staff primarily but eventually, we will also allow film and television schools to offer training here. Rather than sending our people abroad, which may be culturally very different to Saudi Arabia, this facility will offer everything under one roof in the same environment, where they will work,” continues Al Hazza’a.

“Essentially, it will be like field training, which we cannot have if we train them in London or Paris. We may not be able to conduct many courses at the same time. Here, we could host one course very month. It’s just more practical,” he says.

This is part of the change that Al Hazza’a has initiated since he took charge of SBC. Al Hazza’a has a huge task ahead of him as SBC has inherited around 7000 employees from the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information.

“It’s not going to be easy,” he confides.

“Our real challenge was to absorb all of the Ministry’s staff and use them efficiently. Many of them are old school but we have to try and take them forward. At least, one hundred of our staff will retire this year. It gives our organisation an opportunity to hire young people, who will come with new ideas and help take SBC forward.”

Saudi Broadcasting Corporation is also revamping its web site, which is scheduled to relaunch this month.

“The new web site will have information about each channel in the SBC bouquet. We will also soon launch a YouTube channel to offer catchup TV for our viewers. A mobile application for our TV station is also on the cards. There’s a lot to do but we will get there,” Al Hazza’a promises.
Tell us a bit about Belden and your role in the company since you took over as CEO? I have been with Belden since October 2005. Prior to that, I worked at Danaher Corp, which is a large multi-diversified company. I am a mechanical engineer and most of my experience has been in general managerial positions in B2B industrial automation. When I came to Belden, we sort of plotted a new course for the company. Everybody knew Belden as a high-quality cable manufacturer. We felt there was an opportunity to position ourselves as a cable manufacturer. We felt there was a possibility to be more diversified and to enter into new and different markets.

Following the acquisition of Grass Valley, John Stroup, CEO of Belden was in Dubai to touch base with some of the company’s key customers. BroadcastPro ME caught up with Stroup for an exclusive chat

Belden signals change with Grass Valley and Miranda

What changes have you brought to the company? We have come a long way in the business. When I joined Belden, the revenue was USD 1.3bn. Now, it is USD 2.4bn. The company’s financial statement showed a lot of different and the gross margins were 38%, although now it is 37%. Our cable products, which used to be 100% of the business, now brings in 35% of the revenue, because the company is now more diversified. Only a third of our business now is cable.

The beginning was tough. I won’t say it was not fun but it wasn’t very glamorous. We spent the first two or three years creating the business foundation that I felt we needed to be successful in the long run. We put in place modern operational techniques, modern financial systems and made a lot of changes in our information technology infrastructure. The other significant change was the way we go to market. In the past, as a cable company, most of our products were transactional through distributors and most of it still is. Now, however, we have a significant number of sales people calling on users. The objective is to help customers to make decisions on what product lines fit their applications. We spend a lot more time talking with our major end users.

On our other businesses, we have great relationships with the likes of Siemens, ABB, Emerson Yokogawa and Petrosys. These are major corporations in industrial and enterprise businesses and we receive significant revenue from connectors and networking.

How do you intend to integrate Grass Valley and Miranda? There is some overlap between the two companies, but not much. There wasn’t a lot of controversy or surprise in deciding which product categories are stronger.

We talked with our customers on what we are planning to do with our routers and some of our payout products. We will eventually pick a platform but will not discontinue anything immediately. Our broadcast business is the largest now owing to the recent acquisitions. Before that, industrial application was the largest revenue generator for us.

I would like to mention here that our broadcast business is very similar to broadcast. Just like broadcast, industry downtime is incredibly important and end users here tend to choose technologies and vendors that stick with them and don’t make things obsolete quickly.

Miranda and Grass Valley are strong brands, perhaps more than Belden? We are very comfortable managing multiple brands. Grass Valley and Miranda are both well respected and very well known brands. Having said that, Belden is a strong endorsement; it’s more than a 100 years old. It is a stable, predictable company that has a solid foundation. Belden is a $ 2.4bn company.

When we took over these brands, we did so with a long-term perspective and not purely for achieving short-term profitability. When companies buy through brand equity, their objective is to make money quickly on the investment within say, a period of five years. We plan to be in this market forever.

Belden would like to retain these brands and that’s why we are focusing on customer relations.

When we combined Grass Valley and Miranda, I was very impressed that the Miranda team recommended us.
retain the Grass Valley brand. In the last four years, Miranda has developed very strong technology. It is seen as a modern, innovative and current brand. It is perhaps viewed as a stronger brand in the MENA region, but Grass Valley has been around since 1959 and has more recognition globally. Having said that, none of that takes away from Belden.

It’s hard to be a global company if you are a $500m or a $1000m company. As a $2.4bn company we can really invest in R&D. In this industry, the investment in R&D is significant. If you have the size to be a global company, then you can invest in R&D. The ideal investment of the combined company now is substantial which gives us the opportunity to innovate and differentiate and help our customers.

What is your strategy for the Middle East? In almost every area in the Middle East, our focus will be on all three platforms – broadcast, industrial and enterprise – but we are stronger in broadcast than enterprise or industrial here. Our strategy is to strengthen all three. Many of our broadcast customers are potential customers of enterprise and industrial as well. We have global sales organisations for each of the three platforms. Here in Dubai, we have three offices not because we want them but that’s the legacy. Eventually, we shall bring the three together in one office because they have a lot of opportunities to collaborate.

How do you think Belden’s experience in other sectors can support your broadcast business? Most of the companies that we compete with offer services in one of the three sectors while we have a complete chain. Most people in the broadcast industry are struggling with IP-based solutions. We have already done it in enterprise and industrial and eventually, our customers will use more IP technology. The problem arises when a vendor understands one of these sectors and not the others. We have worked in all three and that gives us significant advantage. Some of the companies operating in a similar space as us are traditional suppliers of switchers and routers but they do not understand industrial applications.

Are there any plans to make your solutions more open? Open systems can be a mess if not managed properly. In the industry, you have to create certain standards. It is hard to say exactly how it is going to go but if there is a big customer who is taking it in a positive direction, there might be opportunities to collaborate with them.

PROINTERVIEW

Where do you see this industry headed? We are likely to see more software-based applications and less hardware-based ones. I am also very confident that the demand for video on a global scale will only go up. People want more content and there is a huge emerging generation that wants higher resolution and higher definition, better quality and more flexibility. The bigger challenge is evaluating the dynamics between content creation and consumption. There’s a lot going on there. I don’t know who is eventually going to make it – the satellite provider, MSOs (multi-system operators), major legacy networks or pay-TV organisations, the studios, or direct TV. I’m not going to place any bets there. We have to be present in all these areas.
“While there does seem to be consumer appetite for higher resolutions, the price point will determine when 8K becomes a realistic buy for the mainstream.”

Over the past year, the broadcast technology sector seemed consumed by predictions and projections relating to virtually every aspect of Ultra HD/4K. We have witnessed the undoubted success of an increasing number of UHD solutions and technologies and it seems safe to say that higher resolutions and frame rates are poised to become the next logical step in the video arena of the future.

It may seem a little premature to start looking ahead to 8K broadcasting, however if we look at NHK, one of the major highlights has to be NHK’s closed-circuit demonstration of the over-the-air transmission of 8K content in a single 6 MHz UHF TV channel. This is a significant move for the industry, given this was the first time 8K had been done outside of Japan.

NHK held its first trial broadcast during last summer’s London Olympics. It produced six channels in the new format, which were then given several public viewings. The trial was deemed a success and audience feedback likened the 8K experience to being at a live event in person. There are now plans to shoot some of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in 8K.

Sporting an 8K future

Although it is still early to predict how quick the adoption of higher resolutions will be, the industry is rife with experiments that will lead to the adoption of 4K and 8K. Here’s a look at what this entails.
even if they have 50 or 60 channels, a relatively small proportion are in high-definition. For terrestrial broadcasts, there is simply not enough spectrum, which means providers will struggle to keep up with the UHD formats. Geographical areas like the Middle East, where the market is dominated by satellite and cable providers, are at an advantage as the major players could establish UHD channels relatively simply. Those using satellite distribution could acquire increased transponder space, which would make both 4K and 8K a more straightforward deployment than it would be for any competitors using terrestrial delivery methods.

The internet may become a more viable method to get much more data through to viewers’ homes. Consumers across the Middle East region already have access to high speed connections, and that speed and reach is continuously improving. 4K content can stream on a 15mbps connection, however the immense size of 8K uncompressed video will need considerably more.

The secret to delivery of higher resolutions lies in compression. In many ways, the infrastructure is already in place and providers need to continue to explore ways to compress content so mass market higher resolution formats will not put too much pressure on their networks. Codecs such as HEVC, and possibly even future versions of Google’s VP9, are set to be key enablers to make ultra-high definition formats more practical. To place this in context, HEVC’s compression rate could see 4K needing only between 10-20% more bandwidth than 1080p. From the technology providers to the producers, and as we’ve seen from some broadcasters, investment in 8K is also underway on the programming side. Around 3000 hours of HD content will be captured during FIFA 2014. There are growing rumours that the final will be broadcast in 4K, and apparently, there are even discussions taking place around the technical possibilities for sending an 8K signal over IP back to Japan and then on to satellite.

The delivery of 8K content to viewers at home is still very much in the experimental stages but it may not be as far away as we may imagine. The distribution infrastructure has to improve and broadcasters and their technology suppliers may be wise to begin future-proofing their means of production and delivery. We may not be too many World Cups away from audiences being put right at the centre of the action.
Tackling 8K broadcast

While NHK and the Japanese government have been very proactive in promoting 8K, the format may see slower adoption in other regions of the world like North America and Europe, says Ian Trow.

As consumer demand for high-quality video content on an ever-increasing number of devices continues to grow, the industry is gearing up to bring 4K and 8K resolutions to the public sooner rather than later. NHK, Japan’s public service broadcaster, along with TV Globo in Brazil, has been testing the robustness of delivering 8K television content over the internet for the 2014 World Cup. By broadcasting 7680 x 4320 images of one of the world's largest single-event sporting competitions, NHK promises to offer the ultimate entertainment experience to sports fans.

While NHK and the Japanese government have been very proactive about promoting 8K, the format may see slower adoption in other regions of the world like North America and Europe, where broadcasters are already experiencing issues with supporting the broadcast infrastructure needed to produce and deliver 4K content.

More specifically, the broadcast industry is struggling to support the kind of production infrastructure and workflow that would be needed to produce and deliver Ultra HD content — whether it is 4K or 8K.

Production Issues

One major difference between 4K/8K content and the traditional HD content we’re used to watching today is that 8K and 4K production relies on fewer camera positions to tell the story of a sporting event such as the World Cup. This results in a very different television viewing experience, as most people are used to watching sports events where the broadcaster directs them towards particular areas of action. The issue is still up for debate, as some producers feel that giving the viewer the freedom to see the whole playing field and concentrate on an HD subset of the action in their field of view on a much larger TV screen.

Issues also exist for consumers in terms of the bit rates needed to deliver 8K. With 8K and 4K content, viewers can see the whole playing field and concentrate on an HD subset of the action in their field of view on a much larger TV screen. If viewers have a preference for the story being told through multiple camera positions in the stadium, this can pose a problem. Broadcasters must decide, both from a technology and creative standpoint, whether they should limit the number of camera shots and panning and scanning within them, or just stick with the way people are used to seeing live sports events, keeping in mind most of today’s consumers do not have a 4K/8K-equipped television.

Another production issue that broadcasters are contending with, when it comes to 8K, is how to effectively mix social media with broadcast content on the television screen. Several set-top box (STB) manufacturers have introduced boxes that support a mix of social media interwoven with broadcast content to optimise the viewing experience. Broadcasters must come up with a strategy for handling social media content.

Delivery challenges

One of the primary issues with delivering 8K television content is that it requires an infrastructure upgrade (e.g., new cameras, vision mixers, and production and playout storage), which many broadcasters are not keen to invest in at the moment. In addition, broadcasters must figure out a way to support the higher bit rates needed to deliver 8K content.

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Middle East is part of our “fab five”

BroadcastPro ME caught up with Charlie Vogt, CEO of Imagine Communications and GatesAir at NAB last month, for an exclusive chat on the launch of the two companies and the roadmap for the future.

What led you to create two separate companies? 

Timing was a limited window after we divested from Harris Corporation to use the Harris name. Timing is everything. We felt that where we were taking our enterprise software, playout automation and networking business was very different from the way we needed to be investing in our over-the-air transmission business. It was a great opportunity, therefore, to create two separate companies and allow them to focus on their individual technology specialties. The timing around NAB was perfect to do this and it signals our aggressive technology campaign in areas such as IT and IP.

One of our challenges was how to lead an industry that needs to navigate through a pathway, where a lot of proprietary hardware-centric networks need to be transformed into off-the-shelf computing platforms that can take advantage of unique applications defined by software and software-defined workflows. That’s really the charter from a technology perspective of where we are taking the company. It was a great opportunity to brand our vision and strategy with two separate companies and really the brand from a technology perspective of where we are taking the company has taken. We had more than 1400 people at our launch party.

I see that the Harris Broadcast office in Dubai is presently called Imagine Communications and GatesAir in the Middle East. Is the Middle East part of our “fab five”? 

Absolutely. You have to give us some time. It’s only a few weeks old. On March 17, we introduced the two companies. We are selling our transmission products in the Middle East. It’s a very important market for us and Alain Pecot, who is heading International Sales for GatesAir, used to run the Middle East operations for Harris Broadcast so he is very fluent in that space. Likewise, we have Mehmet Balos, who is very familiar with the region and used to run the operations for a huge reseller in the Middle East.

Middle East is a growing market for us with tremendous opportunities. We are already very strong in our transmission products space and the industry will see both Imagine Communications and GatesAir as two separate entities focused on their respective product lines.

How will the acquisition of Digital Rapids add value to your company? 

We are very excited about this transaction. What I like about the Digital Rapids acquisition is that what they were creating in the compression space is very different from what we were developing. So, our solutions are complementary. They were innovating a lot on file-based and software-based encoding and developed some secret sauce around how workflows can be optimised. This acquisition will result in us announcing two new product lines and a new workflow management platform that will be embedded in our Selenio product line – which is our compression-based encoding and transcoding product line.

We have already launched SelenioNext and will be announcing two new products that will be a direct result of the Digital Rapids acquisition.

I hear there are more acquisitions in the pipeline? 

Absolutely. You have to give us some time. It’s only a few weeks old. On March 17, we introduced the two companies. We are busy. Digital Rapids is a classic case of a company that has done a great job on the innovation side but they just don’t have the scale to benefit from deploying their technology around the world. This is the case with most of our smaller peers, who lack the resources to establish a sales and marketing network. For technology companies, the single biggest expense is sales, marketing and operations. Getting 30 engineers to come...
up with some great new technology is fairly cost effective but when you want to actually start selling it, it starts getting really expensive. That’s where we come in. We are a company on a global scale; we are in 265 countries, have more than 200 sales resources and more than 300 resellers so that should be exciting and inviting for a lot of small innovative technology companies who want to be a part of us. We are fortunate that we were able to do something with Digital Rapids. Most of those staff are in Toronto, which is just down the road from our networking group so there’s a lot of facility synergies as well. All in all, it was a great transaction for us.

Where are the gaps in your current workflow that you need to address? I’m not sure we have gaps. Acquisitions are defined by three things – technology gaps, customer gaps – which could be geographic gaps – and people. We could benefit from having a stronger relationship with certain customers which comes as a subset of certain acquisitions. We have laid out a very clear and concise vision for our product roadmap and go-to-market strategy. It’s really less about what technology we need to develop to be part of our product vision versus the time to market it. In business, it’s all about timing. Often, you get companies — big and small — that bring great technologies, which, at times, don’t get adopted for four years. What does that mean? It means they don’t make it because they didn’t time the market. Small companies unfortunately do not have the muscle or the ability to move the market. We are in an advantageous position, where we have the ability to move the market, and we are already doing it. In a short period of time, we have turned people’s attention to areas that were not in focus. People in the broadcast sphere were not talking about IP or how important it was going to be to the transformation of this industry or how networks ought to be defined by software or how to leverage computing platforms. Take Digital Rapids for example. There was nothing on their roadmap that wasn’t on our roadmap either but they helped us get there two years sooner and frankly, I think the things that they were doing helps us time the market better. It was really about advancing our roadmap and timing the market better.

What are your plans for the Middle East? It’s one of our fab five markets. We have to do more in the Middle East region. The Middle East is a challenging region, which to me, presents opportunities. It’s very fragmented, very diverse and very opinionated. Unlike North America, for instance, where you have one population for the most part trying to do the same thing, in the Middle East, you have countries with a very strong opinion on what they want to deliberately do different from each other. That makes it very challenging for the equipment suppliers. We need to have a stronger influence on the region to have everyone better aligned on what the technology direction ought to be for them to benefit from it. The broadcast industry in the region needs to differentiate itself based on content and content availability — but it should standardize its technology. This industry has made it way too hard on itself trying to differentiate on the technology platforms. My recommendation is to pick companies that are developing great software and innovative apps and differentiate your business based on the content and how you distribute that content. How does it feel to be the CEO of two different companies? We are a half-a-billion-dollar company that is divided into two separate companies with two great management teams. My first order of duty was to create two very capable and senior management teams so I can focus on my core strength, which is creating the vision and the strategy and the go-to-market campaigns. It’s exciting and a little more work than managing one company but Steve Jobs did it and so have many other CEOs on much larger scales.
With the number of illegitimate broadcast services on the rise in the Middle East and several online portals offering unlimited entertainment dirt cheap, the consumer has the opportunity to make the most cost-effective choices today although the legitimacy of these services is open to question. Legitimate broadcasters have now decided to challenge any service that does not have a licence to operate in the region while also launching ad campaigns to educate consumers. Vijaya Cherian speaks to various players in the industry as part of our quest for some answers to the piracy debate.

Last month, Dubai-based pay TV operator OSN and a few Indian channels launched an ad campaign in the local dailies stating that Dish TV, Tata Sky, Airtel Digital TV and Sun Direct services were illegal in the UAE and all those who subscribed to such services were in essence, “stealing”. Dish TV poses a significant threat to the pay-TV business in the Middle East as many South Asian consumers receive their content at an annual subscription of USD 85.

David Butorac, CEO of OSN, slams Dish TV’s service in the region alleging that its spillover into the region is “deliberate”.

“Traditionally, Dish TV operated in India on an NSS6 transponder and there was a slight overspill into the Gulf states and so, traditionally Dish TV could have been received if you were in a Gulf state because it was right on the fringes of the footprint. They have now added an AsiaSat 5 transponder, which is their South Asia beam and while it covers India, it also goes as far West as the other side of Libya. The transponder beam very clearly focuses on all of the core MENA markets going right across to Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, the Levant and in fact, north to Turkey. We operate on specific MENA beam transponders. What Dish TV has done looks to us to be a deliberate strategy of growing in the region, where they are illegal and where they do not have the broadcast rights.” Rajiv Khattar, President of Dish TV, when contacted by BroadcastPro ME, denied any direct involvement in this issue.

“We are aware that there is a problem in the Middle East, so we act on any information we receive. We deactivate any cards that we learn are outside of our business and do not permit reactivation again. If the pay-TV platforms don’t try to curb this, we will all suffer.”

“Regarding the allegation that we have deliberately chosen AsiaSat, we had a capacity requirement when we launched our HD channels and concluded a deal with AsiaSat because their transponders were available and more importantly, were in the slot where we could still use the same antenna to receive transmission from two satellites – NSS6 and AsiaSat. We only use AsiaSat for our HD channels, which make up less than 10% of our subscriber base. Now, if as they allege, we have deliberately chosen AsiaSat, we should ideally have moved all of our channels to AsiaSat to encourage such subscriptions,” he explains, adding that he has neither been approached in a personal or professional capacity by any regional broadcaster to discuss this issue. Butorac, however, reiterates that “there are no uncertainties that this business is being perpetrated through third-party distributors that are licensed by Dish.”

“This is Dish TV activity in a market that has no rights. They will publicly say that they are great supporters of their fight on piracy but it’s difficult to take them seriously when their commercial activity is a complete antithesis to their comment.”

OSN’s frustration is not without reason as it recently acquired the Pehla network in the region, which targets the South Asian population in the MENA region. A significant part of the South Asian population in the region, however, subscribes to Dish TV, which does not offer a legitimate service here. While the signals cannot be accessed by all, it can be received if the subscriber’s home faces the South East.

“This is not just about South Asian content. Dish TV in India also carries legitimate content from Western series and movies. I have no qualms about their legitimate business in India but when they are taking those signals to this region, where we have the rights, they are not just targeting South Asian markets but all markets. That’s unfair on those of us who have invested in this region. We cannot afford to invest in this region if we do not get a return on our investment,” explains Butorac.

Khattar, however, says there’s nothing Dish TV can do about this.

“Like any other satellite footprint, the AsiaSat footprint also spills over into the region. It is common knowledge that the
footprint of almost all DTH operators operating out of the Asian sub-terrain will have a spillover into different geographical areas including the Middle East. We see this in other DTH markets as well. For instance, we see a lot of boxes moving from the US to Canada. This is a common phenomenon with satellite transmission. If a consumer sees an economic benefit, he is likely to seize that opportunity. Platforms need to work together and co-operate to see that this is minimised and we’re willing to extend our support.”

Unfortunately, this is only one of many battles that legitimate players in the region have been fighting to maintain a successful business in this market.

In the case of Dish TV, there are several small third-party players in the region, who are willing to set up a service for customers. In most cases, customers bring a set-top-box with them from India and subscribe to a service from their Indian accounts.

Perhaps one of the steps that the government can undertake is confiscate the box at customs. Unfortunately, as Butorac points out, “governments and regulators have often seen this as a victimless crime”. “What we are now able to demonstrate is that businesses are getting hurt and we are unable to create a viable creative industry,” explains Butorac.

But this is not unique to the South Asian community. Increasingly, we are cognisant of individuals setting up boxes for an annual sum of USD 900 to enable more high-end customers to access premium content from any part of the world. This poses an even bigger threat to players like OSN, which invests heavily in offering the latest premium Western content in the region. Then, there is the threat from online content providers.

In other cases, legitimate players find that small channels steal their signals and redistribute them to subscribers at a fraction of the cost. In fact, some of them steal content and even sell advertising space to clients.

APT has lost up to 20% of its US business to criminals in the Middle East, who subscribe to their channels and many others and then, redistribute it on the internet to their subscribers for a fee. In other cases, small channels pilfer content from rights owners such as MBC, APT or OSN and broadcast them on their channels and also sell commercial space on them.

“If you haven’t bought the rights to the content, you haven’t really spent any money. Therefore, you can afford to offer cheaper subscriptions and also offer advertising at a fraction of the cost,” says Mustafa Tell, General Manager, Broadcasting Operations, APT.

OSN’s Butorac seconds that. “No legitimate advertiser should...
support an illegal channel. The advertising industry needs to recognize whether they are supporting a legitimate or illegitimate business.

“For example, a major Hollywood film such as Captain Phillips is likely to have cost us $250,000 just for that movie for the defined period for which we can use it and we are entitled to get a return. Likewise, we spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year on our content and we do that to provide a service. Now, if a broadcaster spends zero on content, they can afford to sell it cheaper. If someone offered to sell you a brand new Audi A8 for $5,000, you’d think it was a great deal. But if he has stolen it and sells it to you, he can afford to sell it to you cheaper because it has cost him nothing in the first place. Stolen content is the same as a stolen bike or car and consumers need to know it is a crime. This is why we are running an ad campaign – to create consumer awareness,” he explains.

In many cases, rights owners find themselves embroiled in a long legal battle that they do not have the time to go after. “It is a long process,” says ASP’s Ted. “When you see that someone has stolen your content, you have to first have seen it, then record it and prove to the satellite operators that they do not have the rights for. Usually satellite operators are not going to take a channel off the air without substantial proof. In some cases, we are able to convice satellite operators to at least contact rogue channels and ask for proof. Occasionally, we find that the contracts are forged.”

In some cases, we find that a channel has actually been the victim of some other players.”

A channel in Jordan Media City, for instance, was shut down for broadcasting Hollywood films that have not yet been released in the US market. This is where a legal battle raged and we realise how widespread the piracy net is. When the owner of the Jordanian channel was contacted, he had a genuine contract from a company in Turkey that had sold him the rights to the films. He did not know was that he had purchased those films from a pirate.

But there are also instances where channels now buy pirated versions of Hollywood films and broadcast them. One source, on condition of anonymity, told us that you could buy films for as little as $2 from downtown Amman.

“This is a big business that comes with sophisticated additional services. If your DVD doesn’t work, they’ll tell you to bring it back for a fresh copy. If you want subtitling services, they’ll offer it to you in just 24 hours – whether you want it in Chinese, Japanese or Arabic.”

There are so many varied instances of piracy.

“This is why ONS decided that a two-pronged approach is the way forward. On the one hand, it is running an active ad campaign along with its content partners as well as the International Cricket Council (ICC) to create awareness among consumers in the Asian segment in the Middle East that subscribing to a service that is distributed illegally in the country is tantamount to theft. On the other hand, it has also collaborated with leading broadcasters, satellite operators and the Motion Picture Association of America to form an anti-piracy coalition to contain piracy. “This is a coalition of the willing and a very positive industry initiative,” explains Butorac, although he adds that the primary measures are being undertakings by MBC and ONS.

These broadcasters have invested in resources to monitor channels and seek legal assistance while also putting in place a workflow to ensure that action can be taken against offenders. Such a workflow addresses the issues plaguing the legitimate industry and makes the coalition more efficient. “MBC and ONS have been working collaboratively for a long time. We have particularly resourced these facts on piracy and we are not asking the other participants to do anything except support it. We have a joint monitoring operation, where we record the intellectual property and make satellite operators and the broadcasters aware of those transgressions. Because of the heightened awareness, all of the satellite operators are now taking formal action and in recent times, they have been able to remove broadcasts of channels that we are able to demonstrate clearly as being in breach of our intellectual property rights,” says Butorac.

“The satellite operators do wish us to demonstrate that the broadcasters’ assurances are correct. This is organised crime so they are able to show forged documents that purport to show them as owning the intellectual property but as broadcasters, MBC and ONS know who owns the rights to the content. For instance, ONS has an exclusive relationship with all seven Hollywood studios and the three major satellite distributors of independent content, so we are very sure that viewing of Western movies in its early windows is

“Only use AsiaSat for our HD channels, which make up less than 10% of our subscriber base. Now, if as they allege, we have deliberately chosen AsiaSat, we should ideally have moved all of our channels to AsiaSat to encourage such subscriptions”
"If you haven’t bought the rights to the content, you haven’t really spent any money. Therefore, you can afford to offer cheaper subscriptions and also, offer advertising at a fraction of the cost.”

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“The internet provides significant disincentives for piracy,” says Butorac, who adds that the major studios now allow their content to be distributed over the internet.

"If you haven’t bought the rights to the content, you haven’t really spent any money. Therefore, you can afford to offer cheaper subscriptions and also, offer advertising at a fraction of the cost.”

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“...and in the eyes of the content owners, not legitimately.”

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"I think that the most proactive companies out there are those that understand the difference in how the consumer values the content today and gets more of their content out there but also understands that they cannot demand the money that they could demand previously.”

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"...and the fact that content owners have all these different services to pick and choose..."
As counterintuitive as this may sound, to actually determine what you need in a digital asset management system, you have to start at the end. So in other words, the most important questions to ask when trying to determine what goes IN to your asset management system, is "What are you trying to get OUT?"

Let’s start at the beginning… which of course is really the end… of the process.

What and where are you going to archive? Local, cloud or both?
One of the biggest hurdles in the move from the "old" method of capturing content on videotape, (and by old, I mean "right now"), is how you are going to archive all of your content. And just to be clear here, a hard drive might be a useful way of moving content from a record site to a post facility, but that same hard drive on a shelf does not count as a valid archive!
Someday, that drive will stop spinning, at which point you will probably be out shopping at the local electronics store… or more likely applying for a job there.
Are you going to archive locally on a data storage format like LTO tape or optical disk? Do you want to archive completely off-site in the cloud? Or perhaps you want to take a hybrid approach and do both? When choosing an appropriate MAM solution, the above questions must be addressed. Regardless of your take on the "cloud," and despite the amount of bandwidth that you have to actually move your valuable high-res media to-and-from a distant data centre, if you choose to go the cloud route, you need to make sure that your MAM can initiate a restore request to your cloud provider directly from within the interface. It’s counterproductive, inefficient and generally just annoying to find files in your MAM, and then have to find them again in a separate cloud interface. Another factor to consider when deciding to work to and from the cloud is to make sure that your restores can happen in an amount of time that you are comfortable living with, even when the entire office is busy watching cat videos on the internet.

The same goes for a locally hosted archive. Though LTO drives and automated robots are significantly cheaper than they were a few years ago, it continues to remain important to have the functionality you want be directly accessible in your MAM. Cross-referencing Excel spreadsheets is not the path to a happy asset management staff. The MAM has to control the restore process either through direct control of the LTO or via an API to a third-party storage appliance. The process should be easy to initiate and be subject to an approval process, if production staff should not be filling up your SAN with the aforementioned cat videos.

NLE
People have very strong opinions concerning edit platforms. I tend to include it in the list of topics that I do not discuss at cocktail parties, along with religion and politics. Whatever your preference, make sure that your MAM can handle the types of files that your editor works with natively. We all have accepted that transcoding is a necessary part of our lives, but it should be an exception, not the rule. The majority of your files should be in the format that your MAM can handle the types of files that your editor works with natively. Make sure that your MAM can handle these files without undo manipulation. Of course, there will be other file formats to deal with, and of course, the MAM has to account for these as well, but make sure you can successfully handle the bulk of what you need directly, without jumping through three hoops to get there.

Logging
What are users trying to find and use throughout the life cycle of your media? Make sure that the metadata that you
collect along the way feeds into this smoothly. What do users look for most often? How can your MAM system make finding these things a more repeatable, reliable process – working backwards to the input stage? Are users going to be on-set, entering notes live on their phones or tablets while simultaneously juggling the demands of a live shoot? Sounds like they need predefined “tags” that they can just click on their small screens. Are they going to be transcribing interviews verbatim on their laptops? Then they need a simple way to do free text entry. Will they be doing this from home? That means a web-browser interface. Do all of these bits of metadata need to be timecode accurate? And does the metadata need to flow into the edit room automatically or just on-demand? Though logging may seem like a less critical piece in the scheme of things, the answers to these questions are of critical importance when considering the kind of system that you want to deploy. I would speculate that this may well be the primary interaction that many of your users have with the system, and you want them to use the tools, happily. Broadly speaking, a MAM system has to accommodate many different types of users with many different skill sets and agendas. Make sure your choices are sensitive to that reality.

Do your homework

If I haven’t made this clear by now, in the world of asset management there is no one-size-fits-all. Your eighth grade math teacher was right – you have to do your homework. Your ultimate MAM system quite likely will be different than someone else’s ultimate MAM system, even if only subtly. Therefore, it is perhaps most important to find a team that can help in specifying and configuring the required hardware, and above all ensuring that the pieces are properly integrated. This is as much about finding a company who will not only work to tailor their product to your specific environment but is willing to go the extra mile. They should be willing (dare I say, even enthusiastic) to go on-site to train personnel on how to operate and maintain the system themselves. They should be amenable to reaching out to other vendors and including them in conversations. And while these are all essential considerations in your search for a MAM system that works for you, perhaps the most important elements in your search are finding a vendor that is actually engaged in what you are trying to accomplish and is flexible enough to grow with your ever-changing needs. Remember, it is easy to hear, but it is difficult to actually listen.
What’s trending at BroadcastAsia 2014?

Application of OTT technologies will be featured throughout the BroadcastAsia2014 exhibition and conferences from June 17-20 at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

At BroadcastAsia 2014 the spotlight will be on social media, OTT and multi-platform screening. Visitors will not only get to experience the convergence of technologies, but also have an opportunity to unlock new business pathways with access to networking with major global industry players.

The annual broadcast event that serves as a platform for professionals to network, exchange business ideas, gather with major global industry players. This year, the exhibition will see the return of some of industry’s most renowned players in their respective fields, such as Blackmagic Design, EVS, Grass Valley and more. Exhibitors showcasing OTT solutions include Envideo, Channel Islands Media, Gossop, Konka, Lumenlight, SamaVision, Thomson Video Network, and Pace among others.

BroadcastAsia 2013 saw a visitor turnout of 51,000, which is expected to increase this year. The exhibition’s showcase will demonstrate how broadcasters, pay-TV operators and online video and content service providers work together to connect the audience through the latest technologies. As Asian consumers continue to demand easily accessible entertainment, OTT services and pay-TV are increasingly becoming a necessity in the region with revenues expected to grow to USD 43.6bn by 2018, according to a report released by Digital TV Research.

This trend, familiarly coined as the ‘pay-TV boom’, will be showcased at BroadcastAsia2014 to inspire broadcasters to pursue the right business models. Commenting on the event line-up, Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director, Singapore Exhibition Services said: “With the broadcasting industry facing challenges from emerging technologies, BroadcastAsia will gather the industry to discuss these opportunities and issues, as well as showcase the infinite business potential the new technologies can bring, especially in the Asian region. Highlighting 4K, second/multi screens and OTT, among other prevalent trends, is an example of how we continue to introduce new elements into the event and move the industry forward.”

Exhibitors who have confirmed their participation and will be showcasing the latest technologies in DVB-T2, file-based management systems, multiplatform streaming and netgen broadcasting include Coship, Dalet, Dayang, BB Broadcast, Eboro, Envideo, Gospell, Imagine Communications and GatesAir, NDD, Orad, Pace, Patif Media, Playbox, Quantel, Ross Video, Screen Systems, Skyworth, Telestream, Thomson Networks, Toshiba, VIZIT, Wasp3D and Woehler.

BroadcastAsia International Conference
BroadcastAsia2014 International Conference addresses trending topics for the broadcast and entertainment industry, and it is back for its 19th edition. Designed to address the key challenges and trends in the broadcast and media industries, this year’s conference theme is, Discover the Right Business Model to Harness Technology and Maximize Content. Industry experts will share their experiences and case studies on OTT, second screen, broadband TV, multi-screen, content distribution, next wave of technologies for TV, social media / TV, DVB, content delivery network (CDN), broadcast engineering, cloud broadcasting, file-based workflow, and radio broadcasting.

The BroadcastAsia2014 International Conference will kick off on June 17 with a welcome address by StarHub’s Chief Technology Officer Mock Pak Lam, followed by a keynote address, ‘A Global Perspective on How OTT is Changing the Competitive Landscape of the Broadcasting Space’, which will delve into the opportunities for growth and challenges faced by broadcasters in Asia.

The conferences will be led by Joe Igoe, CTO, MediaCorp; Daniel Keens, Igoe, CTO, MediaCorp; Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director, Singapore Exhibition Services, and Lam Swee Kim, Group General Manager, MediaCorp.

The show will focus on:

• 4K, multiplatform & MAM – a display of products and solutions designed for 4K/UHD, multiplatform and media asset management
• Professional Audio Technology – an international showcase for professional audio equipment, services and technology
• Cinematography / Film / production zones – a one-stop venue for the showcase of motion picture production tools and software

Product displays and demonstrations:

• Professional audio/radio, acquisition/ production, post production, management and systems and distribution and delivery.

• Country pavilions showcasing broadcast technology include: China, France, Germany, Italy, Korea, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA and Canada.

BroadcastAsia2014 will have a special focus on Asia’s film and TV industry, Cinematography, Film and Production with a dedicated zone to provide a one-stop venue for motion picture production.

Special focus:

• Animation & VFX
• Cameras/lenses/tripod/
lighting and grip
• Content editing/colour restoration
• Motion/film production
• Post production software
• Services for film productions, on-set and off-set
• Virtual production
Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media Trading LLC organised a workshop in association with Glidecam Industries at AM Studio last month. The workshop was conducted by certified Glidecam instructor, Stefan Czech, an experienced DoP filmmaker and steadycam specialist. Stefan Czech offered an up-and-close experience of the steadycam, and an overview of the evolution of the technology since its invention 40 years ago – from the early models to the highly evolved modern day stabilisers used by filmmakers today.

He demonstrated the stabiliser explaining each part and its functions covering the handheld systems (HD2000/4000) and vest/arm supported systems such as the Smooth Shooter, X10 and X22. He also offered advice on how to choose one over the other. The attendees were given a firsthand feel of both types of stabilisers.

Pooyan Farnam, Sales Manager at Advanced Media Trading claimed the first edition of the workshop last year “received an overwhelming response”. “Based on the demand for such workshops and the number of people who wanted to attend, we decided to conduct a second workshop this year. We announced the workshop during CABSAT last month and hosted it on April 11.”

The workshop covered the science behind steadycams and how it works. Attendees received expert advice on how to manoeuvre the system. The practical session included various exercises from the first move to the more complex ones with moving objects and people. The attendees were allowed to try out the stabiliser and also learnt how to independently put on a Glidecam vest. They also had the opportunity to try various camera configurations and balance the stabiliser. Czech also gave an introduction to the various steadycam terms.

The number of attendees was limited to 10 at a time to ensure that each one of them received one-on-one training. “We couldn’t have more than 10 attendees in each class as we needed to give a steadycam system to each student and give them individual attention. This way, we could ensure that everyone had learnt how to balance and operate it,” explained Farnam.

“Overall, we had two days of practical exercises on the Glidecam steadycam. In the morning, Stefan reviewed the history of steadycams, and Glidecam’s top selling products such as the HD-2000 and HD-4000. “The students then learnt how to balance their own cameras on the stabilisers followed by a coffee cup exercise. After the lunch break, it was time to wear the vests and arms to practice manoeuvrability and how to walk forward and backward whilst controlling the stabiliser with finger tips.”

“I am sure the attendees benefitted hugely from training. Needless to say, it requires practice to become an expert operator,” concluded Farnam.
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DIGITAL 9000 – The Wireless Masterpiece.

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AJA’s Cion

AJA Video Systems unveiled the company’s first camera, Cion, at NAB Show 2014. Priced at USD 8,995, the new professional production camera is capable of shooting 4K Ultra HD and 2K/HD resolutions and offers in-camera Apple ProRes recording, including 12-bit 444. The camera has a 4K (4096x2160) APS-C sized CMOS sensor with an electronic global shutter and 12 stops of dynamic range.

Blackmagic in the studio

Blackmagic Design unveiled the world’s smallest professional production camera, Cion, at NAB Show 2014. Priced at USD 8,995, the new professional production camera is capable of shooting 4K Ultra HD and 2K/HD resolutions and offers in-camera Apple ProRes recording, including 12-bit 444. The camera has a 4K (4096x2160) APS-C sized CMOS sensor with an electronic global shutter and 12 stops of dynamic range.

Nick Rashby, President of AJA, commented that special attention had been paid to Cion’s ergonomics, particularly the placement of ports and controls. It even features a suede shoulder pad and a wooden carrying handle. There are no proprietary connections on the camera and the company has tried to keep the camera completely compatible with industry standards, including a standard PL lens mount.

Lawo makes it crystalCLEAR

Lawo has launched the crystalCLEAR virtual radio mining console. crystalCLEAR optimises radio workflow through a smart console interface that is aware of content, adapting to the skills of the user and the type of sources being used.

crystalCLEAR’s entire control surface is software-driven by a multi-touch optimised interface on a high-resolution computer display. Without the limitations of physical knobs, buttons and faders, the virtual console presents the user with only relevant controls and information, hiding anything not needed for the task at hand. Lawo’s virtual radio mining console can be instantly reconfigured by recalling a SCENE or PRESET. Different shows and different users are easily accommodated. Unlike a physical surface, crystalCLEAR remembers every detail when loading a SCENE, even the fader positions.

Sennheiser launches conference system

Sennheiser has expanded its portfolio of solutions with the introduction of ADN-W, the wireless extension of its ADN conference system.

Mig Cardamone, Director of Sales and Marketing at Sennheiser Middle East, said: “We have identified the demand in the local market for high performance conferencing solutions and have been quick to establish ourselves as a technology leader in the field. With the ADN-W system, Sennheiser has brought its long established industry expertise in wireless audio systems into the business solutions arena. ADN-W expands the success of our popular ADN conferencing system by adding the freedom and flexibility of wireless connectivity. We expect a healthy uptake of this solution by hotels, banks, government organisations and corporate customers.”

Organisations can connect up to 150 wireless discussion units simultaneously while additional units can be added quickly and easily during the conference itself. The system’s Ethernet interface allows the conference system to be controlled from a PC.

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PROPRODUCTS

Appear TV brings the latest addition to its modular system – Dense multiscreen/OTT encoder module. Designed for multiscreen and OTT applications where SDI or HD/SDI baseband inputs are required, such as primary distribution, the module reduces the need to re-transcode in the broadcast chain for all-screen delivery.

“Multiscreen and OTT have created new ways for audiences to view content, but at the same time, they pose new challenges for broadcasters and content providers,” explained Carl Walter Holst, CEO, Appear TV. The Dense multiscreen/OTT encoder module is a part of Appear TV’s modular concept, which allows users to select from the different modules (demodulators, decoding, descramblers, transcoders, encoders, modulators and multiple I/O interfaces, etc.) covering the various distribution formats and processes to create a solution custom-tailored to their needs. When adding the multiscreen/OTT encoder module to a configuration using the XC5000 series 4RU frame, users will have the capability to create up to 64 HD, or 192 SD or more than 400 sub-SD profiles.

RTW has unveiled the new TM3-Primus, a compact addition to the company’s TouchMonitor range of audio meters. TM3-Primus provides a full set of instruments for level and loudness metering in commercial as well as non-commercial production and broadcasting environments.

Targeted at music and multimedia producers, the TM3-Primus can be used as a desktop unit offering analogue and digital audio ports. In addition, it features an advanced USB hybrid mode, where a metering point in a digital audio workstation (DAW) (implemented using a specific RTW plug-in) is visualised right on the new TouchMonitor’s screen. A USB port allows for implementing a USB plug-in hybrid mode that enables monitoring right on the DAW so that a user can process and visualise the information instantly.

Thomson Video Networks debuted TimePlanner, a new application that is part of the XMS Network Management System. Enabling the scheduling and automation of complex service plan changes, TimePlanner gives XMS users the flexibility they need to manage rapid service plan changes, and simplifies headend operations. TimePlanner allows bouquet operators to schedule critical tasks, such as the modification of a large number of channels, changes to the channel lineup, or management of recurring clear/scrambled transitions – without human intervention.

RTW introduces TouchMonitor

RTW introduces TouchMonitor

Thomson Video Networks keeps time

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- IBC Big Screen Experience
  providing the perfect platform for manufacturer demonstrations, ground breaking screenings and insightful, free to attend conference sessions focusing on the latest developments in digital cinema

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TSL Products

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More security with DFT

DFT has announced the global launch of its Scantry HDR film scanner.

Scantry HDR provides a solution for content owners who require a scanner that’s able to handle a range of problematic and historically-aged film issues. It facilitates the ingest of difficult dense black and white materials at real-time speeds using DFT’s new proprietary, patented triple-exposure technology. Scantry HDR serves as a family of film scanning applications, including film archive scanning for mass digitisation, ESL/confirm scanning, low resolution browsing for archive and restoration, short form commercials, 4K UHD ready and digital intermediate scanning.

At NAB 2014, DFT showcased the Scantry HDR with its new cosmetic black look finish and detailing. The production model will ship later in the summer and will include a number of new features that enables users to obtain greater information on the status of on-going jobs.

Sound Devices promises better PIX

Sound Devices’ latest PIX 270i and PIX 250i seamlessly replace tape and disc-based video decks for a complete offering that addresses a range of multiple-source video productions, including fast-paced, mission-critical studio applications, live sports and events, and mobile production.

The units record edit-ready Apple ProRes or Avid DNxHD files and allow simultaneous multiple-drive recording, giving production staff peace of mind with their redundancy and backup capabilities (four drives for PIX 270i, and two drives for 250i).

Their audio capabilities, including 64 channels of both MADI audio and Dante audio-over-Ethernet for PIX 270i, and PIX 250i’s 16 tracks of audio, make each unit a comprehensive, cost-effective replacement for complex video servers and an effective tool for video production.

PIX recorders offer 3G-SDI (12-bit, 4:4:4) and 6G-SDI (12-bit, 4:4:4) I/O, and can record at numerous data rates.

Switch to TSL’s AXIUS range

TSL Products brings its new AXIUS range of managed Ethernet switches for audio/video-over-IP workflows.

“What is special about the new switch is that it has been developed from the ground up around accurate timing and synchronisation through a very tight implementation of precision time protocol (PTP), also known as IEEE 1588, which is used in the majority of high end audio/video-over-IP supported equipment,” said Peter Schellebose, Product Manager for TSL Products.

“The big challenge with getting professional audio/video-over-IP latency and synchronisation is that the latest and most accurate synchronisation technology and can handle virtually all audio-over-IP protocols, including the emerging 802.1av open standard in an efficient, reliable and secure manner,” he added.

The AXIUS range of IP switches is suited for use in professional audio/video-over-IP applications, such as AIB, AES67, Ravenna, Stageline and SMPTE 2022-based systems. The switches feature fast secure connectivity for critical applications that require PTP IEEE 1588 timing accuracies to synchronise network audio/video timing.

Pixel Power in a box

Pixel Power has launched ChannelMaster Duo. Its channel-in-a-box solution that can deliver two independent channels simultaneously from a single system. Fully compatible with Pixel Power’s ChannelMaster family of integrated playout systems, ChannelMaster Duo lowers the cost of delivering a channel and expands the options available to playout centres and other multi-channel facilities.

ChannelMaster Duo is a two-channel configuration of the ChannelMaster system. It features include two server ports per channel for A/B mixing, graphics of clarity engine, master control switching, 4TB local cache storage, and media up/down conversion. ChannelMaster Duo supports mixed format media playback and up/down conversion within a single playlist that can combine HD, SD, MPEG-2 and IMX formats.

Please visit our stand 5G3-01 at Broadcast Asia
Better view with Fujifilm

Two lenses from the Optical Devices Division of FUJIFILM North America Corporation made their NAB debut this year - the Premier PL 14-35mm Cabrio wide-angle lens (ZK2.5x4.1) and the AX100/0.5 HDV telephoto box-style lens.

The new AX100/0.5 telephoto zoom is designed for large venues that require tight shots from long distances, such as for sports, concerts and any live events. The PL 14-35mm Cabrio has a detachable digital servo drive and can be used as a self-contained ENG-style lens or a cine style lens. When used without the drive, industry-standard cine motion can be fitted.

New lens from Schneider Optics

Kreuznach Xenon FF-Prime family that already includes the Premier PL 19-90mm and 85-300mm lenses.

The new XA150x5.5 telephoto zoom is designed for large venues that require tight shots from long distances, such as for sports, concerts and any live events. The PL 14-35mm Cabrio has a detachable digital servo drive and can be used as a self-contained ENG-style lens or a cine style lens.

Primestream’s FORK offers STATS

Primestream’s FORK logger, the metadata tagging module in the FORK production suite, now ingests with in-depth data feeds from STATS. With this service, FORK logger users can start their sessions with pre-populated placeholders that contain rich event data, such as team name, location info, rosters, conferences, and win/loss records, pulled from the STATS feed. Working from these populated placeholders enables users to avoid manually entering data and increases the accuracy of the descriptive information.

The STATS service maintains up-to-the-minute statistics and updated player data, which is integrated into FORK logger users’ library. By providing rich data feeds, FORK logger users can start their sessions with pre-populated placeholders that contain rich event data, such as team name, location info, rosters, conferences, and win/loss records, pulled from the STATS feed. Working from these populated placeholders enables users to avoid manually entering data and increases the accuracy of the descriptive information.

NGenius is a genius

NVerzion announced NGenius, a new open source storage solution that provides broadcasters and media companies with a cloud-based automation and storage solution for preserving and protecting broadcast data.

NGenius is built around an advanced archive platform. Data is stored on dedicated media housed in a SSAE 16 SOC 1 Type 2, SOC 2 Type 2, and SOC 3 Tier II design-certified data centre available from anywhere in the world, offering broadcasters flexibility.

Bittree’s new data panels

Bittree has launched a new line of flush-mount data feed-through panels. The 24-position Cat 6 feed-through panels provide a single location for broadcast, transmission, production, and post production professionals to interconnect data and Ethernet systems nearly and efficiently.

The new data feed-through panels are designed to complement Bittree’s full line of professional audio, video, and data patching systems. Available in 1-RU /x 24 or 2-RU 2 x 24 configurations, the panels feature dual-fiber LC or ST connections as well as RJ45 shielded and unshielded variants. Designation strips are available as an option for any of these panels.

With expertise in managing and leading projects within the broadcast and media industry, BSA can handle the following:

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A unified control system will simplify broadcast operations, making them more efficient and safe

On-air control

Greater technology choice is leading customers down the path of the single vendor option for all their primary equipment, with the promise of a unified control system – or at least, a minimisation of the number of protocols involved. However, even with the best of intentions, many vendors are not control and monitoring experts – why should they be? – and solutions can be half-hearted or out-of-date. Why should customers be forced to relinquish real choice when it comes to equipment selection?

Customers want to be able to buy best-of-breed devices from multiple manufacturers, be that branding technology, routers, video servers, VTRs, multi-image display processors and modular gear, or any combination thereof. But this means despite the often best intentions of the manufacturers there is a huge range of control and monitoring interfaces and masses of functionality that in reality will never be used in an on-air environment. This leads to a consequent inability for operators to move quickly between channels to problem solve or access a particular function, never mind on figuring out how to do it. It also makes content instead of wasting their energies on their real job of broadcasting great content.

A primary challenge for a unified control system is to understand the myriad protocol “standards” and those that are proprietary.

With a unified on-air control technology, the drivers must be bundled into the application so there’s no different installation process. At the most fundamental level, it will let users clear control room desks of equipment-specific hardware control panels and set up a manual control system that focuses on the tasks that operators actually carry out. Instead of training operators in the details of every manufacturer’s particular control system, customers can put in front of them onscreen buttons, faders, etc., labelled according to the task they accomplish such as logo on, logo off, commentary level and so on. The control system will then take care of translating these into commands for the various pieces of broadcast hardware in an installation.

This makes everyday operations much easier, allowing staff to concentrate on their real job of broadcasting great content instead of wasting their energies on figuring out how to do it. It also makes systems safer. Emergencies operations, which are not part of operators’ daily lives, can be packaged as single button presses so that in the event of a problem, they can quickly take action.

Not only does a unified system provide the core benefit of highly streamlined and fit-for-purpose manual control, it also creates additional efficiencies when it comes to staff training. This is vital in an era where deskilling is unfortunately – though understandably – part of the economic and technological landscape. User-definition allows engineers to create complex workflows that operators can trigger at the touch of a button. New users can be trained to carry out what would be otherwise impossible, or at best, massively time-consuming tasks. Operators only have to learn one piece of technology rather than all the discrete technologies and their interfaces. Staff can be brought up to speed quickly and cost-effectively.

Another key issue is the relationship between such a control system and modern automation technologies. Since other control systems like automation may also be sending commands, it’s important that a unified solution keeps track of the internal state of the pieces of broadcast equipment it’s managing. Some broadcast equipment sends status changes automatically while others wait for a status request depending on the manufacturer’s control protocol.

To put it simply, a unified control system can move the complexity of broadcast operations away from operators, giving efficient access to workflows that provide a satisfying viewing experience with the additional advantage of a monitoring safety net.

Roddy Pratt is Technical Director at Rascular.

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