Celebrating the best of the industry at
ASBU BroadcastPro Television Awards 2017

MENA TV’S MOVERS & SHAKERS

Celebrating the best of the industry at
ASBU BroadcastPro Television Awards 2017
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THE FUTURE OF VIDEO BROADCASTING
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The survival of the MENA media industry is at stake with the impending arrival of FANG (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google) — although a more recent modified coinage has been FANGA, with Apple joining the bandwagon! Are we ready?

This was the key takeaway from the ASBU BroadcastPro Television Summit last month, where the CEOs of some of the most high-profile media entities in the region congregated to discuss the best way forward. The threat is no longer from within but from external forces — particularly FANG, which is taking over the world of entertainment with more investment, more daring and varied content, more universal distribution and the power to take away the advertising dollars.

There was a sense of urgency at MBC Group CEO Ham Barnett urged the decision makers in the room to put aside their differences and come together on a common platform: “I’m offering you a platform!” If you would like to come and put your content on this platform… we won’t be surprised if we hear collaborative announcements in the near future.

On another note, the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards hit some record numbers in terms of attendance, with more than 300 industry executives joining us during the day and a little under 400 at the gala awards. This is one of our most celebrated issues with some of the most influential people in the industry coming together and it resonates with the grandeur and joy of the Christmas season. See you next month! Until then, enjoy.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
Welcome to Broadcast 3.0

Broadcast 3.0 is based on the cornerstones of IP transport, software-defined processing, orchestration and seamless control of network resources, and automated workflows. This 3rd generation of broadcast infrastructure solutions raises production capabilities to a new level, enabling more efficient utilization of resources and smarter content creation.

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Johan Bolin of Edgeware describes a unique watermark.
Vice Media has unveiled its MENA platform Vice Arabia with an original Arabic production, an hour-long documentary titled Bil Arabi. The Middle East launch follows a wave of recent global rollouts from Vice Media, with its video content slated to reach 80 territories by early 2018. Earlier this year, the youth-focused company inked deals that saw its presence expand across South Africa with Euronet Media, Brazil with Globosat, the Middle East with Molty Group, India with Times of India, and Iberia with AMC Networks International.

Abu Dhabi Media announces Nat Geo Kids Abu Dhabi

National Geographic Kids Abu Dhabi, a global first for the brand, was announced last month as part of a high-profile launch between Abu Dhabi Media and National Geographic. The new channel, a Fox product, will bring a variety of factual entertainment to children in the region, covering science, exploration, adventure and wildlife. All shows will be dubbed to Arabic. National Geographic Kids will also produce the first ever National Geographic Photographer of 2018. A jury will then select a winner to be the “Little National Geographic Photographer of 2018”. The channel aims to reach 26% of children in the Arab world who represent the segment that views FTA channels. Children who view paid channels constitute only about 7% regionally. Abdul Rahman Al Harthi, Executive Director of the Department of Television at Abu Dhabi Media said: “Abu Dhabi Media has succeeded in developing its entertainment offering in the last three years with the Majid Kids TV channel. Today, we are moving to the next level by launching a channel with content that fuels the interest of our children and fosters a culture of learning and exploration delivered in an innovative, experiential format.”

Commenting on the launch, Sanjay Raina, General Manager and Senior Vice President of Fox Networks Group, added: “With up to 95 million under the age of 14 in the region, this channel is anticipated to be one of the most popular for kids across the region.”

VuClip announces Arabic and Asian original productions

VuClip’s platform Vuclip has announced that one of its many original productions for the Arab world, Hob Al Tayebin, a family comedy, produced in partnership with Saudi-based entertainment company UForm, will be online from December 2017. The platform will also launch ten Asian Vu originals in the Middle East.

In brief

Marwan Shehab, who used to head Vodafone’s Middle East operations has joined Quvit as VP CEMEA. He will be based in Dubai.
**Arab Format Lab and DISCOP invite pitches**

Arab Format Lab, a content developer, producer and distributor with offices in Dubai, Cairo and Jeddah, has partnered with DISCOP Dubai to unveil the Arab Format Accelerator, a matchmaking and pitching programme facilitating the commerce of TV adaptation rights into the Middle East. Arab Format Accelerator will run parallel to the three-day entertainment content market from February 25-27. International adaptation right holders and local producers will be invited to “veteran pitch” their scripted and unscripted TV shows in front of a live audience.

The pitches will be directed to key production, commissioning and marketing executives seeking to adapt fresh ideas for Middle East TV audiences.

Arab Format Accelerator will culminate with an awards ceremony, where innovative international and locally developed formats will be awarded in different categories.

Speaking about the initiative, Khushat Abu Homos, CEO of Arab Format Lab stated: “I’m honoured to be appointed as chairperson of Arab Format Accelerator. Submission processes to pitch content began last month.”

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**belN expands cricket offering**

The best of English cricket will soon be broadcast across MENA following a deal signed by the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and belN Media Group. Alongside the agreement, belN has also announced plans to introduce a dedicated belN Sports cricket channel in the MENA region in 2018. Under the six-year deal, belN will screen premium cricket clashes including India’s 2018 and 2022 tours to England, as well as the Ashes series in the UK in 2019.

belN recently announced an exclusive deal to broadcast Cricket Australia content in the MENA region, starting with the 2017-18 Ashes series. belN will broadcast cricket in more than 24 countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Morocco.

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**Deluxe spotlights IP at workshop**

Deluxe conducted a half-day demo of the Deluxe Broadcast Delivery Network, Anders Hoeg, VP/principal architect, video transport platforms for Deluxe focused on the cloud-based content delivery solution enabling broadcasters to deliver HD-quality broadcast content directly into their facility.

“First and foremost, the solution aims to help linear broadcasters achieve their goals to be able to receive large scale events and have a global reach – in terms of receiving feeds from other countries and broadcasting your own content to a larger global audience. The broadcast delivery network is built on the public internet. We have the same geographical span as the internet has,” Hoeg said.

Confirming that there will be trials in the region, Paul Wallis, Director and SVP Media Cloud for Deluxe added, “We are hoping to test the system in the region including a trial with a sporting event in a neighbouring GCC country.”

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**New VP for Global TV & Video at Eutelsat**

Eutelsat has appointed Gerry O’ Sullivan as Executive VP, Global TV and Video. In his new role, he will drive the product development strategy that ensures that Eutelsat continues to offer customers video services across its global footprint.

O’ Sullivan has experience creating commercial, marketing, operational and technical strategies for leading broadcasters and system operators, including the BBC, BSkyB, Deutsche Telekom, Digicel, Fox News and ABC.

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**The all new Ultimatte 12 features one touch keying, incredible new image and color processing for realistic composites, plus 12G-SDI for Ultra HD.**

Ultimate 12 is more than the world’s best keyer. It’s an advanced real time compositing processor designed for next generation broadcast graphics. Ultimatte 12 features new algorithms and color science for incredible edge handling, greater color separation, amazing color fidelity and better spill suppression than ever before. You get real time cinematic quality keying in a 12G-SDI design that works in both HD and Ultra HD.

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Now you can faithfully reproduce bright colors that were impossible before! Ultimatte 12 has a huge internal color space, smooth transitions between colors and photorealistic compositing. This lets you retain and faithfully reproduce colors such as a bright yellow dress in front of a green screen. You get crisp clear images with vibrant colors that pop!

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Ultimatte’s one touch keying technology analyzes and automatically sets over 100 different parameters. The first step is to properly light the scene and white balance your cameras, then let Ultimatte do the rest. Plus, you can connect a SmartRemote 4 via Ethernet to remote control up to eight Ultimatte units at once and fine tune your settings.

**Smart Remote 4**

**US$3,935**

Ultimatte 12 **US$10,365**

*SRP excludes duties, shipping and sales tax.

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**Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae**
Turkmenistan TV expands OB fleet

Broadcast Solutions GmbH and Turkish company Polimeks have together delivered a fleet of eight vehicles (two sets) as part of a second phase to Turkmenistan TV. Each set of production vehicles delivered consists of an OB trailer, support tender, generator vehicle and an SNG.

The last set, which was delivered this year, is a full UHd fleet. Polimeks is the general contractor for the Ashgabat Olympic Complex in Turkmenistan and coordinates all broadcast facilities on-site. All production resources were deployed at the 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Games that took place in September 2017 at Ashgabat Olympic Complex, Turkmenistan. Besides delivering the OB vans to Turkmenistan TV, Broadcast Solutions was onsite during the competitions to support the production and the teams.

Broadcast Solutions previously delivered two sets of eight production vehicles to Polimeks Turkmenistan in 2015. The large-scale contract was completed this year. To protect the vehicles, all trucks were placed on a flatbed truck to be transported to the customer. Part of the last set was a UHD/4K OB van with 15 cameras – the first ever 4K OB van in the Central Asian country.

On completing the project, Wladislaw Grabowski, CTO at Broadcast Solutions and project manager stated: “This project was the continuation of our successful collaboration with Polimeks and Turkmenistan TV.

“Although the schedule was very tight, and we completed building all eight vehicles in just seven months, we accomplished this project without any compromise on quality or on cutting-edge technology.”

Colors TV launches new show

Indian entertainment channel, Colors TV, has launched Entertainment Ki Raat with stand-up comedy, musical rapping, drop the mic and celebrity chat segments.

Spanning multiple segments in a one-hour episode, the show brings together an ensemble cast that includes Ravi Dubey, Dipika Kakar and Aditya Narayan with the ‘Drop The Mic’ segment that will challenge celebrities to sing. Entertainment Ki Raat will be aired in the UAE every Saturday and Sunday at 10pm.

When 16 artists from around the world descended on Dubai to create art on walls, the property developer, Meraas, and Dubai Real Estate, each leased production house, GTV Film Production, decided to tell their story. The 12-minute, feature-length documentary Art in the City will have its world premiere on The Beach at JBR, on December 8 as part of DIFF 2017.

The film follows the street artists as they create one-off masterpieces transforming City Walk, a development in the Jumeirah area of Dubai, into an open-air museum of street art. Directed by Tewe Pannier and produced by Finzi Horschman, both from GTV Film Production, Art in the City captures the unscripted, behind-the-scenes action with candid voice-overs by the artists as they choose their medium and canvases, and work towards creating the final artwork. Commenting on the logistics of the shoot, Pannier stated: “We deployed a crew of around 12 persons with Harvey Glenn as DOP. Overall, we shot for 16 days in Dubai and one day in San Francisco. With large walls as canvases, our DOP spent a good amount of time shooting on a crane.”

The striking visuals shift from colourful palms and fire hydrants covered with knitting by artist Magda Sayeg, the founder of the global yarn bombing movement, to the signature black rodent of Blek le Rat, known as the master of stencil art. Polish duo Etam Cru spent several days on a crane in the hot sun to create their six-storey high painting of a little girl, which is possibly the largest mural in the Middle East. Art in the City alternates seamlessly between the artist, the artwork and the creative process.

Commenting on the approach to story-telling, Pannier stated: “We attempted to capture the passion driving these world-renowned artists through this documentary and that makes the content both unique and engaging. We are excited to have the world premiere on a prestigious platform such as the Dubai International Film Festival.”

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The interiors of the new fleet.

Sam Kiley.

Colorful palms and fire hydrants covered with knitting by artist Magda Sayeg in Dubai.

Art in the City captures the unscripted, behind-the-scenes action with candid voice-overs by the artists as they choose their medium and canvases, and work towards creating the final artwork.
VR, AR centrestage at InfoComm MEA 2017

InfoComm Middle East & Africa (InfoComm MEA) 2017 will take centrestage at the Dubai World Trade Centre on December 5-7, with 40 free education sessions. Three industry associations — VR AR Association, Association of Professional Interior Designers, and International Live Events Association — will lend support, sharing insights on AV and experiential communications.

More than 100 exhibiting companies from over 20 countries will be on deck to showcase their latest innovations. Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) is a multi-billion dollar industry, expected to be worth USD 6 billion in the MENA region by 2020 and globally, $14.3 billion. Brought to the event by VR AR Association and InfoComm Middle East & Africa, the ‘VR AR Conference – The Immersive World’ will touch on how VR/AR technologies are changing the face of every industry.

Saudi version of Takeshi’s Castle to launch

Saudi Arabia’s General Sports Authority (GSA), which is responsible for all sports-related activities in the Kingdom, has partnered with Japan’s Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) to bring a new version of Takeshi’s Castle, the cult Japanese TV show, back to KSA. The show is returning for the first time since 1990.

The Saudi version will debut in late 2018 across several of the country’s leading channels and see the fast-paced physical game show and its signature challenges within a Saudi setting. An Arab style castle featuring over 50 obstacles will be built in Riyadh over a period of 10 months, in a space of 300,000 sqm. The weekly programme will be open to everyone in the region and will run for 13 weeks, with hugely provis and new challenges each week.

GSA Chairman, His Excellency Turki Al-Shiekh commented: ‘We are delighted to announce this partnership with TBS that will see Takeshi’s Castle make a return, with a new Saudi version debuting in the Kingdom at the end of next year. The GSA is actively developing all sports across the Kingdom at the end of 2018. We hope to not just entertain but also inspire people to get out and try these new sports and activities for themselves.’

His Excellency Toshichika Ishihara, Chairman of the Tokyo Broadcasting System, added that the deal was part of ‘Saudi Japan VISION 2030’.

Image Nation rewards filmmakers

Image Nation Abu Dhabi crowned the winners of its sixth annual short film programme, Arab Film Studio. They were judged by a panel of regional filmmaking elite including Emirati film directors Noha Al Fahad, The Tainted Veil, Ali Mostata (The Worthy) and Majid Al Ansari (Iznazam). Nabil (The Worthy) and Majid (The Filmmaking Elite) were also crowned the winners of the ‘Young Filmmaker’s’ short film programme, which is responsible for all sports-related activities in the Kingdom.

His Excellency Turki Al-Shiekh, GSA Chairman, commented: ‘We are delighted to announce this partnership with TBS that will see Takeshi’s Castle make a return, with a new Saudi version debuting in the Kingdom at the end of next year. The GSA is actively developing all sports across the Kingdom at the end of 2018. We hope to not just entertain but also inspire people to get out and try these new sports and activities for themselves.’

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Streamline Your HDR Workflows

HDR is opening up new possibilities in broadcast, production, post and ProAV with support for increased dynamic range and lifelike color. Stay on the leading edge with our latest HDR workflow solutions including the powerful new FS-HDR for realtime HDR format and WCG conversions, Desktop I/O for HDR playout, and easy to use Mini-Converters to bridge SDI to HDR displays.

Find out more at www.aja.com/hdr

HDR Conversions
FS-HDR is designed to bridge the conversions needed from wide gamut color spaces and luminance ranges to HDR standards, and from SDR to HDR to integrate non-HDR materials into HDR programming, all in realtime.

Inside FS-HDR is the new Colorfront Engine®, which provides realtime wide color gamut and high dynamic range processing for both HD and UltraHD from the Academy Award® winning leaders in color management at Colorfront.

AJA Desktop products include the AJA Control Panel for setup of realtime HDR metadata and HLG playout, directly within your chosen postproduction software application. Choose from the KONA 4 PCIe card, the io-4K for Thunderbolt computers, and the IP video enabled KONA IP.

SSD, LTO, and SAS drives are all supported.

HDR Conversions
AJA’s Colorfront Engine® provides real-time color gamut and high dynamic range processing for both HD and UltraHD.

HDR for Editing and Color Correction
View and display your HDR projects to compatible monitors during postproduction. AJA Desktop products include the AJA Control Panel for setup of realtime HDR metadata and HLG playout, directly within your chosen postproduction software application. Choose from the KONA 4 PCIe card, and the io-4K for Thunderbolt computers, and the IP video enabled KONA IP.

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KSA and twofour54 to promote media

The Media Zone Authority – Abu Dhabi, the regulatory body of twofour54, and the General Commission of Audiovisual Media (‘GCAM’) of Saudi Arabia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will see both organisations collaborate on efforts to help grow the media sector in the region.

The agreement aims to strengthen ties between both organisations, enhance the sharing of experiences and knowledge, and collaborate on initiatives that will support Saudi Vision 2030’s goal to foster job creation and enable the establishment and growth of SMEs in the media sector.

The agreement was signed by Her Excellency Maryam Eid AlMheiri, General Director of GCAM, and Redha bin Mohammed Al Haidar, General Director of MZA – Abu Dhabi, in a special ceremony hosted by twofour54.

Over the last few years, twofour54 has signed an MoU with Saudi Broadcasting Corporation to exchange knowledge and has hosted delegates for training. twofour54 has also collaborated with O3 Productions on a state-of-the-art backlot in Abu Dhabi, where Saudi drama series are filmed.

NewTek showcases IP-based workflow

NewTek and MediaCast conducted two free training sessions presenting the range of NewTek solutions from cameras to integrated IP-based production systems last month in Dubai.

Professionals from the fields of video for broadcast, sports, entertainment, education, corporate and government attended the session conducted by Chris Waddington, Senior Director of Sales, EMEA at NewTek.

Products and solutions on display included NewTek’s video-over-IP technology NDI, NewTek Connect, TalkShow and the IP-enabled camera, the NDI PTZ camera, among others. Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, Elaborating on the initiative, Jaffer said: “This is a very important step that it makes an impact in the ecosystem, we found that it is far more scalable. Now they clearly see how a product adds value to their workflow and also discover if they are missing anything. Moreover, our in-house technical team drawn from various fields of video and audio production fields are best placed to walk end-users through the Blackmagic Design workflow.”

Describing the centre as an immersive experience beyond just browsing a product catalogue, Dadpanah highlighted the growing market for Blackmagic Design beyond the Middle East.

“Over the past 10 years, we have been distributors for Blackmagic Design. We cover the entire Middle East and Turkey. In the two-and-a-half years that we have been in operation in Turkey, we have seen amazing growth. Now, we are expanding into Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries in that region as well.”

mediaCast offers complete experience with BMD centre

MediaCast, Blackmagic Design’s authorised Middle East distributor, launched its experience centre last month at its HQ in Dubai Media City, to showcase a glass-to-glass workflow with the BMD range of products.

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME about the vision behind the centre, Dadpanah stated: “We wanted our systems integrators and other end-users to look at the product range not just as isolated equipment but as part of an entire workflow.

“Moreover, Blackmagic Design has a good number of OEM developers. We are trying to get people who are writing and developing their own software using BMD solutions to come here and integrate their products into this ecosystem.”

Elaborating on the initiative, Jaffer said: “This experience centre is in line with how a typical Blackmagic workflow operates from acquisition to delivery. We have had major local channels visit us as well as representatives from post production houses. While an end-user wants one product in the ecosystem, we found that it makes an impact when they see it along with what comes before and after.

The difference is remarkable. Now they clearly see how a product adds value to their workflow and also discover if they are missing anything. Moreover, our in-house technical team drawn from various fields of video and audio production fields are best placed to walk end-users through the Blackmagic Design workflow.”

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Sennheiser appoints Technical Sales Manager ME

Audio specialist Sennheiser has announced the appointment of Fadi Fathi as its new Technical Sales Manager in the Middle East. In this role, Fathi will focus on supporting customers and growing Sennheiser’s footprint in the business, communication, system integration and audio recording segments.

Fathi holds a diploma in audio-visual and sound engineering from the Academia Du Sciences Cinématographiques Et Théâtrales in Lebanon, and has achieved several certifications from vendors including Electro Voice, Dynacord, Extron, AMX, Datatast, Biamp, and Audinate.

SICFF reaches out to young filmmakers

The fifth Sharjah International Children’s Film Festival (SICFF) 2017 hosted more than 50 workshops during the festival, and continued to attract young artists-in-the-making in different neighbourhoods of the emirate of Sharjah by taking some of their workshops to Duba Al Hisn, Khalba and Khorfakkan.

The films that were screened at the festival this year continue to be shown at the Dibba Al Hisn Cultural Centre. Participation of 124 films from 31 countries, attendance of 70 directors, filmmakers and producers from around the world, social media influencers, and Hollywood movie stars like Jacob Tremblay, who made this edition of the festival one of the most successful ones, the official release stated.

Etisalat trials IPTV service on 4G network

Etisalat has announced the successful completion of the first MENA IPTV service over an existing WTTx (10G) network trial. The trial is the first of its kind over an existing LTE network, and opens the doors to advanced 5G-era streaming services such as IPTV over existing wireless networks.

On the successful trial, Saud AlZarouni, Senior VP, Mobile Network, Etisalat said: “IPTV over WTTx will revolutionise TV service availability for Etisalat customers, making it seamless for them to watch subscription-based e-Life TV content across Etisalat’s 4G networks.”

Etimat trials IPTV service on 4G network

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The industry turned out in full force for the annual ASBU BroadcastPro ME Selevision Summit on November 14 at the Habtoor Grand Hotel in Dubai. The morning session opened with a welcome address by Vijaya Cherian, Editor – BroadcastPro Middle East and Managing Partner & Editorial Director of publishers CPI Trade Media. 

Vijaya highlighted the seven years of close partnership and trust built with the industry. A brief comment on the publisher’s new autonomous avatar as CPI Trade Media was followed by an expression of appreciation for each of the sponsors. We make special mention here of Selevision, who has been our title sponsor for the last four years.

Fox Networks Group, our welcome sponsor, distributed diaries to all attendees. This is the first year BroadcastPro ME has been able to attract broadcasters as sponsors for the event. A big thank you to Zee, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year and Colors TV for adding colour to our event. To the applause of the audience, our free zone sponsor for the event, Sharjah Media City and its imminent launch in 2018, was announced. Special thanks to Irdeto, who has come forward as a panel sponsor every year and added a lot of value to our discussions. We wanted to extend a big thank you to our category sponsors, Arabsat, Lawo, BS Broadcast and Eutelsat. Entertainer came on board this year and gave away its newly launched 2018 apps to our winners for 2017. This event is endorsed by the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), who has been with us from our inaugural edition. ASBU’s Director General Abdelrahim Sulaiman received a commemorative plaque from Vijaya Cherian at the gala awards in the evening.

The four panel discussions, moderated by industry experts, were wide-ranging and straddled the diverse worlds of content creation and technology. This issue features a detailed summary of the four panels and exclusive research from Eutelsat.

Interspersed between panel discussions were attractive giveaways that included three Canon 7D cameras from Sharjah Media Free Zone, iPhone 8s from CMT Technologies, Atari consoles from Axon, Momentum headsets from Sennheiser and Entertainer apps.

The afternoon concluded on a note of cautious optimism from the CEOs of the region’s major broadcasters.
The word ‘censorship’ is inevitable in any discussion on MENA-based content. And it did crop up at the end of the first quarter of the first panel at the annual ASBU BroadcastPro ME Television Summit and Awards 2017. The panel was titled ‘MENA Content: Cross-cultural viewership trends and identifying successful global distribution patterns’. What was unexpected for the 300-odd delegates gathered at the Habtoor Grand Ballroom was the candid autopsy of a formula for content creation across the Arab countries that has run its course.

The question posed by moderator Heba Korayem, Client Director, Meno TV Content Hub, was about how Arabic content can travel globally like Korean and Turkish content.

“There is no secret formula,” declared Fadi Ismail, GM of O3 Productions, MBC Group, who has played a pivotal role in internationalising Turkish content. “Content needs to be authentic to the culture, plus you need good storytelling and good production values. With Turkish dramas, you had good-looking characters, great storytelling and excellent production values that projected authentic Turkey. The same can be said about Korean content, and hopefully, we will say the same about Arabic drama. We are at the beginning of the journey. It will be a long, slow and painful process as producers and broadcasters adapt to international standards in formatting, pricing and so on.”

Gianluca Chakra, MD of Pro Flow Filmed Entertainment, went one step further. Having successfully distributed Lebanese film Very Big Shot, now available on Netflix worldwide, his company is also a content aggregator for Google Play, Netflix and iTunes. He believes there is a dearth of storytelling talent in the region.

“Very Big Shot was about crime in Lebanon, and locally, the press believed that we had portrayed Lebanon in a negative manner. Netflix saw what was perceived as daring in this region as marketable. In the MENA, you have to be careful about what you say. I believe the self-censorship that a lot of writers here subject their creative process to is most damaging to good content creation.”

Countering that argument, Safa Aburiziq, General Director of Beelink Productions, co-producer of the UAE’s first legal TV drama among other productions, said: “Being daring is not essential. You can achieve success with family-friendly content as well. Before we talk about global expansion, I believe we should achieve success in our region. Our drama series Grand Hotel has been sold to Netflix. It is the first Arabic drama series to be distributed on a global scale and translated into various languages.”

As the audience applauded the success story from the MENA region, Ismail struck a sober note by weighing the handful of successes against the number of TV dramas produced in the region. “We have not reached breakthrough yet, when just one or two of the 500 dramas produced in the last five years might have been picked up by Netflix or others. Local success is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Even a one-star rated TV series in any of the territories of the region might not be sold internationally. Also, our 30-episode formula for Ramadan is not conducive for an international platform.”

The audience was then treated to a riveting debate on the language content creation typical of the region. The pressure to produce dramas for the 30-day Ramadan period is hampering Arabic content creation, panelists agreed. “The MENA audience is overwhelmingly young, and they have switched to VOD. While linear TV is not replaced, the name of the game is coexistence between VOD, FTA and pay TV,” said Fadi Ismail, CEO of Creative Ventures.

“While linear TV will not be replaced … the name of the game is coexistence between VOD, FTA and pay TV” Badih Fattouh, CEO of Creative Ventures.
I believe the self-censorship that writers here ... subject their creative process to is most damaging to good content creation”

Gianluca Chakra, MD of Front Row Filmed Entertainment

for local content. Formulaic content will never travel. " 

Optimistic about the future, Ismail reiterated that competition with outside players will create dynamism. "Forget the billions of dollars. What is needed is much less to change the game. It takes new global players to come and invest $5 million each for original content. Local players such as Wahid Plus are about to start creating their own premium content and will have to intensify their efforts.

O3 is now moving away from the 30-episode formula and is developing a 15-episode Saudi series with a different approach to storytelling that we hope will become big. We need to experiment and take calculated risks, even if conditions are against us. Advertising is down 20-40%, and it is a wonderful time for collaboration and co-production. The usual commercial and ego-related issues are no longer roadblocks." 

Patrons of Creative Ventures stressed that the mindset and format need to change. "We spoke of the success of Turkish dramas, but we did not address the number of those dramas that get axed. In this region, by the time the feedback comes in for a 30-episode drama, the project is done. However, if you had the pressure to sustain ratings on a daily basis with the fear of being axed mid-season, productions would get sharper."

There is no secret formula. Content needs to be authentic to the culture,” Fadi Ismail, GM of O3 Productions, MBC Group said. “We have a mix between scripted formats and original writing. We have excellent writers, but good original writing takes time. Hopefully, with the emergence of paid platforms, we will have liberty to talk about areas that are taboo.”

Moderator Korayem highlighted the shockingly low number of global recognitions the region has had, with the one Oscar nod coming from unlikely Algeria in 1969 and the one Emmy award from Jordan in 2008. The next globally viral drama could emerge from anywhere across the MENA, the panelists agreed. As Ismail concluded: "The storytelling will be good. The production values will be better, and we will have that unique content that we dream about. We are not there yet. This is only the beginning."
Since the pre-YouTube era of viral video clips in the early 2000s, viewers of all ages have increasingly shunned traditional linear TV for VOD. Much like virtual reality, the initial ‘wow’ factor around the uptake for internet video has given way to bread-and-butter issues. The second panel discussion, titled ‘Internet video is the new normal’, focused on profitability and was sponsored by Irdeto.

The first question posed by moderator Nick Grande, Managing Director of Dubai-based TV consultancy and service provider ChannelSculptor, was: “Has the era of profitable OTT arrived in the region?”

Danny Bates, CCO and co-founder of Starz Play, responded by saying: “We are now seeing the roadmap to profitability. Compared to three years ago, it is a completely different business now. Puny enough, Netflix has helped. It has made customers more aware of the value for the customer that is profitable for us. We now need to grow the scale and volume of that value.”

Understanding why internet video is the new normal, Maarten Kranendonk, Head of Partnerships, iflix MENA, stated in his opening remarks: “When most SVOD players such as Starz Play and iflix launched, it was B2C. Now the telco partnerships have come into play, which is important for us because they bring us scale and subscribers, and we bring to the telco what they are not able to give to their customers.”

While Kranendonk believes B2B2C is the way forward, Bates said: “We would like an element of B2C as well, since it is extremely important for us to have our own marketing channels vis-à-vis the end consumer. We also work closely with telcos. The telcos enjoy trust with the customers, and that is critical for us as online brands, especially when it comes to transactions.”

Clearly, for the OTT industry to arrive anywhere close to the projected $1.75 billion by 2022, telcos will have to play a major role. Samer Geissah, Vice-President Innovation, Commercial at du, elaborated: “The moment we allowed
Maarten Kranendonk, Head of Partnerships, Iflix MENA customers to use their post- or pre-paid credit to pay for digital services such as Starz Play, that was us saying we believe in OTT moving forward. The viewership for IPTV is on the decline, except for news and sports, and is moving towards VOD. Plus, the personalisation of services is why OTT platforms are doing better as compared to linear TV.”

Geissah questioned the traditional approach of investing billions of dollars in setting up fibre networks, when the internet allows telcos to operate beyond their legally mandated areas of operation. “We have a diverse subscriber base that is matched by the diverse flavours of OTT on offer. Our arrangement with Wavo allows us to reach a certain segment of our subscribers in the fixed category that is outside of our fibre footprint. So if you are looking to get triple play from du in areas where our fibre footprint does not exist, for instance in Abu Dhabi, Fujairah or Sharjah or even certain areas in Dubai, subscribers get premium OTT via OSN with our double play, which is a virtual triple play. For our mobile base, we are looking for partners who can bring the latest series from Hollywood and a good mix of Arabic and Asian productions.”

Almost in response to Geissah, Nadine Samra, VP Digital Business MEA, Z5X at Zee Entertainment, stated in her opening remarks: “We have a large footprint outside India, be it across the Middle East, Africa or Europe. Our aim in the digital world is to be as strong as we are on linear. Our first product was Zee Weyyak, and we launched it six months ago as an OTT service targeting Arab audiences. “In the coming months, there will be free exclusive series on Weyyak. I believe localisation is critical, especially for an Arab audience. It is an AVOID service. If our international VOD platform, is more suited to a subscription-based model. Our pricing decisions will be based on being reasonable and reachable.”

Samra announced that Zee Weyyak has had a million unique visits since its launch and reiterated that original content created by OTT platforms will be the big differentiator, as demonstrated by Netflix and others.

Kranendonk of iflix questioned the long-term sustainability of the AVOID model, despite the glut of hits. “AVOD is a challenging proposition for operators and advertisers. With advertisers increasingly resistant to advertising in traditional models, subscription is the way to evolve an OTT service. “We produced an Egyptian series during Ramadan that did pretty well. We will continue to produce original content. Much like in Asia, we are looking at typically starting with comedy shows like other AVOID or SVOD players, and then move to scripted shows and eventually co-produce movies. On the whole, we are happy with how our partnership with Zain is evolving. That gives us access to a large number of countries in the region.”

Whether AVOD or SVOD, monetisation of content is key, “We work very hard towards bringing content that can be monetised on a subscription service. Arabic content on its own is very hard to monetise, and you have a premium local platform such as Shahid to contend with. But if you can bring content that is exclusive and in the first window and has the stars, we can take customers over the paywall.”

With OTT grappling with fundamental monetisation issues, piracy was not on the top of his list, one of the panelists noted. To this, Richard Frankland, Vice-President Sales EMEA at Irdeto, presented figures illustrating significantly high penetration of piracy and predicted that OTT players will have to deal with the problem sooner rather than later. “In research we commissioned, 59% of our respondents in the GCC had access to pirated content. That is an enormous number, and if you look at millennials, the number goes up to 62%. Piracy should matter to rights owners, because they cannot sell content at the same price points; broadcasters will not attract the same number of subscribers, and consumers will suffer because they are sharing their password and credit card details with companies that are essentially criminals.”

Conceding that the problem is too big for one operator, Frankland stressed the need for collective action from everyone in the industry. Enforcement is also around the corner, he said: “We fully anticipate sports content providers and
“We work very hard towards bringing content that can be monetised”

Danny Bates, CCO and co-founder of Starz Play

other rights holders to enforce watermarking as part of the next phase in general licensing contracts. These licensing agreements will become more onerous on licensees.”

As a solution for fighting piracy while offering consumers a superior product, Geissah of du said: “When we did our music bundling, we worked with a local start-up called Anghami. Any user who generates a certain revenue gets this service free of charge. We saw numbers grow dramatically and have seen additional consumption of data. So it is doubly rewarding – the more we are able to bundle such quality propositions for home and mobile users, consumers will not want to opt for illegal options. Ultimately, piracy is a financial decision.”

There was general consensus in the Q&A that followed that linear TV viewing will decline; but with little transparency on data in the region, the roadmap for the future of live and OTT subscriptions remains unclear. While lauding Starz Play’s stated goal of reaching a million subscribers by the end of 2017, a delegate asked where OTT was currently placed in terms of numbers.

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“Personalisation of services is why OTT platforms are doing better as compared to linear TV”

Samer Geissah, Vice-President Innovation, Commercial at du

“These are very early days for OTT,” said Bates of Starz Play. “If I was to estimate, outside of piracy there are 2.5m to 3m paid subscribers to OTT in this region. The good news is that smart TVs are now a fundamental part of TV viewing, accounting for 50% of consumption and slated to grow to 65% in the near future.”
“We were promised a revolution,” opened Peter Ennis, Senior Vice President, Global Services, Delivery and Customer Support, Avid. The 20-year broadcast industry veteran had flown in from New Zealand to moderate the tech panel at the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Television Summit 2017.

Ennis opened the panel discussion with the question: “We were told everything was going IP and it will change lives. Has it changed your life?”

Titled ‘The Tech Revolution: Tackling new challenges in the broadcast workplace’, the overriding theme of the hour-long discussion was acknowledgement that new technologies in broadcast are not just buzzwords.

“IP has changed the way we do business,” asserted Monish Kapoor, VP of IT and Broadcast at Zee Entertainment Middle East.

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From IP and cloud to blockchain, the technical panel at the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Television Summit agrees that change is here, but there is no standard path forward.

“IP has changed the way we do business. We are far more agile and far more flexible towards changing business needs”

Monish Kapoor, VP of IT and Broadcast at Zee Entertainment Middle East
and set the other power supply on fire as well, and eventually, took down the rest of the servers. The heavy showers had for several weeks to recover from this.

“Of course, then you get into a broadcast company and you realise one needs to have hardware in the building. Applications such as SharePoint and databases are relatively easy to move to the cloud. With video, just the amount of data and levels of connectivity you need creates a huge problem because being bandwidth is a huge challenge concerning video. Even though I do not want to run servers, I have had to acknowledge in the past few years, that it sometimes makes sense.”

Kapoor, a big believer in the cloud, said: “Broadcasters have far more acceptance towards the cloud, with the scalability it offers. Also, the cloud allows your locally created content to be worked on remotely from another location, which is a huge benefit for studios.”

Reiterating the issues that stop a company from fully embracing the cloud – connectivity and hosting costs – Ennis asked Van Dam about the third critical issue of security.

“We were one of the early adopters of cloud platform. We did run into arguments related to security. People are afraid of putting stuff on an intangible cloud. “My stance on this issue is that a company that runs hosting or cloud services as their main business will be a better choice in cooperation with the in-house broadcast IT department. It lack particular information from Amazon or Microsoft would involve crossing so many hurdles. Companies such as Microsoft are very proud of the number of certifications on security they have.”

Bloem added: “As for virtual security, to me there is no difference between the company network and the cloud network. You have to put in place proper configurations and firewalls. The main difference is the cloud is a lot easier to secure. This may seem counterintuitive to many people – though you cannot physically see the server, the cloud is many times more secure on multiple levels.”

“Shifting the conversation to AI, Ennis asked whether this technology is adding value to the workflow.”

Bloom responded: “Any software now claims to have AI in some form or the other. Startup companies will tell you that they mention AI to investors because it sounds cool. Many people don’t even know the difference between AI and machine learning. But AI is amazing broad in its applications for broadcast, from analysing video and translating text to finding scenes to recognising faces on video and much more. An increased proportion of processing is fueled by AI and it is exciting because it is starting to get commoditised and easy to use.”

With Netflix poised to use AI techniques to compress codecs and optimise network data transfers, the panelists agreed that more broadcasters are deploying AI techniques towards audience engagement, content planning and network management. While Van Dam spoke of deploying AI for more efficient use of media libraries, Kapoor said his company is in the process of implementing AI on OTT platforms and weighing options to outsource or do it in-house.

The final discussion on blockchain was in equal parts a crash course on the term for those in the audience not familiar with the concept, and a critical look at the usefulness of the solution for the broadcast industry. Ennis asked the panel about the impact of blockchain on distribution and payment for content, and on protection, if any, from piracy.

Referring to an earlier panel discussion on content creation, Van Dam stated: “We can use blockchain in content creation. The first panel spoke of needing more writers. I believe there are a lot of good writers in the world. Smart contracts within blockchain will help the work to be monitored and picked up and worked on by someone else, with transparency and monetisation at every stage.”

Earlier this year, Spotify acquired Mediachain Labs, a company developing better technology for connecting artists and other rights holders. The start-up is working to leverage blockchain technology in order to help solve problems with attribution, complete with an attribution engine for creators and a cryptocurrency that rewards creators for their work.

While Bloom spoke of the possibility of global collaboration
I believe coders and developers are working towards the next level where content can be broken down and stored for greater security. “Blockchain could very well be the future of DRM,” Bloem pointed out.

“Blockchain could very well be the future of DRM”
Adriaan Bloem, Senior Manager Online Platforms, MBC Group

“Smart contracts within blockchain will help the work to be monitored, and picked up and worked on by someone else, with transparency and monetisation at every stage.”
Peter Van Dam, Technical Advisor – CEO’s office at LIVE HD Broadcast Facilities

PROSUMMIT
over cloud with content producers receiving royalty automatically using blockchain-based solutions, Kapoor lauded the security offered by the technology.

“Bitcoin uses blockchain as infrastructure, and until now we have not heard about hacking in bitcoin.”

“Blockchain could very well be the future of DRM” Bloem pointed out.

“DRM is based on centralised servers. But if you build a DRM based on transactions, and distributed ledgers using encryption, it does not matter what you use to play your video. It could be an app some 15-year-old devised, or it could be the official app from the broadcaster, because the transaction per video is what is counted on the ledger. That would be an exciting application.”

Regarding piracy, the panel agreed that blockchain will not preempt the placing of a camera in front of a screen and illegally recording the movie. The new technology, however, may allow for more platforms for distribution of content. The ease of use for the viewer would help fight piracy.

While 2018 looks set to be the year when new technologies in broadcasting are deployed at scale, so that they no longer remain mere buzzwords, the path forward is not uniform.

“The cloud,” observed Van Dam, “like any other technology needs to be used where required. Technology needs to serve people.”

Kapoor concurred: “The new technologies need to be cost effective and suit your business model. You need to pick up technologies that make you a better broadcaster.”

While 2018 looks set to be the year when new technologies in broadcasting are deployed at scale, so that they no longer remain mere buzzwords, the path forward is not uniform. “The cloud,” observed Van Dam, “like any other technology needs to be used where required. Technology needs to serve people.”

Kapoor concurred: “The new technologies need to be cost effective and suit your business model. You need to pick up technologies that make you a better broadcaster.”

PRO50 has all you need to know about the top players in the region’s broadcast and satellite market. A compilation of profiles of 50 broadcast and satellite companies in the GCC, the hardback coffee table book is a valuable resource for not only business entities but also customers looking for a ready reckoner of key industry players.

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THE RISE OF HD IN MENA

A consumer research paper on TV reception modes and the rise of HD in MENA was presented by Claudia Vaccarone, Head of Market Research & Customer Experience, Eutelsat at the summit before its global release.

Based on updates from the Eutelsat TV Observatory 2017 and on a survey of the largest MENA countries that involved 4,000 face-to-face interviews in June-July 2017, Claudia Vaccarone, Head of Market Research & Customer Experience at Eutelsat, presented a MENA research paper entitled "TV reception modes and the rise of high definition: Updates from the Eutelsat TV Observatory 2017". Presented for the first time at the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Television Summit 2017 before its global release, the survey was conducted in collaboration with Ipsos MENA.

Commenting on the choice of countries, Vaccarone said: "We surveyed four countries: Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These four countries alone represent 70% of the TV homes in the region and so we get a good sense of the changes since last year. For the rest, we aggregated data from the 2016 edition. The whole area comprises 14 Arabic-speaking markets." Among the first insights gained from the study, the increase in TV homes in the region was evident. Vaccarone explained: "The number of TV homes went from 60.8m to 62.6m, which indicates a 4% growth in the four countries. 1.8m more TV homes in the region is significant and speaks for the ongoing demographic growth."

Moving to the issue of TV reception, the object of the study, Vaccarone noted: "This year, like last year, offered no surprises in that satellite TV remains the favoured digital infrastructure to access television in 94% of TV homes, rising to 58.9m TV homes, up from 56.3m TV homes last year. This represents a healthy growth of 7%.

While observing that except for the UAE and Saudi Arabia, HDTV has a very small installed base compared to the reach of satellite in countries such as Egypt and Morocco, Vaccarone said: "We are also seeing exclusive DTT reception reducing to 0.6m TV homes and exclusive analogue TV homes reducing to 1.9m in favour of satellite." Looking at the rise of HDTV, Vaccarone observed: "In terms of equipment, we are seeing strong growth from year to year with more TV homes equipped to enjoy HDTV with at least one TV screen. An estimated 28.2m homes this year have been equipped with HDTV, up from 17.7m in 2016, and this is a conservative figure, considering the growth has been measured only in the four countries surveyed. "Consumers are getting used to the better image quality. And to match the expectation, there is increasing content, with HD channels at the Eutelsat 7/8° W neighbourhood growing from 133 to 176 in 12 months. 20.6m homes in the four surveyed countries and 60% on average in the 14 Arabic-speaking markets, are receiving HDTV at these locations. This is a growth of 90%, since last year only 10m homes received HDTV." Noting that the broadcast industry is not just about addressing consumers at home, Vaccarone said: "We talked to 147 five-star hotels in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and the UAE. We selected countries that enjoy high traffic from business travellers and tourists. We wanted to understand how luxury hotels access TV channels, and there were interesting insights."

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"Satellite TV remains the favoured digital infrastructure to access television in 94% of TV homes, rising to 58.9m TV homes, up from 56.3m TV homes last year" Claudia Vaccarone, Head of Market Research & Customer Experience at Eutelsat

Satellite vs Other TV Reception Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Satellite</th>
<th>DTT</th>
<th>FTA</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Hotel Survey: TV Channels and Access Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Satellite Channels</th>
<th>Other Channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average number of TV channels offered to guests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Satellite Channels</th>
<th>Other Channels</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>64.3m</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>66.2m</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perimeter Evolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homes</th>
<th>TV Homes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>60.8m</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>62.6m</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
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The ballroom at Habtoor Grand was packed as industry professionals gathered to hear some of the most distinguished voices on the MENA broadcast landscape come together for the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Selevision Summit. They discussed issues critical to the survival of the broadcast industry in light of dipping market conditions, the geopolitical issues that have undermined the morale of the industry and the impact of FANG (Facebook/Amazon/Netflix/Google).

Prior to the debate, Sam Barnett, CEO of MBC Group, issued an informal but potent statement in light of the recent events in the region, declaring that the broadcast network, despite the myriad challenges it was facing at the moment, was firmly forging ahead with its launches.

"MBC is a prized asset, a jewel in any crown ... We have several launches planned and intend to go ahead with them. In December, we will launch the region’s largest and safest kids’ VOD. Wizzo, our games portal, has broken all records this year, and in 2018, we will be publishing our own games. Shahid.net has had 10m unique users every month and 26m users during Ramadan. In 2018, we will be commissioning our own exclusive content for Shahid. On TV, we have just finished Top Chef. We have Voice and Voice Kids and we anticipate maintaining ratings at the same level we have had them to date. Our Turkish production company has produced the most successful Turkish TV drama ever. It has now launched on MBC and we will have the largest show in Turkey next year on MBC.

“So, it’s business as usual and ... we will be competing as strongly as ever” Sam Barnett, CEO, MBC Group commented that, despite the fact that the industry has lost north of a billion dollars of advertising revenue in the last two years with 2016 being “bad” and 2017 “worse”, he did favour the ad-supported model for running a TV business as “active engagement, and eyeballs is the goal towards which everybody is running”. However, he did caution that surviving 2018 would mean being “fiscally prudent” and aiming for “collaboration now more than ever”.

Barnett offered a more optimistic outlook. While he agreed that in Saudi Arabia, TV advertising on FTA is four times more undervalued per capita compared to countries elsewhere, he added that the launch of people meters would give advertisers the confidence to invest.

"As the business cycle starts to pick up, particularly in Saudi Arabia, and as the economy diversifies and gets more competitive, advertisers will battle for market share and the ad industry will continue to use TV. With technology able to divide up different markets into North Africa, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there is a very robust case for FTA with TV. If the market has come down, it will go back up again."

A fine example of a media house that has come up the ranks with new commercial strategies is Fox Networks Group under the helm of VP and GM Sanjay Raina. "A couple of years back, we took a call and rolled back our FTA model for us, the debate is not FTA versus pay. It is all about content, collaboration and the consumer" Sanjay Raina, VP and GM at Fox Networks Group.
Barnett warned that the threat was now from external forces and called for collaboration.

and moved into pay," Raina said. "We have found some ways of launching more pay-TV products. Last year in April, we launched three Fox-branded channels that found widespread distribution across most of the pay-TV platforms. This year again, we have launched three Fox-branded products, one of which is an Arabic product. We are typically Fox. We are always hungry; we are always hunting. For us, the debate in not FTA versus pay. It is all about content, collaboration and the consumer. We will keep pursuing everything that falls within the three Cs."

Sachin Gokhale, Who heads Viacom 18, which targets Indian expatriates in the Middle East, commented that the way forward for this brand has been to diversify its business. "We have been targeting a niche demographic that forms a large segment of the population in many markets but has historically been under-indexed and under-valued. We have premium content, so we have taken the conscious call of putting that content on pay. Because the pay-market itself has not really grown for us, we diversified and set up a successful ancillary operation with localising our content and syndicating it to more broadcasters based here. We have grown from a single channel to a 22-channel operation; we make 30% of our top line from local initiatives like live events and local content. The fundamental appetite for content in the region is growing among that demographic, and you will see us working more in the SVOD space in collaboration with our partners."

Sarkis turned the discussion to Martin Stewart, CEO of OSN, the channel which has once been the dominant force in the pay-TV sector. He stressed that one of the big issues with pay is "the lack of respect for intellectual property rights, and I think it is incumbent upon content owners to take the lead for that."

He commented that while MBC and OSN have taken the lead on this front "fighting piracy with whatever legal means are at our disposal", it's important for the rest of the ecosystem including "content owners, telco operators and the entire marketplace" to come together... to grow our businesses in a profitable way."

He cautioned that if steps are not taken with urgency, one would see un-economic prices being paid for content which, in the short term, will hugely benefit those content owners, but does not create a sustainable business model forward."

He called for "greater regulation" and stated that "it doesn't matter if people meters are put in place if most of the viewing is done through illegal means."

A slightly different player in the mix was Tarek Mounir, VP and GM of Turner MENAT. Sarkis asked how Turner's approach to the business has been different, given that content on pay. Because the pay-market itself has not really grown for us, we diversified and set up a successful ancillary operation with localising our content and syndicating it to more broadcasters based here. We have grown from a single channel to a 22-channel operation; we make 30% of our top line from local initiatives like live events and local content. The fundamental appetite for content in the region is growing among that demographic, and you will see us working more in the SVOD space in collaboration with our partners."

Sarkis then moved to a bigger debate that a number of regional broadcasters have been trying with, without much success – collaboration. He commented that Barnett has mentioned collaboration and invited other broadcasters to join the Shahid platform. "The next wave of competition in this market is not from here," clarified Barnett. "It is from the international players. The cost of their platform is amortised in another 70 countries, and they
are coming with deep overheads to take the advertising dollars from us. While before we had the luxury of competing between ourselves, we now face an external threat and they provide an opportunity to collaborate.

"Shahid generates 10 million unique users every month, and if people want to put their content on this platform, they are welcome. We don't want your money. Come and make your advertising dollars on the platform. Yes, the platform will get stronger, but all of us will benefit from such a collaboration. And on the back of that, if we have had three serious approaches and we are trying to work out a model on how we do it," he explained.

OSN’s Stewart suggested that "The great PANGA (with Apple making up the last A) is coming... unless everyone starts cooperating and developing partnerships in such a way that mutually benefits those who have been here a long time, those outside corporations will simply take the eyeballs."

When the term ‘joint venture’ was thrown in, Gokhale was sceptical, calling it a “sureshot recipe for disaster” and stated that this is nothing “just about a JV”. He said, "I prefer to date first before we engage in a joint venture.”

Barrett agreed that a JV can be complicated and suggested a simpler contract between media entities to take that first step towards collaboration.

Gokhale stepped into the conversation at this point, stating that most of the biggies in the US, from CBS and Disney to Showtime and HBO, had all done it individually, and Hulu was an exception. He seemed to suggest that collaboration is still some years away.

"Everyone’s doing their own B2C ventures. While we recognize the need for collaboration, as content owners we have always traditionally been in the B2B space, where we have relied on other parties to make that last mile possible. And now, we are in a scenario where suddenly there is limitless potential to reach the consumer directly and create that value for your business by being B2C.” So I think it will take a while before serious players come together to collaborate.

"Active engagement and eyeballs is the goal towards which everyone is running," Mukund Cnara, CEO, Zee Entertainment

Mounir said, although he added that Turner prefers to launch its product with a number of platforms rather than go for an exclusive tie-up.

Raina added at this point that Fox was launching Nat Geo Kids Abu Dhabi "and if Sam says let’s go with us, we will go ahead with it". But he also cautioned “Take in locks with arranged marriage, it’s all in the stars. If they don’t mix, typically you don’t have a match.”

OSN’s Stewart suggested “they go to the back room”.

“I even have a pen," he quipped. “On a more serious note, Stewart seemed less optimistic that a regional collaboration would happen soon. “I guess we will do more deals with PANGA before we do anything here.”

Clearly, there was an urgency for collaboration in the room. As Raina pointed out, Netflix goes to 121 markets and has 100 million subscribers. The ability to distribute globally is what makes them a threat to our business. How can we create that universality and versatility in our distribution within the region and be part of it?”

Reiterating the urgent need for collaboration, Barnett pointed out “We have less time here, because the market does not have the degree of regulation that most other markets have. This market has been anarchic in the past, and what has happened across the region in the last weeks and months leads me to predict that governments will try and become more protectionist. PANGA then can come here and dump cheap advertising on this market.”

The discussion then turned to the other big issue – going digital. Stewart said OSN is rolling out short-form content on its web platform, WarnerMedia is an interesting experiment to see how it develops.”

One of the big discussions around digital was the choice of content, the technological infrastructure and what makes the platforms so successful, and if it was indeed overtaking linear platforms.

"It has definitely lowered VPN usage, and this was evident when Netflix launched forms," Stewart pointed out. Gokhale cited the example of Voot, a product from the Viacom 18/Indiacast stable.

"Voot is an AVOD play service which collates around 40-45,000 hours of content that we run across our group channels. 90% of the content consumption comes from the top 5% of the content. OTT players have tapped into this. One of the big things that VOTT is bringing to the table, apart from the convenience of accessing content, is lower ARPPUs, easier subscription models and leaner lock-ins. Given how people consume content, OTT will take away from linear consumption and our traditional pay-TV platforms. We should try to get out of the channel business and be part of it.”

Barrett declared that MBC had its busiest week in early November, while Mounir pointed out that the Middle East and Turkey remain “high-growth markets” for Turner. Raina said his focus would be on localisation, multi-platform solutions, reaching the consumer and getting the eyeballs, while Barnett added that “there’s still a lot we can do on pay-TV platforms as differentiated content”.

Gokhale advocated localisation, diversifying revenue streams, getting out of the channel business and sticking to content. Stewart concluded by saying that OSN’s aim is to produce better content and grow its reach.
The MENA broadcast industry converged at Habtoor Grand on the evening of November 14, 2017, for the seventh annual ASBU BroadcastPro Selevision Awards.

The glittering Habtoor Grand ballroom played host to more than 380 delegates from the broadcast and satellite industry as they cheered their peers who were shortlisted from more than 100 entries received by the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Selevision judging committee.

Selected for their expertise and representing the MENA region, the judges scrutinised entries vying for categories within production for TV and film to broadcast installations and OTT strategies.

Keeping with the changing face of the industry, OTT operators were recognised for outstanding productions and trendsetting innovations. Excellence was also recognised in the satellite and telco sectors. Music and good food accompanied what was a thoroughly enjoyable evening with industry peers.

The jury
Our judges this year were (in alphabetical order):
- Abdulla Al-Balooshi, Director General of Technical Affairs, Bahrain IAA
- Andrew Clemson, Cinematographer, Goldfish
- Dr. Fares Lubbadeh, Director General of Technical Affairs, Jordan
- Hasan Sayed Hasan, Managing Director, Master Media
- Houria Khatir, Director, Algeria Television
- Eng. Khalid Abu Ali, Director of Digital Workflow Systems, Mediacast
- Vijaya Cherian, Editor, BroadcastPro Middle East
Broadcast Awards

PRO AWARDS
BEST SHORT PRODUCTION OF 2017
Electric Films & Mubadala Investment Company

Untold Stories from Electric Films & Mubadala was chosen unanimously by the judges for being “slick, impressive and engaging”. The award was presented by Shihab Alhammadi (l), Director of Sharjah Media City to Gemma Wale, Senior Producer of Electric Films and Mohamed Nizar Luqman from Mubadala Investment Company.

BEST LONG PRODUCTION OF 2017
Nomad Productions

Each of our entries this year was an orchestration of great production values and presented an engaging story. The winning entry, Fighting Fit Dubai from Nomad Productions, however, edged out competition as it was found to be the most engaging in terms of content, pacing and cinematography. Pictured from left are Nomad’s founders, Phil and Zoe Griffiths; Tim Swain, MD; Stewart Game, Senior Producer and Tim Orr, Head of Production.

EXCELLENCE IN VFX
Dubai Media Inc.

The Dubai Racing Channel Identity Video by Dubai Media Inc. has used VFX as an organic element in narrating the story making the content compelling and immersive. The riveting scenes of horses, camels and the flight of a bird combined with the dramatic music score had not just our judges captivated but our audience as well at the gala awards, where we played the clip. The award was presented by Ammar Hares (l) of Selevision to Fadi Izzaldin at DMI.

BEST ANIMATED WORK OF 2017
Real Image Production

This stunning opener, which was produced for DUBAI CHAMBER for the MRM Awards 2017 ceremony, by Real Image Production, epitomises technological innovation and versatility with both composition and execution on an uncommon aspect ratio. This entry required an output resolution that is four times the width of full HD and was clearly a challenge to create. Pictured is Aiham Ajeeb, MD of Real Image Production, with the award.
PROAWARDS

Broadcast Awards

OTT PRODUCTION OF THE YEAR
iflix MENA

Walidhna Walaa from iflix MENA won this award hands down for its content and production value. The Egyptian comedy, co-produced by Shadows, Front Row, Kuwait National Cinema Council and iflix, depicts the lives of four families that live in a dilapidated building, where new guests enter each day as a carpenter, concierge, cook and so on, and become part of the plot. Pictured is the iflix team with Klaus-Joerg Jasper (extreme left), Sales Director Middle East, Lawo.

BEST DIGITAL STRATEGY OF 2017
Dawri Plus, Intigral

500,000 active users in one day, 1.6m total active users in one month, 3m+ downloads of the app, 1.8m registered users, 10+m hours of video content has been streamed over the past three years, 7m GB of overall data consumption and 220k users on its gaming platforms. Need we say more about the success of the Dawri Plus strategy? Pictured is Mike Rich (extreme left), Global Marketing Director for Entertainer with the Intigral team.

STUDIO OF THE YEAR
MBC GROUP

MBC’s Dubai Studio City facility stood out in terms of its sheer size at 25,000 sqft with many set designs to accommodate different programmes for various channels. The incredible mix of multi-tiered studios with different sizes and shapes of LED screens not undertaken before in the region, the social media screens and the interactive technologies made this an outstanding facility. Khaled Jamal (l), Head of MENA and Pakistan at Irdeto presented the award to Raed Bacho (r), Broadcast Manager at MBC Group.

TVC OF THE YEAR
SocialEyez

This winning entry titled Canon Live for the Story, from SocialEyez, a Dubai-based digital engagement agency, caught the attention of the judges for being both visually evocative as well as telling a story well. Pictured with the award from left is DoP Mark Williams and Production Director, Ali Hameed.
PRO AWARDS

OTT TRENDSETTER OF THE YEAR

Z5X Global

The Zee Weyyak platform from Z5X was chosen for the unique way in which it has acquired and provided premium exclusive content to Arab online viewers. 45% of its content is from Bollywood and is part of its own brand and, therefore, not available on any other platforms. It has a large mix of Syrian, Egyptian and other Arabic content as well. In October, it had 1m unique visitors. Pictured is Richard Frankland of Irdeto with the team from Z5X Global, the digital arm of Zee Entertainment.

BROADCASTPROME INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF THE YEAR

Blink Studios

Blink Studios is an innovator that has demonstrated the courage to take on the relatively unknown. Blink experimented with and developed solutions around mixed reality to create content here in Dubai. The result was the totally enthralling Karim and Noor, Sachin Gokhale, Media and Entertainment Business Head, MEA & APAC, Viacom 18 presented the award to Nathalie Habib, GM at Blink Studios.
PROAWARDS

Broadcast Awards

SYSTEMS INTEGRATOR OF THE YEAR
Television Systems Ltd.

Television Systems Ltd. stood out for many reasons: the sheer size of the project it undertook, the complexity of connecting two different sites, managing several vendors and addressing complex requirements within a rigorous timeframe. More importantly, TSL received glowing referrals from the client. Mukund Cailasam II, CEO of Zee Entertainment presented the award to Suhail Ahmed, who heads TSL’s regional office, and Managing Director, Jeremy Rees.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD
CMT Technologies

CMT Technologies’ outstanding work in providing OTT solutions in the region is truly award winning. CMT recently deployed a fully customised end-to-end OTT solution for Saudi Broadcasting Corporation with nine HD channels and six radio channels. The project included the deployment of a multi-CDN solution. CMT has now been contracted to run the operations and maintenance for SBC. Pictured with the award is CEO Hisham Arafat flanked by team members, Salma Asharaf (l) and Victor Hasan (r).
Broadcast Awards

BROADCAST EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR
Sanjay Raina, GM and VP, Fox Networks Group

Raina demonstrated leadership by strengthening the pay-TV ecosystem across the region. He has done a number of trendsetting deals that has made him the envy of the broadcast community. By walking the talk on both pay-TV and regional content, he has found a sustainable model for the broadcast industry grappling with disruptions in both content creation and technology. Raina (r) received the award from Raz Islam (l), MD of CPI Trade Media.

OUTSTANDING DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION
TRT World

TRT World had a number of entries and its documentaries didn’t go unnoticed by the judges. Fitting well into the documentary genre were a number of human-interest stories on children as the victims of war and the rebuilding of cities destroyed by military forces. Rising From the Ashes was especially award-winning. Pictured here is Irfan Gondal, CEO of BS Broadcast with Alexandra Francise Pauliat, Executive Producer of Planning, TRT World.
Broadcast Awards

Kuwait TV

Kuwait TV has deployed 4K infrastructure at its facility for its news studio and production environment. Both projects were integrated by INC System Integrations. Several manufacturers were involved in these projects including EVS and Tedial on the production side, and SAM, Avid, Calrec, SGL and Vantage on the newsroom side. Meshal Al-Makled (r), Undersecretary for Technical Affairs of the Ministry of Information, State of Kuwait received the award from Hasan Sayed Hasan (l), MD of Master Media.

Bassam Alsaqqa, Palestine TV

Bassam Alsaqqa, Broadcast Engineer at Palestine TV, is a go getter. When the TV station needed an OB van to cover news, Bassam didn’t just have to design a vehicle that could successfully run on the road, he also had to identify local resources, and oversee the building and integration of a broadcast van. Bassam braved several odds to come to the ASBU BroadcastPro Awards to receive his award. Where there is a will, there is a way.

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**Broadcast Awards**

**OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN STUDIO & SET BUILD**

*twofour54*

twofour54 Abu Dhabi began the construction of a new outdoor set spanning 20,000 sqm at the beginning of 2017, bringing the total space occupied by the backlot facility to 150,000 sqm. The recent construction was used for Bollywood movie *Tiger Zinda Hain*. A timelapse video shared with the audience showcased how the backlot was transformed to cater to different productions, making the work twofour54 does truly award winning. Seen with the award is the twofour54 team.

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**Satellite Awards**

**MSS OPERATOR OF THE YEAR**

*Thuraya*

SatellitePro ME’s ‘MSS Operator of the Year’ went to Thuraya Telecommunications Company for the deployment of 2000 satellite terminals — the largest ever — that helped facilitate seamless connectivity for a key government project in Kenya. Ahmed Al Shamsi, Acting CEO of Thuraya Telecommunications Company, accepted the award on behalf of the team from Abdulrahim Suleiman, Director General of ASBU.

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**TELECOM STRATEGY OF THE YEAR**

*Etisalat*

Etisalat executed a connectivity driven multi-million dollar project for offshore communications and a unified ICT infrastructure to one of the biggest oil & gas clients in the United Arab Emirates. The award was received by Ibrahim Mohammed Hassan (l), Sales Manager, Government Sales-Security Entity, Abubaker Mohamed Almarzooqi (c), Senior Director, Government Sales-Security Entity and Nadim Katayeh (r), Client Director, Energy & Utilities, Etisalat.
CABSAT 2018: AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF INNOVATION

CABSAT 2018 brings together experts to make sense of viewer-driven disruptions and the array of solutions, to devise the best strategy to address your target audience.

With an estimated 13,000 attendees, at least nine country pavilions and in excess of 90 hours of content generated, CABSAT 2018 will be held January 14-16 at Dubai World Trade Centre. CABSAT’s 24th edition will feature a number of new sections and initiatives aimed at putting not just equipment and services in the spotlight, but talent as well.

The annual event, put together by Director Exhibitions, Frederique Maurell and her team, will have more than 130 countries represented.

With the industry vying for eyeballs and ROI, CABSAT is dividing its conferences into focused technical, strategic and creative sessions to draw engineers, decision-makers and content creators more closely into the fold. A number of new sections will be created to dedicate space to audio as well as film and music talent, as part of efforts to bring more visibility to communities operating in these sectors.

There will be an Airwaves Showcase, where manufacturers will feature their latest audio equipment, technology and services for the broadcast, radio and live events market. A Tech Innovation Startup Zone is also being developed to put emerging VR, AR, drone technology and media, film and satellite start-ups in the spotlight. CABSAT is also looking to host Script to Screen in 48, an interactive session aimed at offering training to young professionals and students. The Script to Screen in 48 Workshop and Competition will engage young professionals and filmmakers with a half-day workshop; they will then pitch a short film idea and film it on-site at CABSAT within 48 hours. Winners will be announced on the last day of the show.

In an effort to bring together not just equipment but also talent in the music community, the event organiser is launching CABSAT Beats, a two-day music festival where the audience will enjoy a variety of different genres and performers, from local musicians to international talent. CABSAT Beats will take place on the first and second evenings of the show – January 14-15 between 6 and 9pm.

Lastly, with estimates that content marketing will more than double in under four years to become a $300 billion dollar industry by 2019, CABSAT 2018 promises products, conferences, green room wizardry and the occasional celeb vlogger, with content creation and marketing taking centrestage.

As official media partners, BroadcastPro ME and SatellitePro ME will be presenting a comprehensive overview of the products and innovative solutions on display in the January issue, in addition to the brief preview that follows.
LiveU to promote IP with UBMS

For the first time at CABSAT, LiveU will demonstrate the Lu600, a portable transmission solution with the HEVC Pro Card for global newsgathering, live sports and events coverage.

Integraing the Lu600 with the new IP HEVC/H.265 hardware-based encoder allows professional broadcasters and content creators to benefit from unparalleled video performance with extreme bandwidth efficiency. The company claims, using one of the smallest portable cellular bonding units in the market. The solution also enables VR and 360-degree applications.

Liveu will also be presenting the new AP Live Community, the first live video content platform for global newsgathering.


cuton QC by Interra

End-to-end QC by Interra Systems will showcase its comprehensive approach to QC and monitoring, which ensures the delivery of video on every device, in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

New features that will be displayed include QC checks, adaptive bit rate (ABR) stream validation, real-time quality of experience (QoE) measurements, live content monitoring and deep-dive compressed stream analysis. Interra Systems will showcase the QC capabilities for its BATON QC solution, powered by workflow tools that go beyond standard automated QC systems to provide comprehensive quality checks and verification efficiency in a flexible environment. BATON supports a wide range of new codecs and formats including IMF App2 Extended, iTunes Subtitle, CineCanvas Subtitles and Kodak Creem as well as multiple DRM systems, to ensure quality on every screen.


telestream delivers tools for streaming

Telestream will showcase modular X platform

Telestream to showcase modular X platform. Built to handle bitrates in the uncompressed domain as well as compression in the contribution market, it supports TICO, JPEG2000, AVC and HEVC with a reported ultra-low-delay mode.

Interoperability and standards compliance is a key asset. It has specifically been designed for an IP-based or satellite infrastructure, where the satellite modulator and demodulator supports the higher order modulation schemes.

For IP-based systems, the platform has a default video firewalling functionality for seamless and secure video handling. Redundancy is ensured through an intuitive user interface where control is achieved through simplified access to multiple dRM systems, to enable Telestream customers to stream any content to any audience, at any level of resolution, meeting industry standards.


cable TV to showcase modular X platform

CableTV will showcase the capabilities of its modular X platform. Built to handle efficiencies in the uncompressed domain as well as compression in the contribution market, it supports TICO, JPEG2000, AVC and HEVC with a reported ultra-low-delay mode.

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DRIVING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Canara lighting champions green technology

Having participated in CABSAT for the last four years, India-based Canara Lighting Industries, will bring to the event, a total studio lighting solution.

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, Managing Director Ajeet Khare said: “We provide consultancy at the project stage followed by technical and project design and the commercial proposal. Then the entire equipment from lighting fixture to rigging to network management systems, dimmers, consoles and electrical power distribution panels is manufactured at our facility. On-site, our experienced team will be responsible for installing, commissioning, testing, training and handing over the equipment.”

We also provide after-sales service. This complete set of services from consultancy to commissioning under one roof is part of our unique offering.”

New-gen displays from sonoVTS

sonoVTS, a Munich-based provider of system design and integration will feature substantial advancements to its modular videowall, and introduce a new range of IP-optimised broadcast displays at CABSAT 2018.

The new videowall consists of 3x3 55” HQLOWE displays, featuring an extremely small, 0.9mm bezel coupled with an engineered, self-supporting rack system. Wolfgang Huther, sonoVTS’ Head of Products and Displays said, “We took great care in designing this videowall, to ensure it represents the very best of a new generation of powerful and versatile broadcast displays.”

Quicklink streamlines remote communication

At CABSAT 2018, Quicklink will demonstrate its new, Remote Communicator solution which allows streaming of real-time, full duplex ultra-low delay audio/video or audio only that is sent and received from a single web browser, enabling broadcasters to create high quality, ultra-low latency video and audio contributions.

The Quicklink Remote Communicator can be used on Quicklink hardware or installed on users’ own hardware.

The new solution includes cloud advanced firewall punch through with automatic fail back to Quicklink Relay Services guaranteeing connectivity on the most challenging and secured networks, according to the company spokesperson.

Pixel powers productivity

Pixel Power will demonstrate the benefits of combining its graphics and processing power with intelligent automation. The company has already delivered multi-channel automated content production solutions in the Middle East.

Through two core technology frameworks – StreamMaster media processing and Gadium workflow orchestration – Pixel Power can work with broadcasters and media enterprises to create tailored workfloes. Systems can support multiple tasks from automated content production all the way to premium channel playlist. The software architecture means Pixel Power automation systems can exist on premises or in the cloud, or a combination of the two.

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Combating OTT content piracy

Piracy is an ever-evolving problem for content creators and owners. Whether because of the cost of programming or the geographic limitations on availability, more viewers than ever are tuning in to illegally-delivered content. The Alliance for Creativity and Entertainment (ACE), made up of 30 leading content creators and media companies, estimates that there were 5.4 billion downloads of pirated films and television shows in 2016.

When content is distributed or downloaded illegally, its quality is usually degraded. As higher resolutions become the norm, 4K can be degraded to HD. This means it remains at a high enough viewing quality, creating even more of a market for illegally-shared content. This all adds up to much more than just a headache for those in the industry. It costs content owners and distributors a lot of money, so it is a problem they are eager to address – and quickly. After all, for a media company, content is their most important asset. It's why people use their service.

Creating a unique stream
Watermarking assists in a new approach to protecting content. But with the number of pirates surfing the internet, the amount of content being distributed using IP and the multiple versions of each programme, it’s hard to implement in such a way that it’s easy to track the pirates.

And watermarking content through online delivery is traditionally very difficult to do. The very point of a CDN – which is used to scale TV delivery – is to make delivery more efficient by copying content. To protect content through delivery, broadcasters and filmmakers need to be able to forensically track the source of illegally shared content.

One method that has gained momentum is manifest-based watermarking. Online TV content isn’t streamed as one long video file, but as a collection of three-to-five second segments. By creating ten versions of each segment and marking them A and B, content distributors can create a unique string of sections.

While this does create a unique watermark that survives CDN delivery, content must be stored twice on each server, increasing operating costs. This watermark also takes a long time to identify, and it is possible to obscure it by splicing together the two versions.

A new kind of watermarking
The goal is to put the spotlight back on content thieves and catch them in the act. By watermarking from the edge of a dedicated TV CDN, a bitstream-based watermarking solution inserts a unique watermark directly into the bitstream, on the fly. The best approach to make sure content survives the CDN is to manipulate the bitstream for each individual viewer. The process only requires a few byte changes, performed by specialised servers on the edge of the network as they stream content. Just before delivery to the end user, the system identifies just a few pixels within the picture’s frame and changes them in a way that’s completely unnoticeable to the viewer. For example, black might be changed to very dark grey. This pixel identification creates a unique code for each streamed version of the video and is easily detectable by the client. Within five seconds, a pirated stream can be identified and tracked to the specific user.

This bitstream-based watermarking, compared to manifest-based watermarking, can be embedded much faster, at a rate of several bits per second. It's also much harder to cheat this watermark, so pirates can be identified much faster.

We’ll quickly see an increase in premium online content being protected using this kind of watermarking application when it’s delivered online via a CDN. Protecting content in this way gives broadcasters and content owners the forensic tools they need to track down anyone who illegally streams or copies their content.

Johan Bolin is VP Products at Edgeware.

“The best approach to make sure content survives the CDN is to manipulate the bitstream for each individual viewer”
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