Celebrating pathbreaking content creators, TV strategists, OTT experts and tech aces at the ASBU BroadcastPro 2018 awards
Thank you to all our Attendees, Speakers and Sponsors

BroadcastPro ME Summit & Awards is our annual flagship event to promote and celebrate excellence in the broadcast and satellite industry across the MENA region. Featuring extensive networking opportunities, seminars and awards presentations by key industry and government leaders.
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**Welcome**

Our vision when we launched BroadcastPro Middle East was not just to be a leading magazine in the MENA region. We wanted to be perceived as an industry insider that had created a platform connecting various sectors within the TV and film industry, and to be the place where conversations began, where deals were signed and where companies wanted to debut their prized solutions.

That day has come. Last year, CEOs called for collaboration to survive external forces that come to the region with money and marketing muscle; this year, Sam Barnett began the CEO panel discussion by announcing that MBC had joined forces with Fox. There are other deals we are pesty to but not at liberty to disclose just yet. My heart, however, soared when we saw open testimony that our platform has indeed become the place where conversations begin.

We were equally pleased that Strategy& chose the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit to announce some of its exclusive findings about the MENA media and entertainment market.

While there were a lot of key takeaways from each of the panel discussions, and we have outlined them in great detail in this edition, one talking point that has stayed with us in regulation. A concern was raised that regulators have received international media powerhouses with open arms while being more stringent with local players, and that this has had serious repercussions on the local broadcast industry. It has become increasingly clear that regulators need to be part of these discussions to bring about positive change. How can we do this effectively? We welcome all suggestions.

This issue of the magazine also celebrates the winners and innovators of the MENA TV industry. We reveal little-known but hugely inspiring journeys around our winning entries. Let’s create a vibrant online broadcast community!

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
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Join us @
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#C2.30
Snap has announced that it is working with more than 20 Middle East media companies, including Dubai Media Inc, Abu Dhabi Media, Discovery and MBC, to create shows on Snapchat as part of an expansion of its Discover brand. More than 30 series from MENA brands are scheduled to launch on Snapchat in the coming months.

These partnerships expand the local content already available on Snapchat’s Discover page, that hosts content from Al Arabiya, Sayidaty and UTURM, among others. TV networks and entertainment studios are revisiting their popular series for Snapchat, with shows across entertainment, sport and food, from Scoop with Raya from MBC, to Tareq Show from Rotana Media Group and Fatafeat from Discovery. Content has been cut in the vertical full-screen format pioneered by Snapchat, which has since become the de facto standard for mobile. Each show averages five minutes in length, has a clear narrative and is hyper-visual with motion graphics, split screens and quick cuts, inspired by the way Snapchatters engage.

“The Middle East is a very engaged content market for Snap – we saw a 54% increase in time spent in Discover from April to September of this year,” commented Rami Saad, Head of International Content Partnerships at Snap.

**Fox Networks Group launches Fox Plus streaming service on Shahid Plus and Jawwy TV**

Fox Networks Group MENA (FNG MENA) has launched Fox Plus streaming service, which will be available on MBC Group’s Shahid Plus platform as part of a three-year agreement. Producers Middle East can also reveal that Fox Plus will be available on its Indigenous streaming platform, Jawwy TV.

While the addition of Fox content will significantly boost the content libraries of both platforms, this regional collaboration is also a strategic win for MBC and FNG MENA, who have long advocated the need to join hands to fight FAANG and other international players entering the regional market with premium content at low subscription rates.

Content on the two platforms will include Nat Geo documentaries, Fox Lifestyle shows, Baby TV and global TV series and movies. Speaking about the launch of Fox Plus, Sanjay Rains, General Manager and SVP of FNG, said: “By joining hands with Shahid Plus and Jawwy TV, we wanted to ensure that we remain an important part of the content portfolio that is reaching Arabic-speaking audiences.”

**beIN Media Group promotes Yousef Al Obaidly to CEO**

Nasser al Khalifi, Chairman of beIN Media Group, has appointed Yousef Al-Obaidly as CEO, assuming the role previously held by Nasser al Khelaifi, who will continue his role as Chairman of the Group. Yousef was previously Deputy CEO and has served in a number of positions during his 15-year tenure with beIN Media Group.

**Facebook appoints new MENA MD**

Facebook has appointed Ramez Shehadi as its new Managing Director in the MENA region. He will lead the commercial growth and impact of Facebook and its expanding portfolio of apps, services and businesses across the region. Shehadi replaces Jonathan Labin, who left the company in August.
ZEE5 launches in MENA with strong sponsorships and partnerships

ZEE5, a digital entertainment platform from Zee Entertainment Enterprises, which launched last month, is looking to strengthen its position in the market as title sponsor of the Northern Warriors in the T10 cricket league. Led by Darren Sammy of the West Indies, the Warriors is one of the three new teams making their debut in the world's newest cricket league, currently in its second season.

Speaking about the sponsorship, Archana Anand, Chief Business Officer, ZEE5 Global, said: “This sponsorship perfectly complements our brand ZEE5, given its global composition. The timing couldn’t have been better, as we’ve just launched in 190+ countries with our campaign.”

ZEE5 recently launched in APAC, Africa and MENA with its global ‘Dil Se Desi’ campaign, targeted at the South Asian diaspora. The digital platform’s foray into the international market will soon be followed by launches in Europe, Canada and the Caribbean.

To expand its footprint in the global market and strengthen its platform on an international stage, ZEE5 has also leveraged Microsoft Azure solutions. It uses a fully-managed Azure platform to host its content and perform infrastructure maintenance and load balancing. ZEE5 presently boasts 100,000 hours of on-demand content, including Indian movies and TV shows, cine plays, music, and health and lifestyle videos, along with exclusive originals across 12 languages. It also has a live TV offering with more than 60 live TV channels.

The ZEE5 launch is a step up for Zee Entertainment, which has been entertaining Arab audiences through its VoD service 25 Weyyak since 2017. With a target of roping in more regional brands and advertisers onto its platform, Zee also recently partnered with DMS, the digital arm of Choucri Group, as the exclusive media representatives for Weyyak.

Medi1 TV Morocco upgrades with Avid solutions

The Medi1 TV team also relies on Maestro Designer to create real-time graphics across its news programming, supported by Avid’s underlying HDVS4 graphics rendering platform. In addition, the broadcaster uses Avid’s video editing software Media Composer, digital audio software Pro Tools and Avid NEXIS shared storage.

Medi1 TV produces newscasts, talk shows and documentaries on current affairs, business and financial markets, and sports in both Arabic and French.

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NOA appoints sales head for MENA and Asia

All digitalising and archiving specialist NOA GmbH has hired Abderrahmane Bessaih as Sales Director, MENA and Asia. With more than 20 years of experience in the industry, Bessaih will develop and execute strategic plans to achieve sales targets and expand NOA’s customer base in the region, as well as build customer relationships.

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Medi1 TV has deployed Maestro Designer on the SDI and HDMI inputs and outputs to drive on-set monitors.

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*SRP excludes duties, shipping and sales tax.
UBMS equips Dubai’s Citruss TV studio with Blackmagic Design solutions

Dubai-based United Broadcast & Media Solutions (UBMS) has completed the implementation of a turnkey Blackmagic Design-equipped broadcast studio for Citruss TV in Dubai. The project was designed to equip Citruss TV’s post-production and live broadcast facility with lighting studio integration, online video editing, digital broadcast cameras, camera support systems, video server, character generator, recorders, audio system and wireless microphones with players and an end-to-end routing system.

The project was installed and integrated by UBMS with the assistance of audio/video solutions distributor, MediaCast.

MBC Group inks agreement with China’s National Radio and Television Administration

MBC Group has signed a three-year MOU with China’s National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), a move aimed at developing traditional and digital media content, sharing TV and film production expertise, and competencies, and promoting and developing the human resources sector.

The strategic agreement will comprise media content in all its forms, including dubbed television programmes from both territories and joint productions.

The signing ceremony took place at MBC Group’s headquarters in Dubai, in the presence of MBC Group Chairman Sheikh Waleed Bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim, Vice Chairman Ali Al-Hedeithy and CEO Sam Ibrahim, Vice Chairman Ali Waleed Bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim, Vice Chairman Ali Waleed Bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim, and joint productions.

Dubai launches CineMENA and GoFreelance initiatives

Dubai Studio City launched CineMENA, a platform for content creators and local talent, last month. The initiative aims to assist content creators in enhancing their skills through an annual agenda of events, including workshops, master classes and training sessions by industry influencers, actors and filmmakers.

Set to officially kick off in February 2019, CineMENA seeks to provide networking opportunities for members and stakeholders in the MENA creative community, speech, post-production and directing.

Also last month, Dubai Internet City (DIC) launched its GoFreelance initiative, which will enable freelancers to work in the technology sector with access to various services and facilities offered by Dubai Internet City.

Experts in the domains of web and mobile, among other related fields, are eligible to apply.

Middlesex University Dubai wins rights to adapt a Stephen King story

Author Stephen King has awarded budding filmmakers at Middlesex University Dubai the rights to adapt the short story Stationary Bike, from his book Just After Sunset, for just $1.

The university’s Film and Media department made the request under the author’s Dollar Baby programme. The adaptation will reportedly be completed in-house at the university’s facility, MDX Studios, which features industry-standard editing suites that include colour grading suites, editing and VFX suites, an ADR booth, 4K editing facilities and a newly designed integrated learning space that also includes a screening room.

MDX Studios is reportedly the only film university in the Middle East certified by Blackmagic Design. As part of an ongoing collaboration with Roxy Cinemas, the final projects of year three students, along with the final presentation of Stationary Bike, will be showcased at a private screening.

Speaking about the milestone, Dr David Tully, Head of the Film and Media department at Middlesex University Dubai, said: “This is not only exciting from the university’s perspective, but it’s also exciting news for the region. MDX Studios is also in partnership with film distributor Shooting Stars Middle East, which has now officially signed a contract to produce local content for Warner Bros. and Universal Brand Development. This deal provides the students with exposure to brands such as Vox Cinemas, Dubai Parks & Resorts and Ski Dubai.

Looking at digital media, the agreement aims to focus on audiovisual programmes, with MBC Group showcasing Chinese film content dubbed and translated into Arabic.

In turn, NRTA will show MBC Group programming, tailored to a Chinese audience. Resourcing and the human development sector is at the heart of this agreement, focusing on the exchange of expertise through joint seminars, courses and training programmes aimed at honing the human talent of both parties.

In other news, MBC Group signed a five-year strategic MOU and cooperation agreement with China’s National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA).

As part of an ongoing campaign, the university awarded budding filmmakers the rights to adapt a Stephen King story for just $1.

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Overhaul at Alhurra TV leads to new look and programmes for MENA

Alhurra Television last month unveiled the first part of the largest transformation the Arabic-language TV network has undertaken in its 14-year history. The transformation included an overhaul of the channel, with a new look and feel to the TV network as well as changes to Alhurra-Iraq, Radio Sawa and Alhurra. com. Alhurra has doubled its number of newscasts to 12 hours each day and will have live broadcasts from studios outside Washington, DC and Dubai.

The channel also boasts an all-new line-up of anchors. The new programmes have extensive reporting from across the region and promise to provide in-depth analysis focusing on topics not found in other Arab media outlets, such as social, cultural and religious challenges. In addition to stronger content, the relaunch includes new graphics. Newscasts will report from throughout the MENA region and around the world. Alhurra will have daily newscasts dedicated to North Africa and a daily newscast focused on stories from the US. Nart Bouran, who used to head Sky News Arabia as CEO, is now Senior Vice President of News, Programming and Transformation at MBN.

Cineco opens new cineplex in Bahrain

Bahrain Cinema Company (Cineco) has officially opened its new, 3,000sqm cineplex at Oasis Mall in Juffair. Featuring 10 screens, it boasts a wide variety of new offerings including two concepts: a Kids Cinema – a first in the kingdom – and an exclusive VIP fine-dining opportunity. Cineco presently owns and operates 57 cinema screens in Bahrain and 47 screens in other GCC countries. The cineplex provides Dolby Atmos systems and 3D technology, the release stated.

The organisers of the Dubai International Content Market (DICM), a first and dedicated to c]content creators and distributors in the entertainment and media industry, have unveiled the list of speakers at the upcoming edition. The two-day event, kicking off on 9 December at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel Conference Centre, aims to attract media industry investors and decision-makers. The DICM is expected to attract more than 750 visitors and participants from all over the world, with 10 speakers from the world of entertainment, media and content market, including Jamal Al Awadhi of Etihad Airways, who will speak about ‘In-Flight Entertainment - Emerging Trends’; Ali Al Marzoqi of Dubai Gulf Film in Abu Dhabi, who will deliver a speech on ‘Feature Film & Its Development in the MENA Region’; and Bassem Wargy of Orange Egypt, who will talk about ‘Content in the Digital Era and Monetisation’.

The Development and Investment Entertainment Co (DIEC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), has been rebranded to Saudi Entertainment Ventures (SEVEN). Former Disney executive Bill Ernest has been appointed as CEO of SEVEN.

SEVEN was established by PIF in 2017 to develop the entertainment and lifestyle sectors in the kingdom. In partnership with the AMC Group, it launched the first movie theatre in Saudi Arabia in more than three decades. Ernest will lead and manage all facets of SEVEN and attempt to maximise its investments in the entertainment infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, the release stated. In other news, PIF (SEVEN) is exploring the acquisition of a stake of up to $700m in Legendary Entertainment, the US movie studio behind films such as Jurassic World and Interstellar. PIF’s overtures to Hollywood come as Saudi Arabia has been seeking to open foreign films. To serve a population of more than 32 million, Saudi Arabia wants to set up around 150 movie theatres with more than 2,500 screens by 2030.

ENEX expands further with partners in Egypt and Jordan

Following the agreement with Arab 24 last month, European News Exchange (ENEX) has announced a series of partnerships in the region. Its global membership base has now reached 56 and the latest signing is of Al Quds Al Youm (Jordan Today), one of Jordan’s commercial news channels. ENEX now has five Middle Eastern partners and has ambitions to locate a news editor in the Middle East to coordinate news activities. ENEX has also reached outline agreement with leading privately-owned Egyptian newspaper and digital entity Al Masry Al Youm (The Egyptian Today). The newspaper is developing its digital edition and seeking to incorporate more video content, the release stated.

Vitec acquires H.264 encoding provider Amimon

Vitec, a provider of video encoding and streaming solutions, has acquired Telairity, a provider of H.264 encoding solutions to broadcasters worldwide. Matt McKay, formerly at Telairity, has joined Vitec as Director of Sales and Marketing. The company also announced that it has acquired chipmaker Amimon Inc for $50m in cash. Vitec and Amimon have had a customer-supplier relationship since 2012. Vitec acquired Telairity, a provider of H.264 encoding provider, in 2017 to develop the entertainment Co (DIEC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), has been rebranded to Saudi Entertainment Ventures (SEVEN). Former Disney executive Bill Ernest has been appointed as CEO of SEVEN.

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KIPCO looks to sell 60.5% stake in OSN, new CEO joins as Stewart exits

OSN’s Chairman, Faisal Al Ayyar, has announced that Patrick Tillieux has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of the pay TV network, effective immediately. The news comes a few days after Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO), which owns a 60.50% stake in Panther Media Group Limited, otherwise known as OSN, announced its plans to sell its shares in the company.

Tillieux succeeds Martin Stewart, who is leaving the company to join Sky TV in Zealand as CEO. BroadcastPro ME can reveal Tillieux has been on OSN’s Board for two years and is the chairman of the executive committee of the Board. Panther Media Group, registered in the Dubai International Financial Centre, has two shareholders – KIPCO and Saudi investment firm Mawarid Group Limited. While KIPCO reportedly owns 60.5% stake in OSN, Saudi Arabia’s Mawarid Group holds a 39.5% stake. KIPCO’s move comes after its pay-TV subsidiary had a 10% drop in Q2 revenue compared to the same period in 2017.

du to screen Snatch exclusively on TV First

As part of the Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (EITC), has added a new category under the Free View service called TV First, featuring shows on the same day as their US release, available for unlimited viewing at no additional cost. Also included in TV series Snatch, an American crime comedy-drama starring Rupert Grint of Harry Potter fame. Commenting on the initiative, Amr Eidscooky, EVP consumer business, du, said: “At du, we are always looking for new ways to elevate our entertainment schedule by adding more of the unique content that our customers demand.”

New OSN TLC travel series explores Jordan

Lifestyle channel TLC has added a new series of the Arabic travel show My World to You last month on OSN. Directed by producer Darine El Khatib and sponsored by digital travel platform Booking.com, the series explores Jordan, offering a new perspective on the cultures, traditions, destinations and food of the country. In the ten-part series, each episode follows Darine through her day of exploration, visiting local markets, restaurants and tourist attractions.

Starz Play inks deal with Mobily

Saudi telco Mobily and Starz Play have signed a new method-of-payment partnership that makes Starz Play available to Mobily subscribers. Commenting on the partnership, Maz’i Shakir, CEO and managing director of Starz Play, said: “Our new partnership with Mobily takes our service direct to all of Mobily’s subscribers, which represents approximately 28% of the SEM mobile subscribers in the Kingdom.” In other news, Starz Play also announced that Season 5B of Vikings will be available exclusively to MENA viewers on the platform from November 29th, with episodes showing at the same time and day as they air in the US.

Spotify comes to 13 markets in MENA

Spotify has launched its service in thirteen new markets in the MENA region, taking on music streaming service’s global footprint to 78 markets in total. Spotify has launched with a fully Arabic user experience, offering music fans local and international music and locally-curated playlists, such as Today’s Top Arabic Hits, Oriental Chill Vibes and Arabic EDM. MENA users can access Spotify for free with advertising or can subscribe to Spotify Premium for a monthly fee. Spotify will charge $5.33 per month for its premium service in Saudi Arabia, $5.44 in the UAE, $3.88 in Egypt and $4.99 elsewhere in the MENA. Spotify has also launched the Arabic Hub as part of its Global Cultures Initiative. The new markets are the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Egypt.

Mango TV and China Arab TV partner to promote Chinese culture in MENA

Mango TV, an emerging media platform owned by China’s Human Broadcasting System, formalised the first strategic cooperation with China Arab TV (CATV) in Dubai last month.

Commenting on the event, Cai Zhenhong, Hunan Provincial Committee Standing Committee Member and Director of the Hunan Publicity department, said: “The cooperation between Mango TV and CATV broadens the channels as a bridge for communication and cooperation between Hunan and the United Arab Emirates, and to a larger extent between China and the Middle East.”

According to Li Huabin, Party Committee Secretary and Director of Human Broadcasting System, the strategic cooperation between Mango TV and CATV will include efforts to export Chinese culture. As a satellite TV station in Dubai, CATV covers a potential audience of 500m viewers from 22 Arab countries.

ME debut for Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Independent distributor Hat Trick International has signed a new format deal for Whose Line is it Anyway? to be adapted for the Middle East, the first-ever Arabic version. Commissioned by Ten TV from Cairo-based Global Productions, the new local adaptation will total 14 episodes. The series is now in production and is expected to debut in December this year to audiences across the Middle East, as part of Ten TV’s prime time schedule.

Deltatime acquires Massive Interactive

Deltatime announced last month that it has a definitive agreement to acquire Massive Interactive, an OTT software company. Combined, these entities are the largest independent OTT solution provider in the world, the release stated. Massive’s next-generation user interface is slated to add a new dimension to Deltatime’s sports media technology solutions. Massive will operate as a division of Deltatime, with 18 offices worldwide and nearly 1,000 full-time staff.
The first annual Turner Upfront Africa 2018 event revealed a brand-new look and a slate of local partnerships that will be incorporated into six managed channels across Africa’s 54 English, French- and Portuguese-speaking countries – CNN International, Cartoon Network, Boomerang, Boing, Toonami and the TNT Africa channel, launched in September with a brand positioning it as the place for “the best American blockbusters”. Local initiatives include CN Creative Lab, an African creative competition where the winner and runners-up will be given the opportunity to get their project produced as a pilot with Cartoon Network Africa, which will premiere in 2019; Pop-Up Party season 2, where local kids express themselves through dance challenges; the launch of Mike and Rob, a series showcasing two witty microbes making jokes voiced by comedian Trevor Gumbi; and a new Boomerang production centred on African magic, set to hit screens in 2019.

Turner has distribution agreements with African TV platforms in all key regions, including pan-African players such as MultiChoice, StarTimes, Orange, SFR/Altice and Canal Overseas, as well as region-specific distribution players, including mobile streaming services BlackCell and Maroc:Telecom. Its new distribution deal with African OTT subscription VOD platform Showmax, owned by MultiChoice Group, has made Adult Swim accessible since mid-November.

The 40th Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) screened 160 films from 59 countries, while the Cairo Film Connection received more than 100 applications for film projects. CIFF also launched the first Cairo Industry Days platform, in partnership with the Arab Cinema Centre. The festival, held last month, opened with the Middle East premiere of Green Book starring Viggo Mortensen and Mahershalal Ame directed and co-written by Peter Farrelly. Apart from Egypt, nominations from Arab states came largely from Lebanon with 38 films, followed by Morocco with 33, then Tunisia with 28, Iraq with 20, Syria with 17, Algeria with 14, Saudi Arabia with 12 and the UAE with nine. Both Jordan and Bahrain submitted five, Palestine and Qatar each submitted four, and Libya and Oman each submitted one film.

The festival also decided to dedicate a programme to celebrate female Arab filmmakers, through the screening of nine films by female directors over the past few years.

UK’s ITV Choice partners with MyHD in Middle East
British entertainment channel ITV Choice has partnered with MyHD, a DTH HD pay-TV platform with localised Arabic subtitles, and has also extended its partnership with du as part of its English package. Audiences will be able to watch dramas including Vanity Fair, Victoria and Vera, and programmes such as The Voice UK and The Voice Kids.

First GCC film released in Saudi Arabia
Feature film Shabab Shyab premiered in Saudi Arabia last month, becoming the first GCC film to play there following the opening of cinemas this year. Image Nation is the studio behind Shabab Shyab, and the film is produced by Ramy Yasin’s Breakout Films and Starship Entertainment – a partnership between Al Yasin and Al Faulaq Tanweer Films is distributing the film across the MENA region.

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PROnews

Cairo film festival celebrates Arab cinema, honours female filmmakers

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A clarion call for collaboration was made at the last year’s edition of the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit. The 300-plus audience at the 2018 summit responded with path-breaking partnerships and more.

The industry turned out in record numbers for the annual ASBU BroadcastPro ME Summit on November 13 at the Habtoor Grand Hotel in Dubai. The morning session opened with a welcome address by Vijaya Cherian, Editor of BroadcastPro Middle East magazine.

Cherian highlighted how the event has brought together industry experts to not only share their knowledge and experience but also connect individuals and businesses.

She recalled that in the 2017 edition of the summit, CEOs had appealed to the industry to come together and forge partnerships to combat the might of FAANG. Commenting on the various announcements through the year and even during the panel discussions at the summit, Cherian said: “It is remarkable how the summit has become the de facto platform for industry executives to share their candid views on how the industry must tackle the most pressing economic, technological and creative issues of our times.”

The conference saw 23 industry executives address an audience of more than 300 broadcast professionals on issues ranging from creating Arab content to ensuring a sustainable broadcast industry in trying economic conditions. 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 also brings you exclusive findings on Entertainment and Media in MENA from Strategy&-PWC that was released at the conference.

The BroadcastPro Summit and Awards is organised by CPI Trade Media and endorsed by the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU). The event was supported this year by Gold Sponsor Akamai; Social Media Partner Twitter; our Associate Sponsor Fox Networks Group; Knowledge Partner Irdeto; our Silver Sponsors, Lawo, Eutelsat, Seven Production, ZEE Entertainment Middle East and UTURN; and Networking Sponsor Shock Middle East.

Significantly, the afternoon concluded with content taking centre stage at the CEO panel. Voicing optimism, industry veteran Michael Garin, CEO of Image Nation said: “Everyone, regardless of technology and business model, is committed to increasing the quality of content and this industry is content-driven.”
How to Create Content That Can Travel

From the impact of the exit of Turkish drama and the opening of the Saudi media market, to honing the skills of local talent and creating high-quality Arabic content that can travel outside the region, experts debated the strategy to successfully develop Arabic content.

There’s never been greater demand for quality Arabic content, but are the content specialists – the production houses, distributors, commissioning editors and content producers – able to fuel that demand, and are we able to create work that can appeal to international audiences? This was the crux of the debate at the keynote panel discussion moderated by Lina Matta, Channel Director, MBC 2, MBC 4, Max & MBC+ Variety, MBC Group, at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit on November 13 in Dubai.

Joining the panel, titled ‘Content Creation: Creating an Export Market for Arabic Content’, were experts representing key aspects of the content business: Sadek Sabbah, Chairman of Cedars Art Production; Khulud Abu Homos, CEO of Arab Format Lab; Mai El Khalifa, Senior Commissioning Editor, Content Dubai TV and Abu Homos, CEO of Arab Format Lab; Mai El Khalifa, Senior Commissioning Editor, Content Dubai TV and Abu Homos, CEO of Arab Format Lab; and Gianluca Chakra, Managing Partner at Front Row Filmed Entertainment.

Matta set the stage by pointing out some of the major changes that hit the MENA media market in 2018, some of the direct result of political upheavals in the region, which were as responsible for the opening up of the Saudi media market as they were for wiping out Turkish drama from our regional screens.

The forced exit of Turkish drama, the majority of many Arabic drama channels, compelled content experts and broadcast networks to look inwards to fresh local content and beyond Turkey for other storylines.

Lina Matta began the panel discussion by asking the panelists how they were affected by the exit of Turkish drama from regional screens and the lessons learnt from this experience.

Mai El Khalifa said the exit was “good for us” because “it helped us not to rely on one territory … We were the last to exit the Turkish scene, but it has made us more robust and agile in actually looking to other territories like Latin America.”

Sadek Sabbah said Turkish dramas and telenovelas from Latin America influenced the launch of pan-Arab drama series of 60 episodes in the Arab world. Cedars Art Production has been producing two long series each year. These series are scripted by a team of talented writers specialised in writing long-form content, he commented.

Khulud Abu Homos seconded that. “Turkish drama has actually influenced the way we look at the format of drama that we produced. Turkish dramas started a trend as far as script and long-form drama went.”

She added that the US and Turkish dramas finally got them out of the “38-episode format and forced us to think more creatively about long-form drama series”.

“Turkish drama set the benchmark for us as far as the format of how we produce drama went. Secondly, there is a lot to learn from how Turkish dramas went international by doing remakes of international dramas. They took the rights for the remakes of Revenge, for instance. The whole experience of trying to go international and using Hollywood expertise to create a different level of Turkish drama is a success story and a positive lesson for us on how to create that initial demand.”

This led the panel to explore the next big topic in the market today – the Saudi experience and how Saudi Arabia’s investment in entertainment will change the milieu. Chakra stopped at this point to say that while a country can invest in entertainment, content and studios, building a media industry is a more organic task that money cannot buy.

“You can’t really buy the know-how. You have to start from zero. If they want to invest in anything, they must be in developing their writers and mentoring them. We have always lacked good writers here and this is why the Turkish series were so successful here. We could relate to their culture and they were so successful here. We could relate to their culture, and this is why the Turkish series were so successful here. We could relate to their culture and they literally had no competition from literally had no competition from other products that were produced locally were far too local … either it was too Lebanese or too Egyptian. By comparison, ‘Turkish series had a pan-Arab appeal.’

The crux of the debate at the keynote panel discussion was around the ability in the region to create work that can appeal to international audiences.
He pointed out that one way to possibly avoid the heavy localisation of content and create something that can travel may be through experimenting with co-productions. “The only cinema that can apply to other regions is Egypt. The rest is quite scattered. Content produced in the UAE does not necessarily do well in Kuwait or Lebanon, and vice versa. You have the example of a Nadine Labaki film which was a massive hit in Lebanon but didn’t do well here. No in Saudi Arabia, perhaps the best way to do it is through co-productions with Egypt, where you gradually integrate Saudi talent and Saudi writers.”

El Khalifa pointed out that investment also plays a big role in creating successful content that can travel. “If you go back to Turkish drama, just last year the Ministry of Culture invested $4m in Turkish series – unlike our region, where we are not supported in a kind of a nuclear way. We need investment in good stories, which is what Khudh and Sabbah are doing, and then we need good distribution companies to package those stories for travel. If that doesn’t happen, it will stay in the region.” Matta took this opportunity to explore some of the writing initiatives that both Sabbah and Abu Homos have started in different parts of the region. Sabbah, who has two programmes covering theatre titled Munshih Moor (Egypt Theatre) and Munshih Al Saoudya (Saudi Theatre), explained that initiatives to create content for Saudi audiences have been positive but are presently taking a lot more time and effort. Through Munshih Al Saoudya, Cedars Art Production has created a platform that has helped identify new talent in Saudi Arabia through running casting calls across the country, explained Sabbah. “Through Munshih Al Saoudya, we have been able to attract a lot of new talent from Saudi Arabia in terms of actors, writers, creatives and so on. They have good stories to tell and very creative writers but presently, they lack the scriptwriting technique. So we are getting our experts from Egypt and Lebanon to come in and help polish those scripts and train these young talents in various elements of running a production. We believe that through training, we can encourage new talent and professionals to join the media sector. As a result, we are investing a lot more time on Saudi productions. But this is because it is the beginning. We have seen huge improvements since we first started a year ago, and hopefully by the beginning of January, we will have our first work aired on MBC. And this will give us a good opportunity to have this young talent from Saudi Arabia not just in drama but in cinema as well.” Abu Homos commented that they have taken to writers’ rooms to encourage original content in Saudi Arabia. “We don’t lack talent in this region. What we lack is confidence of the investors and confidence in our talent. I have seen brilliant writers who will never make it through the doors of MBC or Dubai TV because they don’t know where or when to approach. But if we bring a BBC writer to Jeddah to train them to create a strong script, we will instil that confidence in them to create their own scripts. KSA has the talent. The most watched shorts on YouTube come from KSA. The stories need to come from the actual society, and I think investing in writers’ rooms is the way forward to achieve that.”

Taking her cue from Abu Homos, Matta asked El Khalifa whether it had created new opportunities or merely destroyed the market. The panelists seemed positive about the arrival of OTT players, and clearly it has changed the dynamics of the media marketplace, whether it is working with new talent, censorship or even revisiting programme formats and number of episodes. Chakra called “the way TV works here... quite outdated” but declared “that will have to change” with Netflix, Amazon and more international networks entering this market with original productions. “The new generation of content consumers want more than the formulaic Ramadan shows. They will expect content that is of the Game of Thrones or House of Cards standards because they are now exposed to that, and with the current writers you can’t really get that, so you really

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have to start from zero and start grooming our local writers. “Here, a lot of writers and producers limit themselves on the kind of content they can write about, while foreign networks don’t care about censorship. They are opening a whole new market that didn’t really exist. Before, you always had the same writers and the same faces. These guys are going to break those boundaries and a new market is going to open up. As a distributor, we see huge demand for new products and we started acquiring remake rights to feed that demand, we have started to identify new writers and have started to groom them.”

Matta pointed out that there should be no shame in buying formats and doing remakes, because this often serves as the training ground for people to eventually use that expertise to conceptualise and create their own formats and lift the production level of writers.

The panellists agreed that OTT has created an appetite for older content that can also appeal to international audiences. Sabbah said he welcomed digital players “because they move fast with their decision-making and allow for more experimentation and the audience also has a different taste”. “80% of the GCC audience is below the age of 40. With OTT, we are now looking at 15 episodes or less instead of stretching it to 30 or 60 feature-length pieces. These new episodes have a different rhythm, condensed action with a cliffhanger. Episodes have a different rhythm, condensed action with a cliffhanger. Each of the Turkish episodes were literally like a feature and 90 minutes long, but they worked. Daytime is very important, but it requires the long-form format because it also attracts advertising.”

She also added that one of the key criteria for the success of any drama in the Middle East is its appeal to the female audience. “The local content developed so far within the OTT space seems to be skewed towards male audiences.”

The team then returned to the crux of the discussion – how to create content that can potentially travel.

Sabbah pointed out that his company already creates a lot of work that is shown to a global audience, especially through Netflix, Shahid and iflix, among others. “Our Lebanese series Al Hayba, for instance, is on Netflix and is subtitled in more than 40 languages and doing extremely well in different markets including the Dominican Islands. Before, countries could only view content if they were from Hollywood and similar big studios. Now, platforms like Netflix are not just bringing international content to our markets, they are also taking our content to international audiences and people love it.”

Abu Homos pointed out that ArabFormat Lab has done this through its Arabic adaptations of international formats and, more recently, by co-producing a series with an Italian production house.

“At first, we had to buy the know-how. You have to start from zero. If they want to invest in anything, it must be in developing their writers and mentoring them” Gianluca Chakra, Managing Partner, Front Row Filmed Entertainment

“Wrapping up for the day, Matta emphasised the importance of local writers and the need for more experimentation and the cultural differences, the panellists agreed, but not impossible. The panel concluded with Chakra pointing out that Netflix and Amazon intended to focus their energies on the Middle East next year, with heavy investment planned for original productions. The panellists agreed that OTT will dictate some of the content dynamics in the coming years.”

Lina Matta, Channel Director, MBC Group
OTT AND SOCIAL MEDIA
REDEFINE VIDEO

With viewership figures touted in the millions, the panel on OTT and social media reflected the changing face of broadcast. Social media giants sat alongside successful digital and OTT platforms to offer audiences at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit the present and future of broadcast.

With per capita consumption of social media across the MENA among the highest in the globe, the second panel discussion on OTT and social media made for compelling listening at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit. Titled ‘OTT & Social Media: Driving Video Entertainment’, the panel covered issues such as the video push by social media platforms, sports as a genre, content commissioning by OTT and social media platforms, and engaging audiences while keeping the experience secure.

The panel discussion was sponsored by security solutions provider Irdeto, with Twitter as our social media partner.

Moderator Christophe Firth, Principal at A.T. Kearney, along with successful digital and OTT platforms to offer audiences at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit titled ‘OTT and social media: driving video entertainment’. The high-profile panel featured Kinda Ibrahim, Director of Partnerships for Facebook & Instagram for MEA, Turkey & Pakistan; Carlo Nohra, VP, GM, WWE Middle East FZ-LLC; Ahmed Qandil, Head of Product Management – Digital, MBC Group; and Ronald Peters, Segment Manager at Irdeto.

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region for Arabic productions and the consumer’s tendency to binge watch on digital platforms, we work with content partners to deliver scale. Partnerships and aggregation are key strategies to deliver a much bigger value to audiences.”

Following the recent agreement between Irdeto and Alibaba Cloud to secure OTT services in China, Firth asked Ronald Peters of Irdeto what the region can learn from the company’s global experience.

On the increasing integration of social media platforms in content production, Peters said: “Social media was considered a separate stream until a few years ago. When the audiences started to build, production houses began to integrate social media in their operations, allowing for easy scalability of operations. The move to the cloud on the part of broadcasters and content providers is also a move in the right direction. Ten years ago, these very entities were investing in their own CDNs, and now fortunately they are looking at providers such as AWS, among others, to concentrate on their core competencies.”

The 20-minute episodes of WWE’s Mixed Match Challenge on Facebook reflect a contemporary approach to production, with elements tailored for mobile consumption and social interaction, including the ability for fans to engage with the stars during the show. Firth asked Akkad and Nohra how the partnership between WWE and Facebook got off the ground.

Highlighting the synergy between the two in terms of their objectives as key, Akkad of Facebook said: “WWE has a massive following and performs well on social media. With their progressive digital-first approach, we were keen on getting their content. The whole partnership started with superstars doing live events with influencers. We then saw the opportunity to promote attendance to events and act as a funnel for people interested in merchandise. Similarly, with the La Liga rights for India, we are producing content with Mediapro. We are not reinventing anything. We are creating new opportunities for existing broadcasters.”

Nohra revealed that WWE produced 1,500 hours of original content in 2017 and the vast majority of the five billion video views in that year came from social and digital viewership. He said: “The way we look at content is whether it serves reach, engagement and economics, and based on that we decide on the distribution platform. At the heart of our tiered-content strategy is PTV which is the most profitable platform for the monetisation of our flagship shows Raw and SmackDown, for which five hours of original programming is produced a week. In addition, we also have reality series and documentaries. “With social and digital platforms, we aim to build the brand, attract next-gen viewers and promote the direct-to-consumer WWE Network, which optimises value of premium and long-tail content with which we super-serve our core fans.”

Asked about a similar partnership with MBC, Kinda Ibrahim of Twitter said: “We want to make sure that our partners are in line with building new audiences, increasing engagement and finding new sources of revenue. With partners such as MBC creating bespoke content or a short form of their existing content, we advise broadcasters such as them to tailor their strategy based on the platform and how the audience engages with the platform.”

Elaborating on MBC’s digital initiatives, Qandil said: “Every social
“While we are funding original content… these investments are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what viewers can expect on the platform”

Fares Akkad, Head of Media Partnerships, Facebook & Instagram, MENA, Turkey & Pakistan

"Underscoring the need for speed for OTT operations, Peters of Irdeto briefly spoke of the advantages in terms of cost, mobility, time to market and the multimedia streaming capabilities of open platforms for set-top boxes, such as Android TV. Peters added: “Play stores containing set-top boxes, such as Android TV, are proving to be very popular with consumers. Operators need more choice to their customers.”

Peters asked if social media platforms have ambitions to become super content aggregators such as Amazon is shaping to be. Stating that Amazon has multiple revenue streams with content being one of them, Akkad said that Facebook is supported by advertisements rather than being a subscription-based platform. He continued “We are keen on the engagement aspect because it helps people feel closer to their content. What we are seeing now is viewers are spending longer on content, and we are working on making it user-friendly from the VOD standpoint. The nature of content is still shaping — it might not be movies such as on Netflix and Amazon. Most definitely episodic and live content seems to work.”

With a partnership with Amazon, Nohra added: “What drives our decisions in where our fans are. Our existing distribution through pay TV extends to 180 countries, 800 million fans and 25 different languages. Until we find a replacement for that, we will continue to explore what else we can do based on what our fans want.”

With video generating a reported 50% of advertising revenues on Twitter, Firth asked Ibrahim if the platform is seeing similar growth in the Middle East. Conﬁrming that video is one of the fastest growing products for Twitter in the region, Ibrahim said: “Increasingly we are working with partners on a one-to-one bespoke manner, as opposed to a marketplace scenario. We see a lot of demand from brands to associate with a particular publisher. The publisher beneﬁts from monetisation, since we operate in a revenue-sharing model while also garnering additional audiences for their content.”

On the knotty issue of payment and the general willingness to pay for content, MB’s Qandil said that despite weak credit card penetration, there is a case for optimism. He explained: “Local providers such as the SADAD payment system in KSA and Fawry, a pioneering e-payment network in Egypt, offer local opportunities for improving the payment system. Of course, region-wise, more work needs to be done to improve payment infrastructure. Regarding AVOD platforms, we have seen advertisers appreciate the long engagement our viewers have on our platform, and they see it as distinct from the short-form or snackable content on other platforms.”

Elaborating on the issue of piracy, Peters of Irdeto sees consumer awareness improving. What he urges is an attitudinal shift among rights holders and content providers. “While rights holders are deploying watermarking technologies to protect their content, they need to recognize that the pirate is a competitor. Battling with criminals as competitors is far more difficult than competing with a legitimate service. It is then more urgent to win the battle by leveraging anti-piracy services in addition to technologies to rapidly find pirate services and shut them down.”

Nohra spoke of the need for legislation where it doesn’t exist, and enforcement where it does, in ﬁghting piracy. Qandil stressed the combined need for technology and enforcement, and Ibrahim stressed Twitter’s zero tolerance for infringements on intellectual property rights. Switching gears, Firth asked about sports, referring to the multi-year deal Facebook has inked with the US National Football League and Twitter’s deal with the PGA Tour, among other high proﬁle deals. “Is this experimentation or part of a long-term strategy?” he asked, echoing the view of many in the industry who believe these initiatives are a grand experiment with some long-term potential.

Stressing that sports offers the highest response in terms of audience consumption, Ibrahim spoke of the complementary nature of the partnerships. “While our content partners have the sporting rights, we work towards striking a deal to showcase near-live clips or simulcasts, for instance, to build incremental audiences that results in monetisation too. We complement the rights owners’ efforts and do not compete head-to-head for those rights.”

Highlighting the immediate, social aspect of live sports that works well on social media platforms, Akkad highlighted some of the tools Facebook has built, including Watch Parties, which allow private viewing and live interaction between viewers. While acknowledging sports rights are expensive, the positive spillover effect for the platform is undeniable when studies indicate that live videos on Facebook generate six times more discussion than recorded videos. Akkad also hoped that with Oculus Rift, sports viewing will become more immersive.

Aiming for a sports niche not fully exploited in the region, Qandil of MBC said: “We are looking at gaming speciﬁcally. We believe there is a huge opportunity here. It has been demonstrated by Amazon’s Twitch TV initiatives and also YouTube Gaming. We are looking at different business models to introduce in this region.”

For the secret sauce on how WWE has made sports and entertainment work for so many years, Nohra emphasised the complementary nature of social media platforms. “Our OTT platform has our core audience where we deliver content for those who cannot have enough of us. That is not where we cultivate new audiences. Social and digital platforms complement our content and extend our viewership. A good example is WWE Evolution, the women’s pay-per-view event. The ﬁrst half-hour of the show was available on Twitter, and the audience needed to go to our network to watch the rest.”

The news genre has seen similar movement. The likes of Bloomberg have signed deals with Twitter.

“Increasingly we are working with partners on a one-to-one bespoke manner, as opposed to a marketplace scenario”

Kinda Ibrahim, Director, MENA Partnerships, Twitter

While content partners have the sports rights, Kinda Ibrahim said that Twitter works towards building incremental audiences, which results in monetisation.
Pith put the classic marriage counsellor question to the panelists to reflect on what content owners needed from their social media partners, and vice versa, to make the marriage happier. Qandil of MBC made a call for transparency from social media platforms. Almost in response, Akkad of Facebook said: “We want broadcasters to understand how people are consuming content on a particular social media platform. Our algorithms reflect those patterns, and knowing how consumers are consuming content will ensure a winning proposition for broadcasters to plan their content around.” Ibrahim asked for more content that works, resulting in more monetisation opportunities for content publishers. “Let’s make that work,” she added. Carlo Nohra of WWE wrapped up the engaging debate with a one-item wish list: “We want to create bespoke content for our partners’ channels. However, we are ahead of the curve. When we invested in our own digital platform in 2013-2014. We were aware of the content posted on Instagram. From the content standpoint, the goal is social value. When you have this social value figured out, the opportunities to pitch advertisements and other services are limitless and considered part of a fair transaction.”

To conclude the discussion, Pith put the classic marriage counsellor question to the panelists to reflect on what content owners needed from their social media partners, and vice versa, to make the marriage happier. Qandil of MBC made a call for transparency from social media platforms. Almost in response, Akkad of Facebook said: “We want broadcasters to understand how people are consuming content on a particular social media platform. Our algorithms reflect those patterns, and knowing how consumers are consuming content will ensure a winning proposition for broadcasters to plan their content around.” Ibrahim asked for more content that works, resulting in more monetisation opportunities for content publishers. “Let’s make that work,” she added. Carlo Nohra of WWE wrapped up the engaging debate with a one-item wish list: “We want more targeted audiences.”

**“With social and digital platforms, we aim to attract next-gen viewers … We create bespoke content for YouTube and Facebook”** Carlo Nohra, VP, GM, WWE Middle East FZ-LLC
A lively exchange on cloud adoption and the deployment of AI in broadcast workflows ensured that the post-lunch tech panel had the rapt attention of attendees at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit. Issues covered also included workplace culture vis-à-vis technical changes, evolving satellite solutions and developing better user experiences on multiple platforms.

Titled ‘Tech Panel: Addressing the Demands of a New Broadcast Ecosystem’, the panel consisted of Adriaan Bloem, Senior Manager Online Platforms at MBC Group; Ali El Hussein, Vice Director of Technical Operations at TRT; Dave Mace, Cloud and Digital Services Manager at OSN; Ghassan Murat, Managing Director at Eutelsat MENA; and Muath Barakat, GM of Technology at Intigral.

Moderator Paul Wallis, Managing Director of Deluxe Middle East, set the ball rolling by asking Ali El Hussein: “How will you implement the change?” was the apparently simple question. He said: “It is not just about change in technology. Technology gives you a set of tools, but the first challenge is workplace culture. How will people approach this change? We are a huge organisation employing around 40,000 people in 2018. You can’t just ask people to come to work in glass and say ‘what do you start to implement the change?’”

The broadcast veteran began by outlining a truth we often overlook while we navigate a maze of technical jargon – that the way the workflow culture responds to technical upgrades determines the success of any such overhaul. He said: “It is not just about change in technology. Technology gives you a set of tools, but the first challenge is workplace culture. How will people approach this change? We are a huge organisation employing around 9,000 persons with more than 30 channels. People and workflows must be the starting point of any change. You don’t have to rush into it. The multiple options need to be discussed internally and externally with vendors and then a roadmap needs to be created. To overcome any cultural resistance, the approach needs to be workflow-based. If you attempt to tackle every aspect from enterprise and operations to content generation and distribution, you will end up with a lot of problems that you cannot fix.”

Speaking specifically about the estimated timescale for the massive technology overhaul underway at TRT, El Hussein said: “We have undertaken large-scale implementation of AI and cloud. We are essentially in the business of entertainment and content. We are having your platform in the cloud and the benefits the broadcaster has seen. ‘We have undertaken large-scale migration to the cloud, said Mace, Cloud and Digital Services Manager at OSN in his opening remarks. ‘We are essentially in the business of entertainment and content, and any service that we operate from glass to glass will be shifted to cloud. We are seeing the obvious benefits of business continuity, disaster recovery, agility and scalability.”

On the frequently asked question of cost implications, Mace said: “If broadcasters think they will save money in the first year of migrating to the cloud, they are mistaken. In the long term, there will be cost savings. More importantly, having your platform in the cloud
“The decision to migrate to cloud will depend on each individual business case. At times, it will make sense to move from Capex to Opex mode, but at other times it will not”

Muath Barakat, GM Technology, Intigral

"When you first move to cloud you need 'servers' as a metaphor, but once you transition beyond that, such metaphors are not needed" said Adrian Bloem of MBC Group.

Adriaan Bloem, Senior Manager Online Platforms, MBC Group

allows you to scale up or down with ease, experiment with new initiatives and fail with less pain.

Having developed a cloud-based platform capable of delivering video to client apps and devices, Intigral’s Muath Barakat concurred with Mace on the benefits of migrating to the cloud. He observed: “Cloud definitely makes you agile, and broadcasters will probably find it better to start small, identifying areas in the infrastructure that can be shifted. There is no need for broadcasters to immediately migrate all processes and workflows to the cloud. With video, you have a huge amount of data that can be very costly to maintain on premise and impossible to monitor across borders, and having it stored in the cloud is a lot more cost-effective. Shifting spend from

decide to go to cloud will depend on each individual business case. At times, it will make sense to move from Capex to Opex mode, but at other times it will not. The total cost of ownership (TCO) will have to be studied carefully here.”

Predictably, the prohibitive cost of connectivity in the region was mentioned. As a corollary to the connectivity question, Wallis asked Adriaan Bloem of MBC if the talk around 5G was translating into any real plans on the ground. Bloem responded: “Everybody expects all video content to move to OTT and the internet, but we do not currently have the mobile network capability to handle it. If everyone stopped watching satellite TV and watched TV on device right now, the internet would break down. We definitely need 5G. Also, as broadcasters, we must be acutely aware of how end users are consuming our content. We have seen viewers in countries with 4G having great streaming experiences, even if providers in that country struggle to deliver video streaming via old school fixed connections. So 5G is needed and will help in enhancing the viewer experience.”

Elaborating on the user experience, Barakat of Intigral said: “We tailor delivery options for our clients across public or private CDN’s, satellite or OTT and IPTV. We offer multi-platform solutions for video streaming as well. At the end of the day, content is king, but at the same time if you cannot ensure viewer experience regardless of content, audiences will find another satisfactory platform.”

Highlighting that the cloud question has moved well beyond just a simple case of selecting a cloud provider, Bloem added: “The actual challenge we now face is managing our services across multi-cloud: we use multiple cloud providers and deploy our services across them. While initially companies were mostly uncertain about cloud reliability and security, Bloem elaborated that the guardian has moved on: "From my perspective, I want to select the best option in terms of cost and latency for each use case. However, the mechanisms to, for instance, deploy containers across multiple cloud platforms continue to be in their infancy.”

There is no single multi-cloud infrastructure vendor. A multi-cloud strategy typically resolves a mix of the major public cloud providers, such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google, Microsoft and IBM. Moderator Wallis stated that moving forward, systems integrators would need to integrate multi-cloud services into their offer and present it as a unified service to broadcasters. Bloem also highlighted spot pricing in the cloud ecosystem, where discounts are given for using capacity off-peak. Significantly, he cautioned against the misuse of terms such as cloud and that it goes beyond rebranding an erstwhile “hosting company.” He added: “When you first move away from traditional infrastructure and move to cloud, you need ‘servers’ as a metaphor, but once you transition beyond that, such metaphors are not needed and it is certainly not an efficient way to run your operations.”

At this point, El Husseini of TRT struck a sobering note around the realities broadcasters have to grapple with as they attempt to migrate to the cloud. “The hype now is to go cloud to playout. Archive access for both sports and news will be expensive — connectivity and bandwidth-wise, either on-premise or on hosted services. We are talking about transcoding, storage, media transport and so on. Then you have to consider office-associated services such as IT, security, enterprise systems, booking systems, control systems... where do we start?” Obviously, the answer will lie with the infrastructure, network and connectivity.

“The cost of establishing infrastructure to handle both media production and effective workflows is high, and in many well-established organizations it is hard to convince CFOs that the ROI on this change will be seen in a couple of years. Availability, agility and reachability comes with a price.”

To Mace’s query as to what it is about news channels that is not conducive to being on the cloud, El Husseini clarified: “News and sports channels cannot tolerate being off-air, and viewers will not tolerate latency. Most critically, being a government entity, there are regulations regarding the location of data, especially in countries that might shut you down.

Another issue we face is with broadcasting live sport. We have rights for various sporting events, including the Turkish league. However, bandwidth continues to be a challenge, especially with the 4K productions. With multiple users downloading and interacting as games are underway, connectivity does not hold up. I believe we need to have a conversation with telcos on the specific issues around live video broadcast. We are also waiting for regulations around 5G to be established. With 5G, the three issues of spectrum, fragmentation and speed need to be resolved. As broadcasters, we need clear roadmaps before we start migrating.”

With the panel clearly divided on

ems for video streaming as well. At the end of the day, content is king, but at the same time if you cannot ensure viewer experience regardless of content, audiences will find another satisfactory platform.”

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With the panel clearly divided on
the issue of cloud, Waili turned the focus to AI and machine learning. “Personally, I see tremendous benefits, especially around the localisation of content, with AI being able to do this transformation technology,” he observed. He added that AI has made a difference in Eutelsat’s operations.

Elaborating on Eutelsat’s Cirrus, which is intended to be a turnkey content delivery solution for both satellite and OTT platforms, Murat said: “As I mentioned earlier, we have a long and ambitious roadmap for Cirrus. And part of that roadmap is targeted advertising where the engine is AI. We are aiming to free up broadcasters to focus on content and subscribers while the platform takes care of end-to-end logistics.”

Mace highlighted compliance, in which AI plays a critical role at OSN. “One of the first use cases for AI is in the area of compliance. It is significant for us, as assets are monitored for content that needs to be flagged. With AI you make less mistakes and it speeds up the process of monitoring. It goes beyond that as well. If you want to locate a particular sound bite, you just need to search and download. You do need human intervention for content, to ensure a clip is cut clearly and for general-quality control. While machine learning will never replace people in certain roles, especially the creative areas, it helps you do the job quickly.”

Concurring that machine learning will never replace people, but help them do their job well, Bloom added: “One of the reasons Google, Amazon and Microsoft have been particularly successful in video analysis is because they have huge training sets. Unlike popular misconception, there are no androids controlling the data with a mind of their own. AI works great when it’s relatively generic and repeatable many times. I cannot apply the same for very specific uses at MBC. No, what we should aim for is things that don’t need 100% accuracy. For instance, there is a business case to be made for indexing our archives with AI, so we can unlock them for our audience. But the whole idea that AI will take over jobs is more far-fetched.”

While Barakat of Intigral agreed with Bloom on trusting AI, where 100% accuracy is not needed, he added: “AI and machine learning are being used already in Intigral in the writing of articles. A large number of Dawri Plus articles are automated and written by machines. I believe AI and machine learning is getting so advanced that it will soon replace a lot of jobs. Self-driving cars, for instance, will soon become a reality.”

El Husseini observed: “We have seen production lines in factories being taken over by AI over the past thirty years. While certain jobs, especially in areas of aviation and security systems, have been taken over, AI demands new skill sets. As for broadcast, China has an AI-powered presenter. Two years ago in Denmark, a whole radio show based on AI was launched.”

On the question of the significance of CDNs and what constitutes a successful one, Bloom said: “CDNs are incredibly important for streaming video. It is really crucial in this region, where there is not a single company that will make this problem go away with a simple one-stop solution. With 5G on the horizon, I would love not to have to think about it this much, but until we improve interconnectivity in the region and increase the capacity of networks, the issue around CDNs will persist.”

MRN IP video products and billing services provider Intigral has only recently expanded its CDN capabilities, with the first Pol’s operational in Riyadh to be followed shortly by similar Pol’s in Jeddah and Dammam. For Dawri Plus, its digisports platform for delivering live match streaming, and its OTT streaming service Jawwy TV, the company has also contracted with a third-party CDN. Agreement with Bloom about how critical CDNs are, Barakat added: “Companies have to rethink their strategies to deliver the all-important content to the end user with minimum latency and problems. The business case to approach a third-party provider or build your own CDN will obviously depend on the cost per gigabyte, among other factors.”

The cost of connectivity in the region reared its head again at the end of the discussion. Waili asked if there is any viable alternative to satellites in terms of cost.

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Experts estimate that in markets such as Europe, streaming will likely be a viable alternative to satellite for the majority of channels, with direct costs of OTT distribution typically falling 15–30% annually. Not here, though, as Murat of Eutelsat concurred with Mace on the resilience of satellite TV, which has an unprecedented penetration of 94% across 14 Arab MENA countries, according to the company’s figures. “Satellite will remain the main distribution network in the region,” asserted Murat. “At the same time, we are working towards greater integration between satellite and IP. Cirrus represents a big step in that direction, with dual offer of turnkey DTH services and OTT multiscreen delivery. For this region, we believe the integration between satellite and IP will add huge value in terms of growing audiences and advertising revenues.”

The cost of establishing infrastructure is high and in many well-established organisations it is hard to convince CFOs that the ROI on this change will be seen in a couple of years, observed El Husseini of TRT.

“The hype now is to go cloud and to push IP production forward … The two streams are supposed to move in parallel but they do not, posing a dilemma”

Ali El Husseini, Vice Director, Technical Operations, TRT

“As a satellite operator, we needed to transform ourselves … we launched Cirrus, a hybrid satellite-OTT delivery solution that allows broadcasters to offer a flexible, seamless content experience across multiple screens”

Ghassan Murat, Managing Director, Eutelsat MENA
The study indicates that the global entertainment and media industry is growing at a pace close to its historical rates despite much talked about disruption and economic turbulence.

ENTERTAINMENT & MEDIA: MENA VERSUS THE WORLD

An exclusive presentation by Strategy&-PwC at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit highlighted the forces shaping and fuelling the growth of the entertainment and media sector in MENA.

Offering a MENA market analysis with a global context, the report titled: Entertainment and Media Outlook Middle East, was launched exclusively at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit. Presented by Abhijat Sharma, Management Consultant, Entertainment and Media (E&M) at Strategy&, the report spans 53 countries and 15 E&M segments ranging from traditional TV to cinema and OTT.

Sharma began the presentation with a reassuring note that the global E&M industry is growing at a pace close to its historical rates despite much talked about disruption and economic turbulence. According to the report, nominal revenue growth between 2017 and 2022 is forecast to be 4.4%. “This is very much in line with the past,” indicated Sharma. “What is interesting is how consumer-paid- and advertising-led revenue streams are positioned in the region going forward.”

While the report forecasts that consumer-driven revenue remains the largest share through 2022 globally, MENA like other emerging markets will still be an advertising- or telco-dominated region. The 2017 figures indicate that internet access as a share of the total E&M spend by region is a whopping 50% in the MENA region.

The CAGR for the E&M segment in MENA for the period 2017–2022 outperforms global CAGR for internet advertising, C4OTT video, video games (including esports) and cinema.

“As a corollary of digitisation,” Sharma observed, “traditional print media is shrinking at a faster rate than in the rest of the world. Internet advertising and gaming are expected to emerge as primary contributors to media revenues by 2022.”

Interestingly, the market share of the E&M segment in 2022 in the MENA region for video games and esports is predicted to be 14% as compared to a 9% share globally. In contrast, the share of traditional TV and home video revenues is predicted to be 8% in MENA, trailing the global share of 15%. The relative market shares in 2022 clearly indicate the impact of younger, more digital audiences on the media landscape evolution in the region.

Sharma indicated that digitisation poses four monetisation challenges for traditional Middle East media.

“MENA region is ahead of international trends [on the digital front], indicating that the audiences are already there waiting to be served.”

Abhijat Sharma, Management Consultant, Media, Entertainment and Culture (MEC), Strategy& (part of the PwC network).

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players as they attempt to make the transition. While the high degree of dependence on physical advertising revenues comes to mind readily, the transition of physical dollars to digital cents coupled with publishers’ limited capabilities to build compelling digital value propositions versus the global digital majors (especially direct-to-consumer) remains elusive. Lastly, the dominance of non-commercial models in the region distorts the commercial value chains and places additional pressures on the profit and loss statements of commercial players.

In light of these challenges, Sharma stated that future business models will be shaped by the three pillars of convergence, connections and trust.

Convergence is being driven by a combination of new sector entrants as well as rapid evolution of new business models where media is a key input. Media convergence is clear to see with TV networks having to key input. Media convergence is clear to see with TV networks having to

"Traditional print media is shrinking [in MENA] at a faster rate than the rest of the world. Internet advertising and gaming are expected to emerge as primary contributors to media revenues by 2022" — Abhijat Sharma, Management Consultant, Media, Entertainment and Culture (MEC), Strategy& (part of the PwC network)

Sharma used the statistics to support this claim comparing the combined market cap for the top five companies in three sectors of technology, telecom and media. The combined market cap of the top five companies in technology – namely, Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook, estimated to be $3.28tn, dwarfs the telecom and media sectors valued at $914bn and $3,828bn, respectively. The content that is fuelling growth in the technology sector is borne out by events on the ground. Amazon Video, the ecommerce behemoth has partnered with the likes of ATV, the English Premier League, NFL and the US Open. Similar partnerships have underlined the growth stories for Facebook and Google.

With direct-to-consumer OTT initiatives in 2018 slated to grow to 18% of global consumer paid video revenues, the increased involvement of players such as Sky, HBO and Disney among others is an indication that content players have realised the value of direct-to-consumer relationships. The MENA OTT market is expected to rise from 19% of consumer paid video in the region to 24% in 2022. This growth will be driven by partnerships with traditional distributors such as telcos and pay TV providers that provide consolidated payment solutions. These partnerships will also reduce customer acquisition costs and provide better ARPU to OTT players besides revenue shares and strong consumer relationships (led by superior OTT offerings) to the distributors. To illustrate examples of local content efforts, the report highlights Noor’s first Arabic original series Jim. BroadcastPro has also reported several partnerships forged by the likes of Shahid Play and Shahid among others.

Digital AVOD is expected to gain further share from broadcasters, according to the study, led by digital majors like Facebook and Google as they continue to take a dominant share of growth (globally more than 70% of digital ad growth is driven by Google and Facebook). In MENA, digital video is growing at 1.7 times the global growth driven by smartphones becoming the first screen and also by the rapidly improving mobile broadband offering.

Publishers, Sharma said, will need to develop consumer relationships based on specialised brands and build relevance at scale. This will require them to think of these as connections to be leveraged into new revenue streams not siloed by the current media sector definitions. Sharma gave the example of Crunchyroll’s immense success in developing new revenue streams based on its anime heritage and its connections. As was illustrated, developing these streams will involve offering customers high-quality experiences while delivering content that addresses viewer interest and turning high-value audiences to new revenue streams. In conclusion, Sharma reiterated that exploiting the convergence in play effectively. Publishers will hence require new internal capability sets like data analytics, UX, etc. while partnering effectively with other platform players.

And completing the forces shaping the MENA market is the key factor of trust. Sharma stressed that trust will be vital determinant of the E&M sector’s ability to forge connections and succeed in an age of convergence. The report outlines the five vital dimensions of trust that include trustworthiness of content, authenticity of audience, securing return on advertising revenues, customer data security and providing an enduring value to society at large.
The final panel at the 2018 ASBU BroadcastPro Summit offered the audience a privileged view into how top executives are coping with some of the most challenging economic, technological and audience-driven issues the industry has ever seen.

Titled “The Digital Transition and Building a Robust Media Business”, the discussion covered international competition, local media strategies, the UAE's regional role, the economic impact of video streaming, the impact of the competition, local media strategies, the UAE's regional role, and Maaz Sheikh, co-founder and CEO at Starz Play.

Karim Sarkis, Senior Executive Advisor - Media and Entertainment at Strategy&, asked the MBC Group; Sanjay Raina, SVP and GM of Fox Networks Group; Michael Garin of Image Nation Abu Dhabi, Sam Barnett, CEO of MBC Group; Sanjay Raina, SVP and GM of Fox Networks Group; and Maaz Sheikh, co-founder and CEO at Starz Play.

Remarking Sam Barnett of the call for collaboration he had made on the same panel a year ago, moderator Karim Sarkis, Senior Executive Advisor - Media and Entertainment at Strategy&, asked the MBC CEO what progress he had made since then.

“Sanjay and I will announce a deal shortly with Fox Networks Group sitting alongside him. With that breaking news for the audience and the industry, he added: “That is the direction going forward as we try to consolidate our operations in the region in order to compete with FAANG.” At the time of going to press, Fox Networks Group announced the launch of the Fox Plus streaming service on MBC Group’s Shahid Plus and Intigral’s Jawwy TV.

Not mincing words about the potent role of the media, Barnett questioned the open-door policy towards international players: “I think regulators face a big question. In the past, they tended to regulate what they could see — the newspapers, the TV stations — they let foreign media companies come in and didn’t regulate them. Whether that is fair or not fair, it will have significant implications for the media in the Middle East.

“Regarding FAANG, you might be getting more choice and they may be able to win more advertising, but do the countries in this region want to allow them to dump advertising without regulation? Local media companies will survive, and MBC will continue to thrive, but we will operate in a much smaller market.”

To Sarkis’ query as to why more such agreements are not taking place MENA-wide, Sanjay Raina said MENA is a mental construct.

“It is 24 different countries with all its issues, regulations and political affiliations. So even if three or four entities come together and form a consortium, that should be good enough. Why should we worry when the biggest broadcaster and a fairly large international player have seen common ground?”

“We were thrilled to work with MBC and Sam Barnett,” continued Raina. “The kind of cooperation and assistance we get in putting together everything demonstrates clearly that in the coming times, you will need to contribute your energies locally towards achieving the larger goal — which is taking care of the disruptive consumer. It is no longer about producing a channel and hoping that someone will buy.”

Playing devil’s advocate, Sarkis put to Maaz Sheikh of Starz Play that “with broadcasters such as MBC and Fox reinforcing their digital positions, a pure OTT company like Starz Play should worry”.

“Being a pure OTT player is our biggest strength,” countered Sheikh. “In terms of technology and premium content we are delivering a world-class experience to our consumers. Consumers have responded and appreciated that it is a fulfilling experience with access to the latest ads-free content.”

On the question of whether the growing realisation among broadcasters regarding the importance of their VOD platforms is giving him sleepless nights, Sheikh offered an overview of the MENA audience profile: “I believe that this is not a market where only one service can take it all. Netflix is definitely a global powerhouse. Shahid is very strong in Arabic content. But Starz Play is the overall market leader because we are fulfilling the demands for latest Hollywood movies and TV shows for Arab consumers in the region. Our audience survey shows that an estimated 40% of our customers subscribe to at least one of the other OTT services as well. Around 70% of our audience is under 35, so it is a very different demographic. Viewership on OSN set-top boxes
and MBC channels is very different to someone tuning in to an Android phone and watching content on it.”

“Maaz says he is giving young people what they want – and MBC is giving old people what they want, in what I’m hearing,” observed Sarkis, playing an effective provocateur. “Turning to Barnett, he asked whether the traditional broadcasters will become obsolete. In response, Barnett offered the audience an evidence-backed argument for the continued resilience of linear TV, citing the ratings in the UK for shows such as Love Island and Broadchurch.

“In the Middle East, we are still getting 10m-plus audiences on many of our shows, and you do not get that level of penetration on other media. When we don’t air a series on TV and run it only on Shahid, we get dramatically less viewers than when we create the awareness on television. So I think the TV case is very clear.”

Raina concurred, saying that linear TV – both pay TV and PTA – is growing. He derided the premature-epitaphs written on declining viewership, based on a general downturn in advertising in the region and globally.

“Current viewing numbers apart, the demographics should worry linear TV players, Sarkis insisted: “As a traditional player, to what extent are you thinking about? If you look at the demographics, the declining linear viewership and at how younger viewers consume content, do you need to change your strategy?”

“We are doing two things,” responded Barnett. “MBC will win if we produce the best local content. We have just launched our MBC studios, where we intend to massively increase the quantity and quality of drama and film, and that will fuel our TV stations and the expansion and growth of Shahid. If a particular demographic or segment wants to watch on a particular technology or platform, we will provide that, as we have always done.

“Can local content compete against international local content? I think not. The challenge for us as a pan-Arab group is to get local enough to reach out to more pan-Arab audiences, and we are looking at various strategies to make that happen.”

Admitting that linear TV has seen a significant fall in advertising, things can only get better, so from here on, we can only get stronger. We are seeing in Egypt that advertising has come up... the devaluation has hit the floor and based on that, we are hearing that advertising is picking up. Sheikh Waleed has asked that we move aggressively into OTT, and I have large targets. We intend to expand Shahid and Shahid Plus significantly.”

Sarkis then asked Michael Garin of Image Nation how his organisation sees the changing dynamics between traditional and OTT, and whether the organisation is seeing more buyers from outside the region because of OTT.

“We are not really a seller of content,” clarified Garin. “We are here to make everybody on this panel and in the industry successful. We are working with Netflix and Amazon, international companies that were very reluctant to work in this region. Now, through us, they are excited to do local productions that they may not have been prepared to do before.”

“Citing Qalab Al Adalah (Justice), a courtroom drama produced by Image Nation, he added: “We went to the leadership of Abu Dhabi and got them to subsidise this programme. It was not commercially viable but we wanted to demonstrate that this region is capable of producing at a level that it has never seen before. We have done that, and now that the industry is developing we don’t have to be involved in similar productions. Our role is not to build Image Nation but to build the nation. The biggest success that Image Nation will ever have is when the local industry is self-sustaining and viable. We look forward to the day when our support for local entertainment is no longer needed.”

“If certain organisations are producing content without expecting returns, is that a concern?” Sarkis asked Barnett.

That is a problem, Barnett admitted. “Pay TV has been caught in this vice between bell and beast. One side paying vastly too much for content and the other side paying nothing – and you’re caught in the middle. That’s a very difficult place to be, because non-commercial players crowed out people who are applying commercial rigour and doing all the right things, and that’s a great shame. I think the market is big enough to sustain good-quality commercial content.”

“In the past, [governments] tended to regulate what they could see... the newspapers, the TV stations... they let foreign media companies come in and didn’t regulate them. This will have significant implications for the media in the Middle East.”

Sam Barnett, CEO, MBC Group.
“OTT, like any other business, is an execution game,” asserted Sheikh. “It is not only about content. It is about the overall experience the customer gets. It is about ease of use, video quality and payment options. We see ourselves not only as an entertainment company but also as an e-commerce digital company. We are firm believers that the more Netflix goes into original content and the more MBC does, the more Netflix goes into original content, and the more MBC does. We see ourselves not only as a pure content company with Nat Geo and Fox emerging as true content powerhouses. Data shows that people have started watching Nat Geo-feature documentaries and lifestyle television on OTT services. We hope to align with all great partners, including Shahid Play.”

Sarkis then introduced the all-important telco question. “Are they partners or enemies at this stage? And should an OTT player such as Shahid Play be part of a telco?”

“Staying independent and not being owned by a telco is extremely important if you want to have the distribution reach in the region,” stressed Sheikh. “Being owned by one telco makes it difficult to work with other telcos. We have partnered and integrated with 21 different telcos in our region. Besides Shahid, no one has achieved that scale of collaboration. Shahid can do that because they are part of MBC. We did it in three years because we have been an independent and standalone OTT player.”

“We did it in three years because we have been an independent and standalone OTT player.”

“Telcos in the region are wanting in terms of preparedness to deploy pay TV, Raina of Fox observed, with the exception of Etisalat, du and STC. “When we talk about the MENA region and go into territories where there is little penetration of pay TV, your first alliance would have been, with the telco, and most of the telcos are not ready – and I’m not taking of those we are working with. Also, telcos need to revise their business models to take advantage of 5G.”

Sarkis observed that there are very few instances in the world where telcos have succeeded in their entertainment strategy. Sheikh took the argument one step further to say that telcos are rolling out Android STBs and are able to put Shahid or Starz Play or Netflix on their STBs along with linear channels as part of an IPTV offering. “Telcos,” he added, “are accepting the fact that partnering with established branded services is part of their overall entertainment offering.”

On the Saudi question, Sarkis asked if this was an opportunity or threat.

“Completely refuting any notion of threat, Garin asserted. “We are working with the General Entertainment Authority, with MBC and Nebras Films, among others. My own personal view is that the UAE alone is too small to support a sustainable film and TV industry, with a million Emirates and a 10 million population. My ideal scenario is to trade the experience and the skillsets of the UAE for the 32m-strong audience base in Saudi Arabia and create a regional solution for a self-sustaining industry.”

“THE biggest success that Image Nation will ever have is when this industry is self-sustaining … We look forward to the day our support for local entertainment is no longer needed.”

Michael Garin, CEO, Image Nation Abu Dhabi

PROCEO

“[MENA] is 24 different countries with all its issues, regulations and political affiliations. So even if three or four entities come together … that should be good enough”

Sanjay Raina, SVP and GM, Fox Networks Group

Arabia and create a regional solution for a self-sustaining industry.

“The Saudis can create it on their own, there is no question, but they are in a hurry. Booking movies from Paramount and Universal and bringing Cirque du Soleil is important, because it shows evidence of their intention and gives people immediate gratification. But what you cannot buy and need time to build is local content, skills and talent. It has taken us eight years to develop those skills.”

With more than 400 Saudi nationals working for MBC, Barnett described it as “a great Saudi export” and said the opening of the media landscape in Saudi Arabia will allow the broadcaster to scout for talent within the country.

“When we did Arab Idol, we scouted for talent in all eight different towns and cities across the Arab world and not one in Saudi Arabia, and that has changed.”

Sarkis then asked the panel about their outlook for the market in the next five years.

Almost speaking for the panel, Garin said: “I am very optimistic. As evident on this panel, everyone, regardless of technology and business model, is committed to increasing the quality of content – and this industry is content-driven.”
The MENA broadcast industry came together at Habtoor Grand on the evening of November 13, 2018, to celebrate the best of the best at the eighth annual ASBU BroadcastPro Awards.

Celebrating innovation has always been the central theme of the ASBU BroadcastPro Awards and this year, we took it a notch higher with a special entertainment feature to welcome the launch of The Open Road, Fox MENA’s first original production in the region. A road was laid out and lit up in the centre of Al Andalus Ballroom, Habtoor Grand and one of the programme’s lead bikers, Pamela Nabhan drove through the room to announce the launch of the series to the broadcast industry.

More than 320 delegates from the broadcast and satellite industry attended the event with the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre team receiving a standing ovation as they went up to receive the Space Initiative of the Year award for the launch of KhalifaSat. Our MENA judges, who were selected for their expertise, scrutinised entries vying for categories ranging from TV and film production to broadcast installations and OTT strategies. Excellence in Production, Broadcast and OTT were recognised with special awards given as part of Editor’s Choice to award winning individuals and companies. Keeping new trends in mind, those working within the OTT space were recognised for outstanding productions and trendsetting innovations. Excellence was also recognised in the satellite sector.

A big thank you to our judges this year: Abdulla Ahmed Albalooshi, Information Affairs Authority, Bahrain; Houria Khatir, Algerian TV; Ines Jebali Gdoura and Feten Fradi of ASBU; Khaled Abu Ali and Yasir Ballal of Mediacast International; Andrew Clemson, DoP, Dubai; and Supriya Srinivas and Vijaya Cherian of BroadcastPro Middle East.
PROAwards

Broadcast Awards

Best Production of 2018
Red Band Society, Arab Format Lab

This well-executed Arabic adaptation of a Spanish teen medical drama won accolades from the judges for maintaining high production standards and entertainment value while also conveying a social message. This programme is Arab Format Lab’s first production and includes several new talents from the region. Seen here with the award are Arab Format Lab’s business partners, Khulud Abu Homos and Mustafa Alaidaroos.

Best Factual Entertainment of the Year
The Open Road, Fox Networks Group

This riveting original from Fox Networks Group MENA had the judges in awe as two lady bikers take the audience on an unusual journey with the biker community in the region. This entry was deemed the most engaging in terms of content, pacing as well as cinematography. Pictured here with the award are Alex El Chami, Pamela Nabhan and Natasha Kavanagh from Fox Networks Group Middle East.

OTT Production of the Year
Hob El Tayebin, Vuclip

This 15-episode family comedy show features Saudi Arabian social media celebrities and takes the audience back in time through the stories of an elderly father. Commenting on this programme, one of our judges observed that the heart-warming family comedy show addresses all age demographics with equal doses of nostalgia and contemporary culture. Abe Shady Naga (L) and Wessam Kattan (R) of Vuclip received the award from Mehmet Eken (extreme left) of Akamai.

Best Video Initiative on a Social Media Platform
Ya Negm Ya Star, Bigfoot Films

When Egypt’s most valuable World Cup player, Mohamed Salah, was injured and benched, his fans were devastated. Hassan AbouelRouss (R) created a music video, which inspired an organic movement in Egypt and encouraged Salah to play in the second and third World Cup matches. This inspirational video garnered more than four million views on social media and won the hearts of our judges. Hasan Sayed Hasan (L) of Master Media presented the award.
**BEST VIDEO INITIATIVE ON A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM**

**Bad Snappers, Viacom International Media Networks MENA**

This Arabic adaptation of a UK show, re-envisioned to address Arab audiences, chronicles the lives of two social media-obsessed girls and their desperate measures to engage their Snapchat followers. It attracted more than five million viewers across social media platforms. Holding the trophy is Tracey Grant, VP of Content & Channels Middle East, Viacom International, with the VIMN team.

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**OTT SOLUTIONS PROVIDER OF THE YEAR**

**Pan Arab Media Inc.**

The judges lauded this new entry in the market for developing OVPlatform, an end-to-end OTT platform integrated with a wide range of video players and ad networks. In 2018, OVPlatform was deployed on two platforms: wetv, the official SVOD service offered by Egyptian telco operator WE, and Primax.tv, a new independent MENA OTT platform. Moustapha Bekheet (l), COO of Pan Arab Media Inc., received the award from Manoj Mathew (r), COO of Zee Entertainment Middle East.

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**EXCELLENCE IN VFX**

**Real Image TV Production**

This 3D entry from Real Image of an ultra-urban Dubai, shown as part of the African Global Business Forum for Dubai Chambers, is a fine example of how technology and art have been combined on the editing table today. One judge commented that “this company has continuously demonstrated a quality of work that is world-class – the design elements are both effective in visual impact and in its storytelling”. Pictured here with the award are Aiham Ajib, MD of Real Image, and film director Majdi Merza.

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**ANIMATED WORK OF THE YEAR**

**Zafari, Spacetoon International**

This children’s animation series was a visual delight and has been fully rendered in Unreal Engine. Using Unreal Engine enabled the company to achieve subsurface scattering, ambient occlusion, vector-based motion blur, and water and visual effects, among other critical rendering needs for the production. Pictured here is the Spacetoon team receiving the award from Digby Taylor (l), Programme Director at Shock Middle East.
PROAWARDS

Broadcast Awards

DIGITAL STRATEGY OF THE YEAR

Jawwy TV, Intigral

Intigral has a long pedigree of providing IPTV and OTT products in the region. Jawwy TV was introduced earlier this year as the next evolution of Intigral’s Home TV service. The company inked strategic deals with several content providers to ensure compelling content and an engaging viewer experience. Khaled Jamal (left) of Irdeto presented this award to Hamoud Al Rumayan (second from left), CEO of Intigral, and his team.

Broadcast Awards

SPORTS INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

The AGL VR Seat Experience, PLC

This entry from the UAE Pro League Committee delivered the wow factor with the first ever live VR telecast of a whole football season. The event brought together a sports franchise, a telco and a solutions provider to offer a virtual reality viewing experience to fans. Pictured here is the PLC team with the award they received from Sanjay Raina (far right), SVP and GM of Fox Networks Group.

Broadcast Awards

BROADCASTPROME INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF 2018

PSIS Anti-Piracy Solution, OSN

OSN re-architected its content protection solution during its AWS migration. The result was PSIS, an innovative anti-piracy solution, developed in-house by OSN. PSIS has enabled OSN to establish deep collaborations with all US studios and regional content production houses on piracy matters. Pictured here is the OSN team receiving the award from Ronald Peters (far left), Segment Manager, Irdeto.

Broadcast Awards

RADIO INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

Shock Middle East

Shock Middle East has ventured where no other station has with the region’s first dedicated dance music station, Dance FM 97.8, and more recently, Heart 107.1 FM and a contemporary Arabic station, Radio Hala 95.6. There is a science behind their rapid rise, and how they identified and created stations for underserved audiences in the region. From designing bespoke retail radio stations to partnering with global events, Shock Middle East has shown remarkable vision and energy. Pictured here is the Shock Middle East team with their award.
Broadcast Awards

PROVIDER OF THE YEAR

twofour54

twofour54 stands out for the sheer volume and scale of work it has undertaken to attract Hollywood, Bollywood and other high-end productions to the UAE. Besides catering to the production needs of blockbusters like Mission Impossible: Fallout, Tiger Zinda Hai and Al Asouf among others, twofour54 has raised the bar by improving its facilities and services, and introducing initiatives to develop the region’s media industry and grow its talent pool. Pictured with the award are Nabil Abou Samra (l) and Yusuf Al-Butti from twofour54.

TRENDSETTER OF THE YEAR

Weyyak, Zee Entertainment

Weyyak from Zee Entertainment began with exclusive Indian and Arabic content targeted at Arab audiences in MENA. This year, it expanded its library to include content tailored specifically to French-speaking audiences in Morocco and other North African markets, with creative and technical feats to match. Kinda Ibrahim [far right], Head of MENA Partnerships, Twitter presented the award to Zee’s digital team.

FEATURE OF THE YEAR

God Children, AUM Media

This documentary feature is a bold and gripping portrayal of two boys in India, born with deformities, and the extraordinary twists and turns in their lives. For having the courage of conviction and the cinematic prowess to translate a difficult subject to celluloid, Aum Media won the award for Best Documentary Feature. Receiving the award from Bassil Zoubi of ASBU are Film Director Reshel Shah Kapoor and team member Neha Bulchandani.
CEO OF THE YEAR
Sam Barnett, MBC Group

Sam Barnett showed remarkable leadership, when he rallied his organisation and ensured that they remained at the cutting-edge of broadcasting in the region even during trying times. More importantly, he reassured a whole industry when he spoke of MBC Group’s continued plans on various platforms and how it will continue to invest in local content. Pictured here is Sam Barnett (l) receiving the award from Raz Islam, Managing Director of CPI Trade Media.

OUTSTANDING INNOVATION IN OB ENGINEERING
Radio OB van, ARET video and audio engineering

ARET received this award for its innovation in OB van technology. This new Radio OB van, designed for a Middle Eastern client, was developed to endure the harsh desert conditions. Built with AR-7 technology, used in the construction of modern yachts, this van comes with several unique technical features that made it award winning. Pictured here with the award is Dr. Eng. Umberto Asti, VP of Sales, at ARET.

INNOVATIVE MEDIA BUSINESS INITIATIVES
Majed Al Suwaidi, Managing Director, DMC, DSC, DPC

Majed Al Suwaidi, who heads the three media free zones in Dubai, has been the prime architect behind a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the country’s talent pool. The in5 creative space in Production City, which has been designed to offer freelancers and young startups a place to execute their ideas, and the more recent GoFreelance initiative are only two such projects he has helmed.

OUTSTANDING VIDEO PROJECT
Etihad Airways, Action Media

The 2018 Awards concluded with a riveting production from Action Media that served as a fitting closure to this year, which marks 100 years since the birth of the UAE’s founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Action Media’s video, which celebrates both Etihad Airways and the Year of Zayed, was a fascinating mix of storytelling and visual effects. Ghassan Murat (r), MD of Eutelsat Middle East presented the award to Ayman Ahmed, GM of Action Media.
Satellite Awards

**SPACE INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR**
**Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre**

On October 29, 2018, the UAE witnessed an unprecedented moment in its history when a satellite, built by Emiratis, was launched into space from Japan. The launch of KhalifaSat was a proud moment for the UAE and the start of a long journey of ambitious national space projects. Receiving the award is Yousuf Al Shaibani (r), Director General of MBRSC from Waleed Ebrahim Al Hosani (l), CEO of Pro League Committee.

**SATELLITE OPERATOR OF THE YEAR**
**Intelsat S.A.**

Intelsat has worked with various organisations this year to extend connectivity and broadband in rural Africa. Whether with Vodacom in West Africa or Gilat in rural Uganda or AMN in ultra-rural sub-Saharan Africa, Intelsat has engaged in various partnerships that have helped extend connectivity to unserved communities across multiple countries in Africa. Karim Sarkis (l), Exec Advisor at Strategy& presented the award to Shahrokh Khanzadeh Amiri, MD, Middle East & North Africa at Intelsat.

**Satellite Awards**

**SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD**
**Make Space Yours, Wild Guanabana/Isobar**

Make Space Yours is a national educational initiative that aims to support STEM education in schools and universities in Egypt by engaging students in space competitions on a national level. Conceived by Omar Samra, this team reached out to 77 schools, 44 universities and 9 governates in Egypt as part of Season 1. Season 2 is coming. The award was presented by Carlo Nohra of WWE Middle East to Mona Sherif of Isobar.
“Making needed adjustments to esports production is a matter of degrees for broadcasters, as opposed to a whole new ball game”

Esports: a mutual opportunity

ProGuest

While still a young segment in the Middle East, with revenues of around $3bn in 2017 (Statistical), all indicators point to significant market potential for esports in the region. 2018 has set the ball rolling with a partnership agreement between the Arab Esports Federation and Global eSport Resources to develop the first all-inclusive esports portal. Additionally, plans have been announced for the region’s first esports stadium in Dubai.

With 38% annual revenue growth (Newzoo), esports enjoys an explosion of global fan base among young, affluent cord-cutters, a market segment very hard to reach with traditional television. As the next generation of major revenue earners, esports consumers are pointing the way to requirements for the media of the future.

While esports continues to attract significant investment from entertainment companies and brands on streaming platforms, revenue from providing content to traditional broadcast channels is invisible to future growth. Traditional broadcasters benefit from these agreements by capturing some of this growing market.

Meeting the needs of esports audiences

Esports has many similar equipment requirements to any other live sports event: capturing the on-stage playing environment, commentary, close-ups, interviews with players and of course the actual game footage. Esports arenas require separate programming for in-house screens and broadcast. However, there are some fundamental differences between the two genres. One is the number of sources to be managed. In addition to in-venue cameras and graphics, the game action must be captured. Game action is captured as a sub-mix by ‘observers’ who work within the computer-generated application to provide video sources that show the gameplay. The number of outputs from the game varies. A battle royale-style game potentially has hundreds of in-game ISDNs, which must be consolidated into a storyline that is accessible to the audience.

Esports audiences demand localised content. For popular league events, this means producing simulcast streams with dozens of different audio-tracks and branding. The playout infrastructure then becomes a major component of the system. Two hundred outputs feeding broadcast and streaming outputs to locations all over the world is not unusual. Additionally, the production requirements for esports can vary depending on the type of event. Infrastructures and workflows need agility to quickly transition between game formats, with fast set-up and take-down times for rapid changeover between events. Local conditions must also be taken into account.

Transitioning to esports production

Flexibility is key in esports, and having a partner that understands this is critical. Content creators must seek production models that adapt to changing conditions, yet are sustainable in the long term.

One solution is creating scalable production systems where all feeds route to a central switching and routing system that can flexibly divide into different resource suites to handle an event. This centralised system needs to simultaneously mix and output in multiple video formats. With decades worth of experience in live production, broadcasters and service providers are able to meet the increasingly complex demands of large projects. Fortunately, making needed adjustments to esports production is a matter of degrees, as opposed to a whole new ball game. Extending their reach to new audiences quite simply involves calculating risk/reward, and it is crucial to work with a company that has been there before.

Chris Merrill is Director of Product Marketing at Grass Valley.

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