A STAR IS BORN?
Maaz Sheikh on the launch of Starz Play in the Middle East

PRESERVING HISTORY
How to save your media assets before it is too late

CALLING THE SHOTS
Three Arab directors on making their mark with local productions

JOIN US FOR OUR BIG 5TH BIRTHDAY BASH!
Some of you may have travelled to Vegas this year, and I know those of us who went like to tell those left behind how tedious the whole journey was – just in case they think we may have had a good time there.

Jokes apart, going to Vegas for NAB can be hugely tedious, even more so due to the lack of sufficient entertainment on Emirates’ ICE if you’re a frequent traveller. But NAB offers a clear indication of the direction in which the manufacturers and solution providers are steering the market.

Most exhibitors seemed ready with solutions for 4K/UHD broadcasts. Blackmagic, for instance, announced 38 new products at the show this year. A number of them were components capable of 12G-SDI because they believe that UHD is the next big thing. I can’t resist adding here that DaVinci Resolve, which in a previous incarnation, was the toy of the super elite, now has 100-odd engineers working on it, and is scheduled for its largest release ever this summer with 80 new updates. And it’s all absolutely free.

Coming back to UHD, almost all of the major players on the production and delivery side were pushing their UHD-ready products and services so that’s something to keep on the radar.

Another term that came up repeatedly at the NAB conference was about how TV executives were looking to court the millennials – a buzzword at Cannes as well this year. Millennials, for the uninitiated, refers to Generation Y viewers — those born in the 80s and beyond — for whom watching content on mobile devices is more the rule than the exception. TV execs at both NAB and Cannes were debating how to cater to the evolving TV viewer.

While we debate such ultra modern topics, we find that broadcasters are still confounded by what to do with the assets they have on tape in their warehouses, dealing a slow and fatal blow to the region’s rich cultural heritage. For those who haven’t responded to the call for action, the statistics from Memnon’s CEO in this month’s issue will hopefully serve as a wake-up call.

On a different note, it’s been five years since Raz and I launched BroadcastPro Middle East. Since then, the brand has grown and we are truly humbled by the support we have received from the industry. We hope you will join us to celebrate this journey at Habtoor Grand this month. Don’t forget to register! See you on May 20.
A governmental organisation, established in 2009, dedicated to the development of the media sphere in the Emirate of Sharjah. Its objectives are represented through its efforts to enhance the local media sector and the role of media, particularly in terms of strengthening family ties and improving media performance in regards to professionalism, excellence, creativity and responsible freedom of the press.
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Advanced Media expands Dubai showroom

Dubai-based distributor, Advanced Media, has concluded a massive office expansion with the addition of a brand new 500sqm showroom at its headquarters in Al Khaleej Centre. Having experienced a 15% growth in 2014 and anticipating a similar growth this year, Advanced Media’s CEO Kaveh Farnam commented that the showroom is only part of a major revamp within the company. “We are changing everything at the organisation from job profiles and job descriptions to warehousing and logistics to procurement. The last time we undertook a major change was six years ago. It’s time to do something again.”

Farnam also revealed that Advanced Media is presently hiring and will be organising at least five events this month. He added: “This company has gone from one person to seventy people and represents more than 170 brands within professional video, broadcasting and photography. The company needs a change. We are also looking to enhance our distribution channels and make our service centre bigger.”

ONE CONNXT extends agreement with ART

ONE CONNXT has completed the extension of its broadcast video transport agreement with Arab Radio and Television (ART). The extension comes following the conclusion of the initial three-year agreement originally inked in 2012. ONE CONNXT will provide bi-directional transport services and 24/7 monitoring of ART’s high-quality broadcast video programming originated between MISC Media Centre in Cairo and media centres in Amman and Avezzano. Each year, ONE CONNXT delivers nearly 1,000 hours of regularly scheduled content, including weekly programmes and during Ramadan, when 240 hours of special daily programming is transported.

Etisalat chooses IPTV solutions from Agama

Etisalat is implementing an Agama solution for its IPTV and OTT service. Agama secured the deal together with its regional business partner Al-Falak, an IT and communications solution provider in the Middle East. Etisalat will deploy Agama’s DTV monitoring solution covering the end-to-end video distribution infrastructure all the way from the headend down to end-user devices such as STB’s, smartphones and tablets.

TSL and IPE merger called off

Systems integrators and broadcast equipment developers TSL Systems and IPE will not be merged. It was declared that legal hurdles proved too complex to complete a full merger of the two companies. Expressing disappointment at not being able to carry the deal forward, Bruce MacGregor, Director of Solutions, TSL Systems, said: “TSL will continue to provide SI solutions to customers across the globe and we will continue to work closely with IPE under existing commercial collaboration arrangements.”

CNN International now available on Arabsat

Arabsat and Turner Broadcasting have recently entered an agreement to offer CNN International across the MENA region via ARABSAT BADR-6. The agreement gives the audience in the region an opportunity to watch CNN International’s mix of breaking news, business, sports and feature programming at a frequency of 11,785 MHz (vertical).

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In Figures

$159.8 m

Amount of money lost last year by Netflix’s international division, which is not yet profitable

Source: Netflix

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$159.8 m

Amount of money lost last year by Netflix’s international division, which is not yet profitable

Source: Netflix
ABS Network seals deal with Telairity

Dubai-based broadcast services provider ABS Network has signed an agreement with Telairity to deploy the manufacturer’s H.264/AVC encoders across the region. Using Telairity’s SD and HD broadcast encoders will enable ABS Network’s customers to transmit the highest quality video to their viewers. The announcement was made by ABS President Mohammed Al Ajlouni and Telairity CEO Jim Meadlock.

The strategic partnership enables ABS to market Telairity’s equipment through its broadcast services division and serve as the company’s technology support system in the region. This deal also strengthens Telairity’s position in the region. The manufacturer already has a regional office in Jordan. ABS works closely with medium-to-large broadcasters as well as smaller clients, delivering a comprehensive set of content production and delivery services. Its equipment is used by regional broadcasters for live ENG/EDNG news gathering and taped broadcasts. The company has agreements with broadcasters and cablecasters in Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, the UAE and Lebanon, with more installations across varied environments, and backed by a support team that understands how to replace systems on a 24-hour notice wherever in the world a problem occurs. Telairity fulfills those conditions, and we are pleased for them to be our ongoing supplier of encoder equipment.

Telairity’s H.264/AVC encoders are also used by regional broadcasters for live ENG/EDNG and video production and delivery services equipment. Its software integrates with any other broadcast or corporate IT system, and backed by a support team, it is easily accessible to our audience with easy carrier billing integration.”

Speaking about the deal, Gamal Marwan, CEO of Melody Entertainment, said: “It’s critical to us that we work with the right partner so that our high-quality content is not only protected via DRM, but is easily accessible to our audience with easy carrier billing integration.”

Commenting on the partnership with Melody Entertainment, Anun Prakash, CEO of Vuclip, said, “We are excited to expand our offering to bring this engaging content to our consumers. We are delighted to partner with the company to entertain our rapidly growing subscriber base. We are proud to be providing this premium content to our consumers.”

IN FIGURES

$384 m
Opening weekend box office revenue from Furious 7, partly filmed in Abu Dhabi

Ooredoo selects DataMiner for Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera has chosen DataMiner from Skyline Communications as the network management and SDH platform for its $384m Global Media Cloud (GMC) network. The implementation will enable more than 80 offices to be connected with a state-of-the-art network that allows Al Jazeera to transport media and data, as well as serve emerging corporate uses.

“Our ultimate goal is to make sure that any user of Al Jazeera who sits in any of the more than 80 global locations will feel like they are sitting in the Doha headquarters, so they will have access to all the resources they need, be it media files, accessing the MAN or any other broadcast or corporate IT service,” commented Mohamed Albagilah, Executive Director of Technology & Operations (CFO/CTO) at Al-Jazeera Media Network.

The project is based on different technologies provided by Net Insight, Cisco, Harris, Riverbed and Skyline Communications. DataMiner manages the services end-to-end, using unified workflows that are transparent to the underlying technologies. Ooredoo will provide support as an end-to-end service provider for the implementation of the media solution and for its operation. Elaborating on DataMiner’s role, Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani, CEO of Ooredoo, stated: “DataMiner provides a real-time view on the performance of the network, and from a single console, we manage the SDH core network, MPLS connections and satellite links.

“With this hybrid network architecture is based on using the right technology at the right place at the right time. Ooredoo works to help Al Jazeera access content and share their broadcasts with the world faster than ever.”

Ben Vandenbergh, CEO at Skyline Communications, added that DataMiner serves to support “media and IT services across technology boundaries.”
A world leader in media asset management solutions for over a decade, Vizrt offers an integrated MAM solution for broadcast, mobile and web with its unique “One” workflow approach. This makes Vizrt’s Viz One the MAM of choice for leading broadcasters worldwide. With a modular and scalable architecture, big or small, there is a Viz One configuration for you.

Visit us at www.vizrt.com or call +971 50 552 8337 to learn why Viz One is right for you. See us at Vizrt Days 2015, 11-12 May, Bergen Norway

NDTV strengthens Middle East platform with Amagi

NDTV 24x7 will use Amagi’s Storm regionalisation platform to insert regional ads in the Middle East on the channel’s Asia-pacific satellite feed. The installation is part of NDTV’s efforts to expand “its viewership base amongst the vast expatriate population in the Middle East”, according to Dinesh Singh, CTO of NDTV.

“We were looking for ways to provide local advertisers in the region access to our clearly segmented viewership. After evaluating multiple vendor platforms, Amagi’s ad-insertion solution emerged as the perfect choice, as it allowed us to regionalise our channel in the Middle East without creating new, expensive satellite feeds,” KA Srinivasan, Co-founder of Amagi, added. “Content regionalisation and monetisation have been a growing need for TV networks globally. Amagi’s STORM IRD series integrates ad and content insertion capability with traditional IRD functionality, thereby making it easy for TV networks to regionalise their satellite feeds. Amagi’s STORM platform is deployed across more than 4,000 headends and is a time-tested and reliable solution. We are excited to have India’s leading news network, NDTV, on board as our valued client.”

For NDTV, Amagi inserts content watermarks on advertisements that need to be replaced in the Middle East. These watermarked content assets are transmitted over satellite as per the channel playlist. The local ads that need to be played out only in the Middle East region and associated local playlists are transmitted through a trickle satellite bandwidth to be stored in Amagi’s STORMLite IRDs, deployed at NDTV’s headends in the region. When the STORMLite IRD receives the watermarked content assets, it replaces the content with local ads, which are already stored in the device.

Prashant Barot, Head of Broadcast Operations for NDTV, commented: “For a live news channel such as ours, the Amagi watermark triggers turned out to be a much more reliable content trigger mechanism than SCTE-35 and DTTMF cue-tones. With Amagi, we monetised our channel in the region without affecting our existing workflow and systems.”

Avid to acquire Orad

Avid has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Orad Hi-Tec Systems Ltd. for $4 per share in an all-cash transaction. Avid expects that the combined company will further Avid’s position as the most comprehensive provider of content creation to distribution workflows for broadcast and media customers around the world. Avid also expects the transaction to be accretive on an adjusted EBITDA and cash flow basis, and financed by a new $100 million senior subordinated credit facility.

Arris to buy Pace

American communications equipment manufacturer Arris Group Inc. is in a takeover bid to buy British set-top box maker Pace PLC. The deal worth USD 2.1 billion is expected to close by Q2 2015. Arris will set up a new company in the UK following the deal. Both Arris and Pace make products that support the OTT video market. Arris Chief Executive Bob Stanzione said the combination would be able to better compete in an increasingly competitive market.

Global leaders in Archive & Storage Solutions

SGL has an established history serving the archive needs of broadcast facilities in the Middle East and around the world.

SGL’s FlashNet solution is designed to integrate seamlessly with MAM systems to provide significant workflow efficiencies.

SGL provides adaptable, flexible video archiving solutions that organizations of any size can depend on.
Dubai-based filmmaker Kamil Roxas has been crowned the winner of the Real Dubai Short Film Contest, a joint initiative between the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), Samsung Gulf Electronics and the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), for his film Hello World. Kamil Roxas, who was mentored by director Nayla Al Khaja to develop the film, will be attending the 68th Cannes Film Festival in May as part of the prize. Hello World is a poetic narrative on the rise of a city, its cultural landscape, the people and their stories. The film will be screened at this year’s Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner. “As a filmmaker, your dream is to see your film evoke emotions in people and hopefully inspire them. Kamil will have the amazing opportunity to showcase his film at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival to a very diversified international audience and gain access to many industry professionals,” said Nayla Al Khaja.

Mohammed Njati, mentored by Mohammad Saeed Harib, won second place for his film Within, and Juleus Dmello, mentored by Ali F. Mostafa, came third for Coming Home. This year’s DIFF will also include initiatives within the Dubai Film Market (DFM) to nurture and support filmmakers from the region and further boost the local film community.

French lifestyle channel launches on Arabsat and AsiaSat
French lifestyle channel TV5Monde Style HD will broadcast free-to-air across Asia, the Middle East and Africa via Arabsat and AsiaSat. In addition, pay-TV platform MyHD, also carried by Arabsat, will feature the new channel for its subscribers across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Fox Searchlight acquires Abu Dhabi co-production
Fox Searchlight Pictures has acquired the worldwide rights less France and other French-speaking territories to the documentary He named me Malala, directed by Academy Award-winner Davis Guggenheim. The film which is scheduled to be released this year is produced by Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald under their long-term production partnership with Image Nation Abu Dhabi. Mohamed Al Mubarak, Chairman of Image Nation Abu Dhabi, commented that this partnership “will help ensure the film reaches as many people as possible with its inspiring message”. An intimate portrait of Malala Yousafzai, the film is co-financed by Participant Media.

Fox Searchlight acquires Abu Dhabi co-production
Iraqi Media Network delivers HD channels with Imagine Communications

Iraqi national broadcaster, Iraqi Media Network (IMN), has deployed a master control system from Imagine Communications to deliver its Al Iraqia News and Al Iraqia Turkmen channels. The channel placement and content management solutions enable channel delivery while also boosting workflow efficiency and productivity. The turnkey solutions, implemented in conjunction with local systems integrator AV Solutions, include systems design, engineering planning, product procurement and project management services to complete the installation at IMN’s Baghdad-based headquarters. The expanded capabilities are additions to the multiple channels, including specialist sport, religious and entertainment television services that the network already broadcasts using Imagine Communications equipment.

Zaid Wattar, Managing Director, AV Solutions, said the new systems were recommended based on previous experience.

“The existing systems deployed at IMN were dependable and flexible, and we had no hesitation to recommend extending them to gain the additional functionality and capacity required by the broadcaster. The project also allowed IMN to install the latest systems, master control and playout technology, ensuring the best operational workflows and business efficiency.”

The new installation combines Nexio AMP transmission servers, Nexio-Parad high-performance, scalable, online storage and Platinum signal routing and distribution solutions, all under the control of ADC channel playout automation. The tightly integrated deployment provides a seamless, end-to-end media playout and content management platform with abundant bandwidth and storage support to meet the demanding workflow requirements at IMN. The deployment also provides the agility needed to enable seamless enhancements and expansion for additional services in a dynamic and changing media and business landscape.

The second Children’s International Film Festival (CFF) was hosted at VOX Cinemas across the UAE from 23 April to 2 May. The 18-day festival featured 120 films in 50 languages from 60 countries, as well as 53 films made by school students in the UAE and 67 film submissions from overseas participants.

Commenting on this year’s festival, Deepak Jain, CFFP’s Director, said: “CFFP has gained immense popularity since it was launched last year. It’s a platform that provides the opportunity to young people, pre-teens and teens, to express their creativity through the ever entertaining medium of films.”

With Dubai Films and TV Commission (DFTC) as a strategic partner, CFFP 2015 was also sponsored by Nikon and presented in association with VOX Cinemas.

“We host an open competition, where children over 12 years of age can submit short films through their school. The response last year was very encouraging and we received 80-plus entries from the UAE. This year, we received 160 entries from various UAE schools, out of which we selected 53,” said Jain.

Any film made for children is eligible for the festival. It may or may not have child actors and can be in any genre – animation, stop motion, drama, fantasy, sci-fi and so on. During the festival, special screenings were also held for schools in VOX Cinemas throughout the UAE. “The idea is to drive passion among young filmmakers. We showcased 230 international films in 2014, which this year have gone up to more than 400. I feel filmmaking, as a discipline, teaches you life skills – team work, collaboration, and working in different and difficult situations,” added Jain.

CFFP 2015 teamed up with Nikon Middle East to conduct several hands-on filmmaking workshops in schools across the UAE and trained a total of 2,316 students with Nikon’s photography institute, the Nikon School. The festival’s website provides content guidelines, rules and regulations for entering the competition. “Nikon supported the festival this year with equipment and has provided us with six to seven cameras for filming. They have also given us audio equipment to support production,” said Jain.

This year’s theme focused on the ‘Field of Vision,’ which establishes videography as an amplification of the senses with the camera being a tool. Commenting on the role DFTC played in this year’s edition, Jamal Al Sharif, Chairman of DFTC and Managing Director of Dubai Studios, said: “We are pleased to have partnered with CFFP for its second edition, and it is exciting to see these children producing films with so much passion and dedication. The festival provides an ideal platform for young talent to showcase their creativity and learn first-hand about different aspects of the media industry, allowing them to gain real insight and experience at a young age.”

“DFTC is committed to nurturing talent and supporting the organic growth of the media and production ecosystem here in Dubai, and we welcome and encourage the creation of initiatives and platforms to support the next generation, and foster innovation and creativity.”

In addition to DFTC, the festival was also supported by Dubai Police and Ajman Chamber of Commerce, among other government and private entities.

UAE residents urged to participate in audience measurement project

Twix, the UAE’s national TV audience measurement system, has launched a nation-wide campaign to increase public awareness of the ‘twix project,’ run by Emiratis Media Measurement Company (EMMC). Noura Al Kaabi, Chair of EMMC and CEO of twofour54, commented that an ‘open and transparent audience measurement system is essential to the growth of a healthy media, which is why leading industry players have supported this project under the guidance of the National Council’.

The people meter system used by twix is an industry standard around the world, but the UAE’s system is the first-of-its-kind in the region. Extensive research and cooperation from the public is needed in randomly selected surveys and panels to ensure that information is accurate and impartial. The twix campaign begins on television, radio and later, print and outdoor for the next six months.

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Scottish film scores dual airings in Middle East

The Scottish Film Commission has welcomed the recent public screenings of an acclaimed documentary that explores the region’s historic links with Scotland.

‘Scotland in Arabia’ has been screened at the Dubai International Film Festival and AIR Gallery, Dubai, and the 2014 Emirates Film Festival in Abu Dhabi.

Produced and directed by Scottish filmmaker Donald MacKinnon, ‘Scotland in Arabia’ follows the journey of a modern-day Scottish man, John McCrory, on a tour of the Arabian Peninsula.

The documentary was produced by Screen Scotland, the national development agency for film, television and animation in Scotland, and was funded by the Scottish Enterprise and the British government’s Better Films Fund.

It tells the story of the role the Arab and Scottish monarchies played in the Arab-British relationship, which developed from the 18th to the 20th centuries, including the period when the Arabian Peninsula was part of the British Empire.
Assad Allah Masaoukm recently received the Best Comedy Series award in the Middle East. A cross between Late Night with Jimmy Fallon and Saturday Night Live, this Egyptian comedy, hosted by Akram Hosny is broadcast by MBC Masr (Egypt) on Saturday nights. Hosny plays the fictional character Sayed Abe Haflia in the show.

Each episode of the show combines a topical debate about contemporary culture and politics with comedy sketches and parodies, while also including musical performances and celebrity interviews.

Viewers say this show isn’t just about Akram Hosny’s talent; it comes packed with gifted and funny young comedians, who bring out the comedy in everyday situations in Egypt.

As we go to press, the last eight episodes of Season 2 of Assad Allah Masaoukm are being shot and are being directed by Ramy Rizkallah, who has been a filmmaker for the last 15 years and well-known for directing the Arab version of Ugly Betty (Heba Rayt El Ghannah) for Sony Middle East.

His experience in making comedies was the main reason for being chosen for this job. Rizkallah has been involved in producing the show for MBC Masr since mid last year, when shooting for Season 2 began. A third season is also in the offing although details are still under wraps.

Rizkallah explains that the theme as well as the look and feel of Season 2 is completely different from Season 1, which comprised nine episodes, and went on air in June 2014.

“The show’s first season focused primarily on the Egyptian presidential elections,” he elaborates, adding that he did not direct Season 1.

“For the second season, the producers wanted the show to go beyond that. The idea was to take the focus away from only politics and introduce other subjects as well. I was roped in to refresh the show, while keeping the original comic format intact,” explains the director.

Upon taking over the reins, Rizkallah decided to give the show a cinematic look. One major aspect of this was to review his camera options. Rizkallah chose four Blackmagic Production Camera 4K systems. At the time, renting four cameras with a PL mount was too prohibitive, so he devised a system that would work based on a DLSR rig and a set of Carl Zeiss EF primes. The first ten episodes of Season 2 were filmed using four Canon MKII cameras.

“This resulted in a number of frustrations, not least because of the codec limitations and monitoring problems.
we had on set, so we rented a Blackmagic Production Camera 4K and trialled it on a single segment of the show,” explains Rizkallah. Before switching camera packages, the Assad Allah Masaoukm production team had been limited to monitoring their camera outputs in standard definition (SD) during filming. This was despite producing the footage in HD.

“We produce 45 minutes each week, as a director, taking the right decisions fast is crucial and the monitoring option for the MKIII was not up to that,” explains Rizkallah. Here, Rizkallah adds that he has been a loyal Sony user for as long as he can remember.

“Sony has been my camera of choice for most of my career,” he recalls. “I own an F3 and like working with it. I also worked with DSLRs but realised soon enough that I was not comfortable working with them anymore because of the many limitations in terms of both the monitoring as well as codec limitations. They do offer a reasonable price point though. The BMPCC, however, offers better monitoring options, better codec and 4K, plus I could rent it for the same price as the 5D MKIII so the switch was reasonable. I do miss the low-light capabilities of the 5D MKIII sometimes but in production, one must be willing to make compromises.”

Rizkallah says the Blackmagic Production Camera 4K is suited to shooting an intensive weekly television talk show format. But it’s not a bed of roses when you shoot in 4K, especially in post, Rizkallah cautions. As a result, he doesn’t use the camera unless he knows he has the luxury of time to edit in post. “I only shoot 4K though when

“We discovered that shooting in ProRes took down our conversion time as we edit in Final Cut Pro 7. We were so pleased with the results that for the next episode, we switched to filming the entire production with Blackmagic’s Production Camera 4K”  
Ramy Rizkallah, filmmaker
The prospect of grading the 10-bit rushes was a big draw, explains Rizkallah. Assad Allah Masaoukm is, for the most part, shot and delivered in ProRes 422 HQ, with the production team relying on 4K CinemaDNG RAW as and when they know a shot or segment will require additional work in post.

“We discovered that shooting in ProRes took down our conversion time, as we edit primarily in Final Cut Pro 7. We were so pleased with the results that for the next episode, we switched to filming the entire production with Blackmagic’s Production Camera 4K. What I like most about the Blackmagic camera is the soft, natural looking facial tones you get from the large Super35mm sensor. Based on companions, we were confident, that, with the right lighting, we could achieve really good facial tones,” expresses Rizkallah.

“My Director of Photography (DP), Joseph Louis, prefers indirect lighting, so everything on the show is either filtered or bounced off a white source. This is how we use the light in our show.”

Ramy Rizkallah, filmmaker

I know I need the high dynamic range and have the time to edit it as sometimes I’m only left with one day to edit the episode, which makes 4K a little bit problematic. So I use ProRes 422HQ in 1080p, 80% of the time.”

"Due to time constraints, we knew that shooting might not happen at the most ideal time of day. Knowing this early on, I agreed with our DP to shoot the segment in CinemaDNG RAW. The 12 stops of dynamic range then allowed us to get the highlights down in the grade, using DaVinci Resolve, showing the beautiful sky whilst not losing any of the detail and facial tones in the performer’s face. We only had 48 hours for the edit and digital intermediate (DI), so masking and tracking in post just weren’t an option. We were both impressed by the end result.

“The Production Camera 4K is a camera that geared towards a weekly, intensive production such as ours – it’s a real workhorse, and the 10-bit ProRes format combined with the dynamic range are amazing. We are now more confident about what we are shooting because we get better, more consistent monitoring using a single BNC cable, which is a more production-oriented connection, and allows us to use professional SDI-based monitoring solutions,” explains Ramy.

Each format comes with its own set of challenges, according to the director. The same has been true for Assad Allah Masaoukm. Coming up with new ideas that are funny, current and family-friendly is certainly not a cakewalk. Planning new ideas keeps the team constantly on its toes but so does the sheer volume of content that is produced each week.

“We have an amazing team of writers; trying to come up with new visual ways to tell the story is a huge challenge. Shooting music videos, which is also part of producing Assad Allah Masaoukm every week, is a nightmare. Sometimes, owing to budget and time limitations, we are forced to shoot 50 minutes of the show in one day, which makes us work ridiculous hours. We have a record of working for 25 consecutive hours! Handling those volumes of work is challenging but rewarding, nevertheless.”

Most of this reality show was shot at Cairo City Media, 6th of October district and in MBC’s studios in Egypt. The show has garnered viewer interest not just in Egypt but across the Arab world.

“Egyptian dialect is understood all over the Middle East and the topics that we cover are identifiable across a wide spectrum of viewers. Comedy is a very well received genre and transcends boundaries. Although we are an all-Egyptian team, our brand of comedy is popular across all Arab-speaking audiences. The show’s host, Ahram Honey, is one of the most talented, creative comedians that you can ever meet in your life. We have another season in the works but unfortunately I’m not at liberty to talk about it yet. All I can say is that will be completely different,” promises Rizkallah.

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DIGITAL 9000 – The Wireless Masterpiece.
While major broadcasters in the region are investing heavily in expensive international formats, Khaleeji productions also continue to have a loyal audience. Vibhuti Arora speaks to Omani filmmaker Malik Al Musalmani about his TV production and what Omani filmmakers will be offering to Khaleeji fans.

Comedy is, by far, the most popular genre in Arabic productions. While drama is still going strong, there is an increasing appetite for sitcoms, which are regarded a sure-fire formula for success. Oman-based Acacia Media Production is looking for buyers to broadcast its Khaleeji drama Bank Al Hara (‘Village Bank’) especially this Ramadan. The sitcom, which has been a hit on Oman TV, promises to be just as attractive across the GCC. Written by Malik Al Musalmani, Managing Director of Acacia Media, the story revolves around a fictional bank and the comic situations that transpire when a new boss takes over. The Khaleeji drama is set in Oman and features an all-Omani cast.

“The sitcom features young and upcoming Omani actors. It was a great opportunity for these youngsters to be launched in a TV series. We rehearsed for three months before we began shooting the series. Our director is from Jordan, but has been working on Khaleeji productions,” comments Musalmani. Bank Al Hara is a second script to have made it onto TV. His previous production, co-written with Omani writer Amal Al Sabahi, was a private room for post-production. The footage was edited instantly in order to deliver the episode to the broadcaster the next day. “This is how we work on most of the shows aired during Ramadan,” explains Musalmani.

The shooting and airing of the show was done in quick progression over a period of 30 days, after advance preparation last year. “We kept a private room for post-production. The footage was edited instantly in order to deliver the episode to the broadcaster the next day. “This is how we work on most of the shows aired during Ramadan,” explains Musalmani. The shooting and airing of the show was done in quick progression over a period of 30 days, after advance preparation last year.

“The groundwork on Ramadan shows has to be very strong, with everything from crew to equipment and location done way in advance.” Musalmani is now working on his next drama, and plans to begin filming it this year. “I am now working on another Khaleeji production, and we are presently in the planning stage. I am in the process of selecting the crew and booking them, and finalising the required equipment,” he says. Although a qualified HR professional, Musalmani gave up his day job with the electricity department of Muscat to set up Acacia Media Production, which produces drama, TV commercials and corporate films.

“I began with theatre. I used to act in school, well into my university; that kept my passion for acting alive. My first foray into TV was in 2000. After acting in three shows, I decided to start my own company,” he says. Musalmani believes that local producers should tap into the Khaleeji market. “The strength of Khaleeji productions is their script, which maintains the traditional art of Arabic storytelling. Viewers enjoy the simple and straightforward stories that reflect the cultural nuances of the Arab region and each Gulf country has its own brand of Khaleeji drama. “My scripts offer a window to day-to-day life in Omani towns and cities. Similarly, Kuwaiti writers have their own distinct style, as do Bahrainis. Khaleeji shows are deeply rooted in our traditions and culture. I feel these shows should be preserved, lest they get lost in the growing popularity of international formats,” says Musalmani, adding that while localising international formats and shows is a great way to pull your audience towards TV, there is a demand for indigenous formats too.

“If steered in the right direction, we can gauge the true potential of Khaleeji shows,” he notes. “Audiences crave local shows that are relatable and connect them to their roots. While international formats are widely available, it is these indigenous shows that have a better value proposition, considering there are very few niche production companies that are involved in these specialised shows. I feel production houses should try and use the appeal of Khaleeji shows to their advantage. There is a demand for such productions, which should be encouraged,” concludes Musalmani.

Malik Al Musalmani, filmmaker

“This being a sitcom, we supplemented the existing set-up with 30 pieces of Cool Light Luminos. We also built our own rack with HD Blackmagic video and audio mixers. A 16-channel set-up with four screens was installed,” says Musalmani. Post-production was carried out in the same studio. “We kept a private room for post-production. The footage was edited instantly in order to deliver the episode to the broadcaster the next day. “This is how we work on most of the shows aired during Ramadan,” explains Musalmani.

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Malik Al Musalmani, filmmaker

“Audiences crave local shows that are relatable and connect them to their roots”
Syrian filmmaker Afraa Batous was relieved when she heard her film Skin had been selected by Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) for post-production support this year. In the making since 2012, the additional funding meant her project would finally see the light of day, as well as the joy of recognition.

Skin follows Batous’ personal journey through vivid memories of two of her closest friends, Hussein and Soubhi, young men living in politically and socially trying times. Batous documents their gradual collapse which, as she realises later, reflects her own inner collapse. Through her film, Batous takes the viewer on an intimate journey with three actors, with a mix of emotions – hopes, dreams, loss and survival.

“This film follows the trials and tribulations of three Syrian young people, two of my close friends and me, struggling to find our path, dream, love, present, past and future in war-torn Syria. It’s a metaphor for the current situation in our homeland,” says the filmmaker. Originally from Aleppo in Syria, Batous now lives in Beirut, Lebanon, where the post-production work on her film will be carried out. With the shooting complete, the film now needs editing, sound design, sound mixing, colour correction, translation and subtitling, as well as printing of DVDs and DCP.

“I am now in the process of collecting post-production teamwork and funding, and will start work on it at the beginning of June,” she says. DIFF will be funding the post-production of Batous’ film through its Enjaaz programme. The film was chosen for post-production aid in collaboration with Beirut DC, a Lebanon-based organisation that provides help and support to Arab filmmakers. Skin was selected during the inaugural edition of the Beirut Cinema Platform (BCP), organised by Beirut DC.

“Skin’s journey to DIFF took place via the Beirut DC platform. It was selected to be presented during the Beirut DC platform, which took place in Beirut in March 13 to 15, this year. It was the time when I was planning to apply for the Enjaaz fund,” Batous explains.

The Syrian filmmaker has already finalised the editor and sound designer for her film, and the preliminary discussions of the mood of the film have already begun. She has yet to find the right people to work on the colour correction, sound mixing, translation and DCP (digital cinema packaging).

“We have decided to use Adobe Premier and Avid for post-production. For transitions we will be using After Effects, and for sound, we will be using Cuerbase 7. The final duration of the film is 90 minutes, and this won’t change, based on the script and visual material,” she explains.

Batous worked in theatre for six years before getting into filmmaking, and as a vocalist, has used some of her own musical renditions in Skin.

“Communicating with human beings was always my main area of interest, be it through music, theatre or cinema. Since one of the first and stronger ways of humans’ acquaintance of this world is visual, I began looking at the world through my cinematic camera in 2010, after six years of experience in theatre and music. I thought films would be the next level, and that got me interested in making films. At that time, there was no film school in Syria so I started self-educating. This was in 2010, and when I moved to Lebanon in 2012, I started working in the audiovisual arts foundation, which opened new doors for me. I directed a short documentary film, Akh about the Pianos, in 2013 and then started working on my first feature documentary, Skin,” she recounts.

Batous began working on the idea of Skin in mid-2012, inspired
by Hamletmachine by German playwright Heiner Müller.

“I was working on Hamletmachine in 2010 in Syria, exactly a year before the Syrian revolution began. The play was very similar to what happened in Syria after 2011. I decided to go back to the people who were working with me on the play and watch how they were dealing with the script. We were living the life that we had depicted in the play. I wanted to know what my co-actors felt and how they dealt with it. This film was self-funded during the development stage, then was funded by individuals from different nationalities.”

The film was shot in three different countries – Aleppo in Syria, Guanziatep and Istanbul in Turkey and Beirut in Lebanon – which is why it took more than two years to complete.

“We began shooting in October 2012 and finished in December 2014. The main camera used on this film is a Canon 650D. Since I am one of the three actors in the film, I tried to create an atmosphere of intimacy and friendship in the film. I was trying to make the audience live with us as friends and go through our journey. “I chose the Canon 650D, for sensitivity of its image capture and its flexibility of use. Because I was present behind and in front of the camera, I wanted something easy to use. The scenes had to make the characters comfortable to make the audience go into the very intimate moments of those three friends, who are gradually losing their dream and faith in times of trouble.

“We had to portray our innermost feelings on film, the feelings of people who are losing their homes, their hopes, their beliefs and their relationships. It’s a sad film, and while working on it, I struggled to maintain a cheerful atmosphere on location, as each of us would slip into despondency,” explains the filmmaker.

“The film is shot throughout in warm red light and natural light, and the sounds used are mainly Shotgun and Zoom. This also helped make the actors comfortable in their space and keep the director’s movement smooth. “I have shot the entire film from my point of view, both when I am in front of the camera and behind it,” she adds.

Batous wants to take her film to an international audience.

“It is very important for me that this film reaches both international and local audiences, so once the film is completed, we will start the festival tours from November 2015.” Inspired by the likes of Andrei Tarkovsky, Lars von Trier, Rnir Kusturina, Omar Amiralay, Pedro Almodóvar and Pirjo Honkasalo, Batous prefers to make documentaries because they are like a diary, a way to present her point of view to her audience. Her previous films have been short documentaries; this is her first feature.

“I mainly like to make documentary films, especially the ones that deal with human emotions and stories. I enjoy any story that deals with social issues. I do believe that this stage is producing new styles in the Arab films and it needs time to mature. I think believing in the new generation will help our cinema to mature creatively.”

She believes each film carries a part of the director’s personality and personal journey. “I like my audience to understand me through my films and empathise with the situations that I present in my films. The situations and geographical boundaries may be different but at a human level, individuals relate to the basic human emotions.

“I see Syrian characteristics in my films, but believe that cinema, music and art are ways of communicating with other humans, and wherever I find a human interest story that touches me, I will not hesitate to work on it,” she concludes.

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Afre Batous, filmmaker

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A key theme at Cannes this year was The Millennial Shift, which demonstrated how millennials, meaning people born between the mid-80s and 2000s, have been a huge driving force behind change and development in the entertainment industry – by the way they are producing, watching and interacting with content across all platforms.

National Geographic’s President of Original Programming and Production, Tim Pastore, made this clear when he said: “In a world where 50% of 18-32-year-olds are browsing the internet while viewing television, creating brand addiction is a necessity.” Delivering the first keynote at MIPTV 2015, Pastore pointed out: “If content is king, the brand is the castle. Kings come and go, the castle stays.” He commented that National Geographic, which has been around for the last 127 years, is now looking to reach out to the younger generation while also keeping its focus firmly on its branding strategy. “There’s a hurricane of content crashing into our homes,” Pastore said, adding that the way we knew for the last 40 years “is not one show that we produce and constantly innovating.”

Equally interesting was what former AFP executive Eric Scherer, now director of future media at France Télévisions, had to say at the event. Of the many points he made, the ones that stood out are his prediction that the syntax of news is changing with the new platforms and apps. He cited examples of BBC News’ Instagram micro-video clips, Snapchat’s recently-launched Discover section with reports from Vice and so on. He also categorically stated that he did not see young people coming back to the TV screen – “at least the major TV screen that we knew for the last 40 years”

He added that “the TV industry will have to work on a mobile-first strategy. Not a digital-first strategy, but a mobile-first strategy, because mobile is now the first screens, and it’s taking time away from the TV.”

He concluded by saying that broadcasters will move from a “mass media” approach to “precision media”.

Kodak Media’s Marc-Antoine d’Halluin, who was the former CEO of OSN, was a key figure at MIPTV this year. Speaking about the collaborative process within production and the power of digital, he said: “There is not one show that we produce today where we do not think, together with the broadcaster that commissioned the show, what will be the impact in the digital space.”

He stated that the company used to “pitch to our primary broadcasters in each of the markets. Now at the same time, we can pitch to Netflix and Amazons, so the world is becoming bigger.”

On a completely different note, the interest in kids’ programming at Junior@MIPTV was perfectly summarised by Laurine Garaude, Director of Reed MIDEM’s Television Division: “Children are on the frontline in the mutation affecting traditional TV, and their viewing habits presage the TV landscape of tomorrow, as they travel back and forth across multiple digital experiences, expecting new and original content everywhere they go.”

At MIPTV 2015, the debate about traditional TV and internet content, the power of digital content and how mobile devices were becoming an important part of broadcasting strategy were discussed by several key executives. Yang Woking, EVP and President of Tudou.com, insisted that “new” and ‘traditional’ media entities would live side-by-side: “I don’t believe new media will replace the television stations... they will co-exist,” he commented.

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VICE’s Global Head of Content, Alex Miller, pointed out the only thing that matters is storytelling and good content.”

Sky’s CEO Jeremy Darroch said that there’s never been a better time to be in the industry, with so much choice for content. The three strands of conferences addressing the millenial shift included MIP Digital Fronts, MIP TV and Junior@MIPTV.

News from MIPTV

Big format news announced in Cannes was that FremantleMedia is partnering with Shanghai Media Group, BestTV and China Media Capital, in a joint venture to create and develop formats for the Chinese markets, with FremantleMedia International heading up all international sales outside China.

MIPTV Digital Fronts partner Maker Studios struck a deal that will see Maker Studios programming launch on France’s Canal+ Group’s streaming services.

NBCUniversal International Television Production unveiled a new agreement with TF1 and Germany’s RTL to co-finance, develop and produce three English-language crime and legal series set to go into production in 2016.

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American streaming service Starz Play launched in the Middle East last month, offering a raft of Hollywood premium content to regional customers. BroadcastPro ME speaks to Starz Play Arabia’s President and COO, Maaz Sheikh, to find out what Starz Play brings to the region.

As the regional OTT market continues to evolve, several local and international players are looking at the MENA region as a high-growth territory, with huge potential for monetising content on the go. Last month saw the launch of a new VOD service in the Middle East – Starz Play, a premium online video service offering Hollywood blockbuster movies and TV series exclusively and immediately after they premiere in the US, in addition to a full library of recent TV series, movies and children’s content.

The service marks Starz’ first foray outside the United States, where it has more than 57 million subscribers across its STARZ and ENCORE pay TV services. Maaz Sheikh, heads the region’s operations as COO and President. Sheikh feels the MENA region is ready for greater OTT engagement, and adds that Starz Play, as a service, doesn’t have direct competition in the region.

“We don’t see any of the existing services in the region as competition, because we are defining a new category. We are purely a streaming service focused on premium Hollywood content. We don’t offer DTH or carry linear channels; our expertise lies in VOD on connected devices. It goes without saying that new technology improves customer experience. I am confident that if you offer compelling content with a good quality of experience, it’s bound to be a success.”

This region in its consumption pattern is fragmented because it is very diverse, but Hollywood has universal appeal,” notes Sheikh.

A question typically asked by skeptics is whether consumers will subscribe to streaming services when content can be downloaded for free. Digital piracy is a problem all over the world, and the Middle East is no exception. Despite rampant digital piracy in the Nordic markets, legal streaming services are doing well there. Figures show that widespread BitTorrent addiction has not deterred the growth of legal platforms. Netflix is a successful model that has experienced relentless growth despite various challenges in the digital realm – international paid subscribers totalled 16.8 million at the end of 2014, and the company announced earlier this year that it will increase its presence around the world, seeking to operate in 200 countries by the end of 2016 (Netflix is currently in over 50 countries). Although its international division also admitted to incurring losses of $159.8 million last year.

“One cannot overrule the problem that piracy poses and we can’t possibly convert everyone to use our service. But there is a segment in the market, a large one at that, who is willing to pay for quality of experience. Watching illegally downloaded content is not a great experience with all the malware popping up. You wouldn’t want your children to watch,” says Sheikh.

As the broadband connection in the region is fairly strong, also there is a high concentration of tablets and smartphones. Then the behaviour and demand for content is there. Add to that a tech-savvy population. All of these factors are conducive to the growth of OTT opportunities. I am confident that if you offer compelling content with a good-quality of experience, it’s bound to be a success. “This region in its consumption pattern is fragmented because it is very diverse, but Hollywood has universal appeal,” notes Sheikh.

“Different demographic groups view content differently, but Hollywood content appeals to audiences across the board. Considering the region we are in, Arabic content will be the next logical step for us.”

Maaz Sheikh, President and COO, Starz Play
be exposed to unwanted content. The quality of videos is also not necessarily good," explains Sheikh.

Starz is looking at its first year in the region as a time of learning from customer experience and feedback. Its content has universal appeal, according to Sheikh, who adds that Starz will optimise the service for smaller segments of the market in due course.

The streaming service aims to build a critical mass by creating awareness of legal streaming in the region. Regulations applying to subscription VOD will apply to Starz as well. Starz already has the Middle East rights to content from several Hollywood studios, including Disney, Paramount, Sony, Warner Bros and CBS.

"The rights are negotiated on a market by market basis. We have rights that we have optimised and acquired for this region, and the content is curated and selected based on this region's requirement. Our differentiation is on the programming front and all of it is in HD. Shows from Showtime, a major studio in the US, are showcased exclusively on Starz at the same time as the US. People don't watch episodic content anymore, binge viewing is common behaviour now," he says.

According to Sheikh, the combination of quality HD content, the language option and a raft of exclusive shows makes Starz a compelling value proposition. The pay movies on the platform are released 12-18 months after their theatrical release, following which they go on to free-to-air platforms and subsequently to the library.
Our audiovisual archives – hosted by broadcasters and by cultural institutions – are under a catastrophic threat. If we do nothing, they will disappear; they will be lost forever.

This is not an idle threat posed by an architect and representative of an archive technology company. It is an unavoidable fact, based on the way that our current recorded media are decaying and on the obsolescence of the hardware on which to play them. This is an issue for broadcasters, who will lose the ability to access their archive. Their programme archive will disappear, meaning they will no longer be able to monetise content. The news archive will also disappear, making it impossible to put today’s stories into context.

For historical and cultural bodies, this is an even bigger issue. Preserving and storing a recording is useless if no one can access it. In the Middle East, where many countries are relatively young, a whole nation’s history is on film, audio and video recordings. If they cannot be played, that history is lost, forever.

Media

Why am I sounding this warning? Because both the media themselves and the means to play them are disappearing. Think about how a traditional archive stores its content. Some are on film, perhaps the most robust method. Film has a predicted lifetime of around 100 years or more, which still means some material is already getting close to the deadline. It also needs to be stored in cool conditions and 39-50% humidity. This can be a problem in the Middle East, where temperatures are high and humidity low.

Audio and video recordings on tape can only be expected to have a life of somewhere between 20 and 40 years. Old tapes begin to shed oxide – the particles, which actually hold the magnetic recording. Many archives will still have 1” and 2” video recordings, dating back half a century. A skilled operator can bake these tapes so that you can get one last playback, but just lacing them up on a machine – assuming you can find one – is likely to destroy the original recording forever. One chance to get it right.

Otherwise, according to Richard Wright of the Presto Centre, an international centre which guides members on audiovisual archive preservation: “75% of the video in Europe will be lost by 2023 when video digitisation will simply have ceased to be. So that it’s going, going, gone for analogue by 2023.”

“A skilled operator can bake these tapes so that you can get one last playback, but just lacing them up on a machine – assuming you can find one – is likely to destroy the original recording forever.”

Michel Merten, CEO, Memnon Archiving Services

Hardware

This is an area in which technological obsolescence has always advanced, and is now galloping forward. The more we innovate around digital storage, the faster we lose older platforms. There are millions of 78rpm audio recordings which have never been digitised. But, as far as I am aware, there are only a few manufacturers of 78rpm needles in the world. It is a small business, and should it die, that may be the end of those recordings forever.

Our research shows that there are probably hundreds of thousands of 2” video tape recordings in the Middle East alone, as part of that cultural heritage of nations which have grown up in the television era. But there is only one manufacturer of heads for quad video recorders. Those heads may only last for a few hundred hours, so the demand is high.

Even Digital Betacam, which was the workhorse for broadcasters up until very recently and is still widely used in some parts of the world, is coming to the end of its life. Sony has announced that the product line will be discontinued in 2015, with spare parts guaranteed only until 2044.

As the hardware disappears, so too do the skills needed to operate and maintain the equipment. Much of this technology was developed before the computer age, and certainly before the internet age: you cannot go online and just download a PDF of the manual for a lot of the old equipment.

Some companies recognise this, and as part of their operations they seek to acquire not just equipment but skills as well. These skills are then passed on through a scheme, which trains the next generation of any other companies that are doing this. This aspect is essential to digitisation these days.

Scale

It is hard to get a real sense of the scale of this problem. I have already said that I think there are hundreds of thousands of 2” tapes in the Middle East alone. In the last couple of years, we have digitised and archived 200,000 hours of DAT audio for EBC in Denmark, 70,000 hours of video for Swiss television and 70,000 hours, dating back to 1” tape, of audio for RTBF in Belgium. Indiana University in the USA has recently announced a partnership with Memnon to digitise over 300,000 objects. We are also working on probably the largest archive protection and preservation project in the Middle East. According to UNESCO, 200 million hours of audiovisual programmes are at immediate danger. That is a whole chapter of our history, as well as a practical resource and source of revenue for broadcasters and production companies.

I noted earlier that Richard Wright...
PROaRchive at the Presto Centre puts a date of 2023 as the end point. Michael Casey of Indiana University, speaking at a conference in 2013, said: “How much time do we have? 10 to 15 years.” So it might be 2023, or it might as well be 2028. Based on work done in conjunction with archive institutions, Chris Lacnak of consultancy AVPreserve has developed a new business approach to archive preservation, which he calls the ‘cost of inaction’. His proposal is that if you have an archive you have already invested in it, if only by providing the storage facilities. If, around 10 years from now, that archive is inaccessible then the investment must be written off, which could look worse on the balance sheet than starting a digitisation process.

Lacnak developed a mathematical model to calculate the cost of inaction, which he generously makes freely available. It is at coi.avpreserve.com. The business case for preservation will look strong, even ignoring the cultural and commercial drivers to make content widely available.

So if we have around 10 years to complete the digitisation and your archive currently has 100,000 items of audio, video and film content, you should plan for a minimum of 10,000 digitisations a year. If the average duration is 30 minutes, that is around 100 hours of content a week. Remember that there is no point in just digitising something. First, this may be your only chance to make a final transfer, so you should ensure you get the best possible quality from the original. This might include cleaning film and discs, and pre-treating tapes. Once digitised, you can complete the restoration at a later date. Second, you have to add the metadata that makes the digitised version accessible. For a cultural archive, this means adding the historical information that will help a wide range of users find and understand the content. For a broadcast archive, it includes not just descriptive data but business issues like intellectual property rights to maximise the future revenue from it.

Partners
For most organisations, the first step is to find a partner with the skills, experience and – most importantly – the technology to take the broad spectrum of formats in your archive and create a coherent, high-quality digital library. The digitisation service is carried out either on the client’s premises or the digitisation company’s facility, based on the requirements of the project. Your archive can and should be digitised and preserved. Action must be taken now. In just 10 years or so, it may be impossible, or at the very least unaffordably expensive, to find the facilities and equipment to do it. At that point, the archive will be lost, and broadcast assets and cultural heritage will disappear forever.

“75% of the video in Europe will be lost by 2023 when video digitisation will simply have ceased to be. So that’s it: going, going, gone for analogue by 2023”

Richard Wright, Presto Centre
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store rooms, but have very little idea of how to use it going forward, let alone monetising it. This is where monetising history becomes the key driver of digitisation. According to a survey conducted by Crowdtap in 2014, millennials spend an average of 17.8 hours a day with different types of media. In the wake of growing competition, broadcasters and media organisations today are sparing no effort to improve content quality, which leaves them with insufficient resources and more time to digress and look at the digitisation of archival video footage, to counter media degradation and obsolescence. This is where outsourcing comes in as a boon. As the media ecosystem in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region becomes more evolved, digitisation is increasingly becoming a priority for broadcasters and content owners. However, the challenge lies elsewhere. Given the socio-cultural sensitivities in the region, legacy video content often demands extra security, delicate handling and a commitment to privacy. That makes digitisation a more specialised and challenging task. Digitisation is not just about converting the content from analogue to digital. It involves a complex workflow right from assessment, cleaning, meta-tagging, archival and distribution. It is a time-consuming and resource-intensive process that can only be undertaken by specialists. To give an idea, digitising content stored on some obsolete media formats might take twice as long as the actual duration of the data. It is an established fact that outsourcing digitisation as a process leads to improved productivity, faster turnaround time and reduced overall costs. It helps content owners gain competitive advantage by better monetising it. The real challenge for content owners, however, comes from three questions: where, when and how does one digitise? Broadly, there are three types of engagement models for digitisation: off-site, on-site and managed services.

Off-site digitisation

Off-site digitisation is carried out at a remote location. It is best suited to small organisations looking at offloading a portion of their content or a part of their digitisation workflow while getting the specialists to handle the process at a fraction of the cost. The model works well for a temporary or ad hoc requirement, as cost of staff, training, equipment and so on is higher if digitisation is handled in-house.

On-site digitisation

For broadcasters and media companies focused on producing content 24/7, on-site digitisation is a great option. In this case, digitisation is undertaken at the client’s premises. Staff, operations, technical support and training are all outsourced while the client provides the infrastructure and equipment and manages the overall project. This model is recommended for small-sized to large media companies dealing with large volumes of content and risk or varied media formats, who want to keep management and control with themselves for certain business reasons.

“The decision to digitise is driven by the volume and condition of the legacy content, its historic value, the required infrastructure, the technical expertise and the costs involved”

Sanjay Salil, Managing Director, MediaGuru Consultants

Managed services

This is an outsourcing model involving the right mix of both on-site and off-site digitisation services. It is more of an SLA-based model, where the third party manages all aspects of digitisation – assessment, consulting, infrastructure, equipment, talent sourcing, operations, training and technical support. The managed services model is suitable for large organisations producing or possessing a lot of content. It fits the bill when a company has very limited interest or expertise in digitisation and wants content to be digitised in a fixed period. There may not be a formula to decide the best way. Most often, a content owner’s strategic objectives, sensitivities and concerns end up directing them to the model of their choice, subject to the cost factors that suit their budgets. Since most content owners and broadcasters in the MENA region are much more strategic than price-sensitive in their approach, the decision to digitise is driven by the volume and condition of the legacy content, its historic value, the required infrastructure, the technical expertise and the costs involved. This trend is bound to proliferate, as more and more smartphones and tablets crowd the MENA market and digitisation becomes a compulsion to preserve history. After all, the past needs to be gifted to our future!
Modern MAM systems are capable of simplifying the production environment and adapting workflows to optimise production.

Integrated and streamlined tools allow asset production and delivery to any platform in one workflow, enabling content packaging and delivery that is dramatically more efficient than traditional workflows. Extensive vendor experience – from high-profile live entertainment events to major sporting events like the Olympic Games and the World Cup as well as live newscasts – provides a unique understanding of the requirements for these fast-paced productions. Field-tested technology helps customers quickly find content stored on servers and sends it to the right desktop for further processing (editing in an NLE, or graphics for promos). The underlying infrastructure should be able to manage all types of media during production – including for ingest, cataloguing, archiving and editing.

Metadata flow

The effective management of metadata flow through the system can greatly determine how efficiently and quickly assets can be used and repurposed across the production chain. The workflow saves tremendous space by storing only original files rather than clogging servers with edited content, and saves time by performing the conforming process live with automatic multi-platform distribution. Enriching assets with metadata such as titles, descriptions, categories, markers, keywords, annotations and scene descriptions makes it easier for users to locate and retrieve the right media. File movements, housekeeping and graphics can and should be automated to ease metadata.

To be most beneficial, the metadata must only contain the relevant information that will streamline the production. And once a file is uploaded – sometimes even before a file is fully uploaded – into the server, all metadata is instantly searchable by the entire team. New metadata and changes made are instantly updated in all applications managed by the system. Importing assets with metadata and enriching it through the life cycle of the asset adds value to the media asset.

Designed for the future

It’s no secret that broadcasters will need to produce 4K content to keep market share and a similar level of existing revenues. The level of preparation that broadcasters are undertaking for 4K is substantially higher than it was for HD. From a physical point of view, the bandwidth that 4K consumes and the storage space it takes up is much bigger. Broadcasters will need more storage and increased network capacity to incorporate new codecs to handle 4K. The job of the MAM system is to manage all of these changes. The introduction of 4K in a MAM system should not change basic services such as file management, load balancing, partial retrieval and file movement.

A MAM system is an investment well into the future of any organisation. The system architecture must be able to address the present and the future needs of any organisation both in terms of the technology implementation as well as the scalability for future upgrades and integrations. It is difficult to envisage a future need well beyond five years due to the rapid development in software technologies. The design should be flexible and modular, and built for upgrading based on workflow modifications with little or no disruptions in the process.

Extensive APIs

An extensive set of public APIs and excellent documentation is a vital requirement from a good MAM solution. This allows customers to build their own bespoke applications and user interfaces that allow a tighter integration and workflow solution that best fits their needs. Good APIs also protect against product and technology obsolescence and 5-year investments by allowing for independent development and support for future integrations.

Commercial and other considerations

The total cost of ownership needs to be evaluated when deploying MAM. Cost of ownership is to be considered for terms for a number of years and includes upfront costs, yearly support costs and development costs in tangible terms. It also needs to consider other important aspects such as the reliability of the vendor and SI, their leadership status, financial health, ownership of content, clients and references and track record for innovation. Local support, skills and knowledge are important to consider as well.

Phased implementation

MAM projects are complex. A good project strategy should avoid a comprehensive, one-stretch implementation but should be considered in manageable and distinct phases and spread over time, allowing each phase to be completed and tested. The subsequent phases can then be reviewed and aligned to the workflow as required.

Considering the plethora of sources for media assets and the number of platforms in which these assets need to be used, the implementation of an effective media asset management (MAM) platform that benefits the entire chain of production has become critical. Today’s best MAM systems are capable of simplifying the production environment and adapting workflows, while providing the related tools needed to optimise the production of the many versions and variants an asset needs to be delivered to. Production teams need a comprehensive collaborative platform, with a common user interface, that manages all content in a central repository while producing video files for multiple platforms. Access to tools and assets must be regulated – not only for security, but also for usability. Permissions for accessing and editing projects need to be customised to specific team members or open for everyone to collaborate.

Storage & Database

Availability of assets is important and to be able to find these easily and quickly when needed is the key to efficient media production, which requires easy access to the right assets at the right time. For this to happen, numerous production staff must be able to access a reliable central repository where assets are stored, searched for and retrieved along with a cutting-edge file management system. Users must be able to access this content simultaneously. In the past, this central storage was located on site within the broadcaster’s facility. Today, the same capability can be expanded into the cloud, enabling professionals located anywhere in the world to access files and collaborate in real time. Indeed, cloud-based storage will be key to keeping up with the ever-increasing demand for more content that needs to be accessed and shared across multiple sites.
Distributor UBMS recently hosted an ARRI lighting workshop, conducted by Dennis Jackstien, a specialist in light technology. Jackstien has extensive experience working with ARRI. The key focus of the training session was broadcast-quality lighting, with a focus on modern LED technology to provide participants with a practical overview of lighting technologies.

The workshop brought together 18 professionals from production houses, studios and broadcast entities. Jackstien gave a detailed introduction to mainstream lighting technologies, especially HMI discharge and LED, and presented the pros and cons of the most common fixture types, such as Fresnel, open face, PARs and ARRIMAX. The workshop also covered colourimetry and colour quality.

“The objective of our training session was to educate and inform the users about the latest developments in lighting technology,” commented Jackstien. “I explained the features of some of ARRI’s flagship products, such as the ARRIMAX, to give them an idea of how these lights can improve the quality of images. The session was very interactive, with a lot of questions from the audience. I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

The workshop featured theoretical and practical sessions. The first half of the full-day workshop focused on the theory of lighting and future technologies, while the second half consisted of hands-on training, giving attendees the opportunity to operate the latest ARRI releases. Peter Kynakis, Head of Marketing at UBMS, commented: “This is the first time that ARRI is conducting a lighting training workshop in the region, and we are very proud to be associated with it. It’s a free-of-charge workshop, which we are providing to our customers as an added value service. We were over-booked for this particular session and chose the attendees on a first-come, first-served basis.”

Irfan Ali Shah, Media and Film Director at NSV Media, who attended the training session, said: “It was quite technical, but a good learning experience. I was keen on the hands-on training. I personally feel that LED will become mainstream in due course. Some of the features of LEDs need further research, especially their colour saturation. Tungsten, by far, deliver the best colour saturation.”

Charbel Reaidy, Montage TV Productions

Mohamed Kashif Joosab, Managing Director, Light House Studio

“For me, it was an opportunity to learn from a lighting engineer who has worked with ARRI for many years. I have been using ARRI – HMI and tungsten lights. We have to move to LED at some point because of its benefits. Having said that, these are two different lighting systems; one doesn’t replace the other but complements it.”

Charbel Reaidy, Montage TV Productions

“I plan to make the first completely LED studio, a first in the region. Presently, we use traditional lights like tungsten and HMIs in our studios. The focus of this workshop was LEDs and new technology. I wanted to learn more about the differentiating features of the high-end lights and the regular brands, and I did get the answers to most of my questions”

Mohamed Kashif Joosab, Managing Director, Light House Studio

“My objective was to have a better product knowledge. I am not a lighting specialist, but workshops like these help me build my knowledge of the products in the market. I am glad UBMS has taken this initiative to educate the market”

Adnan Peter Almaliki, Executive Producer and Partner at Flicker Show
The manifestations of megatrends such as IoT, mobility, cloud, social, and big data will be brought to life at CommunicAsia2015, EnterpriseIT2015 and BroadcastAsia2015 from 2 – 5 June 2015, at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

By 2018, 100 million 4K TVs are expected to be sold each year, with ownership exceeding 20% in leading markets, Futuresource Consulting has declared. The falling cost of 4K TV sets and smaller screen sizes will also drive 4K adoption. This is despite the lack of standards and equipment to transmit 4K content over-the-air or via other media. Broadcasters and content providers are increasingly using 4K cameras, decoders and workflow to future proof their programming, ensuring that they are ready for the next change in the broadcasting industry.

Mobile explosion has given rise to dramatic changes in the consumption of technology, data and applications – the hyper-connected consumer and workforce and ease of connectivity proliferated possibilities and realities of Internet of Things (IoT). Forecasted to reach US$59 billion by 2020, Asia Pacific’s total IoT spending points to the opportunities in the areas of digitised landscape monetisation, wearable technology enablement, big data and analytics and even the IT infrastructures in place for greater agility, flexibility and scalability required for business and national growth.

BroadcastAsia 2015 will look more closely at multiscreen consumption of content and how it is affecting traditional models. The event will also examine the changing behaviour of viewers in the hyper-connected world.

The delivery of content, with high-definition and 3D now made readily available in the comfort of consumers’ homes, the TV experience has become critical for the broadcasting industry.

BroadcastAsia2015 International Conference
Broadcasting technologies and innovations impacting on consumers’ experience of visual, audio and more.

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Visitors can expect to see developments in broadcast technologies and innovative solutions addressing consumer experiences of visual, audio and more.

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Visitors can expect to see developments in broadcast technologies and innovative solutions addressing consumer experiences of visual, audio and more.
Asia’s largest and truly international exhibition for the broadcasting and film industry.

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Get hands-on with the latest equipment, cameras, vision and many more at the exhibition.

Hear from leading international experts at BroadcastAsia2015 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE and gain insights into “Delivering Exponential Content Everywhere”.

Check out the best solutions in the non-linear broadcasting value chain at the Production Hub @ Roselle Room.

Professional Audio Technology 2015
The Professional Audio Technology zone will showcase latest technologies and expertise on pro audio with exhibitors including AES, CAD, Digigram, Lawes, Mee, Pericord, Sennheiser, Stagelae, Teles Alliance, Winnmedia, Wohler, Xon and Yamaha more.

Watch out for...
TV Everywhere Zone (NEW)
From smartphones, tablets or Smart TV, media and TV consumption are now everywhere. This year’s new TV Everywhere Zone promises an experiential showcase of solutions from automation, monetisation, network & device management, OTT, security, storage and more. Exhibitors include major players from across the world and region, such as Accedo, ALi Corp, Arris, Aveco, Brightcove, Ericsson, Limelight, MarvisTech, Quick Play, Rovi, Seachange and Viment among others.

Key topics
• Sustaining radio broadcasting
• Achieving reach, resonance and engagement
• Best practices in delivering an immersive TV experience
• Leverage cloud-based TV technologies and network virtualisation to drive efficiencies
• Digital broadcasting – Standards, technologies and implementation challenges
• Best practices in delivering an immersive TV experience
• Leverage automation technologies to drive agility, scalability and modularity in your workflow
• Sustaining radio broadcasting in an online age

Conference expects to convene 700+ key industry stakeholders. The conferences will discuss topical issues surrounding growing your OTT service in a fragmented Asian market, immersive TV technologies, second screen & social TV monetisation strategies, applying viewer data analytics, digital broadcast solutions and implementation challenges, cloud distribution, workflow management & automation, radio broadcasting, and more.

The show will showcase high level case studies from industry influencers and trail-blazers from Telkom Malaya, HOOQ, Philips Long Distance Telephone, FOX International Channels, ABS-CBN, PT Telekomunikasi, SAPRA Radio, TV5 Philippines, Twitter, and more. Gain insights into the latest television technologies, and practical advice on how to expand business and revenue in Asia’s increasingly competitive broadcasting industry.

Visit www.Broadcast-Asia.com for the latest event updates and more information.
NAB 2015 WRAP-UP

The NAB Show 2015 that wrapped up last month brought a slew of new launches to the broadcast market. Here are some snapshots from the show and our pick of the hottest new products.
URSA goes Mini

The Blackmagic URSA Mini is a lightweight miniaturised Ursa featuring a 4.6K Super 35 image sensor with global shutter and a 15 steps of dynamic range. The super compact and lightweight design is balanced for handheld use as well as for all-day shooting. That means you get a handheld camera with higher resolution and better dynamic range than most Super 35mm film. URSA Mini shoots up to 60 frames per second, has a super bright five-inch foldout viewfinder, dual SDI and Profoto and more. You can select from four models of URSA Mini with 4.6k or 4K image sensors and either EF or PL lens mounts.

www.broadcastprome.com

Grass Valley begins to Focus

Grass Valley has introduced a new camera for broadcasters seeking a cost-effective alternative to the LDX series. The Focus 70 Line camera represents a new entry level into the Grass Valley camera line for less demanding applications. Consisting of two different single HD format camera heads, with 720p/1080i% and 720p/50/59.94 support, the camera offers a feature-set optimised for many of the typical live studio and field applications, in combination with an easy-to-operate control solution. It is based on the LDX series technology, using the same level of quality for the optical blocks, mechanics and three fully digital Xensium-FT CMOS imagers with global shutter.

Grass Valley has developed a line of dedicated Focus transmission solutions to support the new product.

www.grassvalley.com

Exterity’s new multicast gateway

Exterity has announced the launch of its AvediaStream Origin. The server provides a gateway between multicast IPTV distribution and Over-The-Top (OTT) streaming protocols to enable content delivery to mobile devices, internet-connected devices and a wider range of network-connected devices such as smart TVs and corporate thin-client systems. The server of OTT services has increased the number of protocols that professional IP video systems need to support to distribute content to multiple devices in real-time. AvediaStream Origin Server enables proficient installations and enterprise IP video system administrators to deploy a single solution to deliver IPTV and OTT streams to any device over WAN, Wi-Fi and the internet.

www.exterity.com

FOR-A switches to MFR-3000

FOR-A has introduced its new routing switcher, the MF-3000 3G/HD/SDI&ASI unit. The 4RU MFR-3000 offers a midsize system where variable input/output capabilities and mixed signal formats are used. Designed for mission-critical broadcast facilities, the MFR-3000 routing switcher can be expanded by eight inputs or outputs modules, up to a maximum of 64 input/64 output matrix. Operators can also use up to four inputs and four outputs for 8K facilities, as well as 16 inputs and 16 outputs at 4K, making it suitable for any growing facility. The unit offers auto signal detection and provides standard support for 3G-SDI, HD-SDI, SD-SDI and ASI input and output. FOR-A’s MFR-3000 offers redundancy to ensure continuous operation.

www.for-a.com

Vislink and GoPro become heroes

Vislink in conjunction with GoPro, has launched HERO2Cast, a miniature transmitter that allows GoPro HERO2Black and HERO4 cameras to broadcast live, HD wireless video for the first time. The HERO2Cast lets broadcasters deliver new perspectives from live events. The range of new camera positions that can be adopted, with GoPro cameras that feature Vislink’s live HD wireless transmitter, promises the viewer many new live event experiences. Designed with flexibility in mind, the HERO2Cast is specifically tailored to be compatible with existing GoPro equipment and can be positioned in multiple locations.


Ncam’s reality show

New features for broadcast tool Ncam Live and movie visualisation system Ncam Reality were shown in live demonstrations on the FilmLight booth, with the Red camera on the Vizrt booth and at Brainstorm at NAB. Ncam Live is designed for broadcast applications, such as immersive graphics and virtual environments. It provides a real-time stream of camera metadata in a standard format, which can be used by existing graphics engines such as Brainstorm and Vizrt, ensuring a seamless blend with very low latency. At the heart of the Ncam solution is its ability to determine precise position and orientation, even when the camera is moving freely.

www.ncam-tech.com

Zylight goes more compact

Zylight has unveiled the F8-200 LED Fresnel. Designed to be compact for field use, the new addition to the F8 product line delivers the brightness of a 2,000-watt Tungsten or 400-watt HMI fixture, but can be powered by AC or two 14.4V standard D-loc Mount or V-Mount batteries. Built on the same chassis as the FR-100, the FR-200 includes an active cooling system, collapses to less than five inches thick for easy transport and is water-resistant (IP54) for use in challenging conditions. It also maintains many of the features of the original FR-100 and Zylight’s patented focusing system. It has a high CRI (colour rendering index) as well as a high TLCI (television lighting consistency index), while an eight-inch SCHOTT glass lens maintains single-shadow traditional Fresnel beam shaping.

www.zylight.com

Ross expands with Carbonite Black

Carbonite Black brings expanded I/O and ME count to the Carbonite series, with a new control panel, three full MEs, 36 inputs and 22 outputs – plus all of the superior features found in other Carbonite models such as MiniMEs, MultiScreen, 3G and UHD (4K) format support. The 2RU Carbonite Black frame will be available with two or three MEs, and will accept all current signal formats as standard – including 3G/1080P, 50/59.94 and UHD quad link with no reduction of resources whatsoever processing these higher data rates. With three MEs and four MiniMEs, this switcher effectively has seven fully available MEs and a total of 22 keyers.

www.rossvideo.com

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Sony’s next generation of HDC series camera technology provides the ability to use the high magnification wide zoom range lenses, currently employed by HD 2/3-inch systems, while maintaining an adequate depth of field to properly show all the action in live event broadcasting.

The new HDC-4300 is aimed to be the world’s first camera to use three 2/3-inch 4K image sensors. It supports the same B4-mount lenses as well as the same control surfaces as Sony’s HDC-2000 series cameras. The existing HLOA-1500 series, control and shading systems, viewfinders and master set-up units are all interchangeable between the HD and 4K systems. Directors and operators can keep their approach to live events while using familiar camera technology.

Sony HDC-4300 widens view

AJA Video Systems has announced a host of new mini-converters, portable devices that harness AJA’s technology for more flexible and extensible digital video workflows. The newly announced FIDO-4T-ST and FIDO-4R-ST enable quad-channel SDI to ST fibre and ST fibre to SDI, enabling fibre transmission of 4K and Ultra HD signals, and 4K-4K converts Ultra HD/HD HDMI to 6x 3G-SDI, FIDO-4T-ST and FIDO-4R-ST are quad-channel 3G-SDI to ST fibre and ST fibre to 3G-SDI mini-converters carrying up to 4x 3G-SDI signals on a single converter, with the ability to send signals from a 4K/HD/SD source, such as from the CION camera, up to 10km. The quad-signal path also allows multiple HD signals to be carried across long distances.

AJA goes compact with FIDO

Riedel Communications has launched MicroN, an 80G media distribution network device for the company’s MediorNet line of media transport and management solutions. Working seamlessly with the MediorNet MetroN core fibre router, MicroN is a high-density signal interface with a complete array of audio, video and data inputs and outputs, including 24 SDI/HD/SDI-SDI, two MADI optical digital audio ports, a Gigabit Ethernet port, two sync reference I/Os and eight 10G SFP+ high-speed ports. MicroN is available as a fully networked MediorNet device, as well as in a point-to-point edition at a very competitive price point. The RSP-2016 Smartpanel itself includes three high-resolution, multitouch colour displays; premium-quality stereo audio; a multilingual character set; and standard matrix connectivity via RAVENNA/AES67 or AIB in just 1RU. The units are easily software upgradable should requirements change. These features make the Smartpanel a powerful user interface that can be further expanded through the use of apps.

Riedel connects with MicroN 80G

Vidcheck launched the Vidcheck Advanced Media Player (Vamp) at NAB.
Vamp is a full media player designed specifically for quality control, DCI review of media files. It is available as an add-on feature to the company’s Vidchecker and Vamp range of automated quality control products. Vamp can play video and audio files on a PC and output them on SDI. The results of automated QC processes appear directly in timeline displays. As well as playing out the video and audio, Vamp’s main features include timeline display of video keyframes and all audio tracks; location and description details of all alerts from Vidchecker/ Vamp auto QC; file metadata display; and file info data.

Vidcheck Vamps it up at NAB 2015
In today’s media industry, the only constant is change. The volume and variety of media is increasing as consumers become more tech-savvy and develop new mobile media-viewing practices. Just as the new generation of mobile viewing devices is transforming consumer expectations, so too is new technology revolutionising content creation and programme production workflows. In news, we are seeing more cameras and more shots. With the evolution of smartphones, every mobile phone is a news camera. News broadcasters must develop ways of accessing this new camera resource and integrating it within their workflows in ways that help them break the news story first and remain ahead of the field.

In TV show production, we see a new generation of low-cost solid-state cameras. As a direct result of this shooting, ratios are going crazy – 1000:1 is not uncommon on reality shows. The $64 million question is: how do programme producers use this vast source of material and still maintain operating efficiency?

The challenges don’t stop in programme production. The days of linear broadcast is long gone – publishing now means pushing finished media to multiple formats and platforms. SD, HD, broadcast, cable, IPTV, websites, OTT – up to 20-30 versions of the same content is often needed. So what impact is technology having on this developing scenario? We can see that the proliferation of cameras and viewing devices is driving these changes in one area, while a growing trend of distribution via IP networks is driving it in another.

Today, tape and linear video is no longer the bare technology for distribution. Instead, broadcasters need to select the most appropriate technology to respond to changing demands. And at the same time, they need to create opportunities to increase new revenue generation.

While baseband video will be with us for some time, the strong trend today is towards intelligent automated file-based workflows, covering all processes from ingest through production, transcoding, packaging and publishing. Meet this challenge with fit-for-purpose technology and broadcasters find themselves in a technical environment where increased production capacity and flexibility are possible without increases in labour costs.

In a file-based workflow, improvements in encoding algorithms equate to better image quality at lower bit rates, which, in turn, mean improved viewer retention and lower data distribution costs. All of this means that one modern media processing server can deliver as much capacity as five to ten conventional servers, which results in massive savings in rack space, power and air-conditioning. What really gets broadcasters excited is brand-new opportunities to generate revenue streams. One new technology that provides this is “Time Adjustment”, which enables re-timing of file-based content.

George Boath is VP International Sales, Enterprise Products at Telestream.

“Time Adjustment in broadcast”

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Sony PMW-F5S was one of the first Cinema 4K digital cinema cameras Advanced Media sold back in 2013 which was very popular amongst producers, production and rental houses in the region, one of the biggest dealership agreements for Advanced Media, and recently AM has become the first official distributor for RED.

#iAMexpanding

cam·e·ra·man /’kæmərəmən/ n plural camera men /’mɛn/ [C] someone who operates a camera for films or television. Do not confuse with photographer (= person who takes still photographs).