Nadine Labaki’s directorial venture defies traditional filmmaking to spotlight refugee crisis
Piracy is terrorising our industry, and our broadcasters are having to stand by and watch helplessly as the premium content they bought with the rights to is stolen right before their eyes. This is only one of the many scenarios in which piracy has threatened bottom lines in MENA to such a level that it has now shaken the very foundations of our sector’s economy.

It is no longer just a little pest that can be pif-paffed to death, it has slowly crept into the cracks and crevices of our system like a disease that has spiralled out of control, and is threatening to put an entire industry out of action unless we take immediate steps to eradicate it. The time for action and collaboration is now. This is why the MENA Anti-Piracy Conference, brought to you by BroadcastPro ME, is significant. Our aim is to bring all the stakeholders in the chain together to discuss how they can potentially crack the whip in unison, work with regulators and government authorities, so that pirates will never dare raise their heads again.

With regulators and government authorities working in tandem, not permitting on-site registration, however, online registration at www.antipiracyconference.com is mandatory. New regulations do not permit on-site registration. But the conference is not until later this month. We have just bid goodbye to the 2019 edition of CABSAT, and NAB is around the corner with promises of several new launches.

We will be reporting from the thick of all that action in Las Vegas.

In the meantime, I also had the pleasure of meeting film director Nadine Labaki and her husband, Khaled Mouzanar, who shot to fame when their film Capernaum was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category. Their story is significant. Their film Capernaum promises of several new launches. Nadine Labaki, CABSAT, NAB and the Anti-Piracy Conference – there’s a lot in store this month.

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FUJINON 4K Lens Lineup

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AVAILABILITY LATE 2018

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UA46x13.5

UA13x4.5

UA22x8

UA24x7.8

UA27x6.5

UA107x8.4

UA1x5.5

UA26x10.5

UA46x9.5

UA46x13.5

Available Fall 2018
Rohde & Schwarz to develop transmission network in Egypt

The Egyptian National Media Authority (ENMA) has signed up with Rohde & Schwarz to develop its transmission infrastructure ahead of the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, to be held from June 21 to July 19.

The agreement will see Rohde & Schwarz provide 2KW transmitters to ENMA and set up the whole RF chain, including combiners, RF feeders, antennas and electrical subsystems. The equipment will include a THU9evo DVB-T2 transmitter, a Kathrein antenna, Spinner coaxial equipment and RFS for the main feeder.

Rommer Balanon, Bid Manager, Rohde & Schwarz Middle East & Africa, said: “The transmitters will be deployed at nine sites while antennas will be deployed at seven sites. This project will multiply later on, as this is just the beginning of the DVB-T2 network ENMA wants to build in Egypt.”

Qvest Media to build Asharq media centre in Dubai

Qvest Media has secured the contract to build the required systems for a multi-platform news and media centre owned by Asharq News Services Limited in the heart of Dubai’s financial district. This will lead Bloomberg Asharq to deliver news across online, social, TV and radio services to the Arabic-speaking population globally. This project is reportedly the first in MENA to use IP technology throughout its entire media infrastructure.

Following the technology analysis and agreement on the system design, Qvest Media is now starting the process of integrating the media and IT systems. The technological design is based on a sophisticated architecture. A full-IP network, compliant with SMPTE ST 2110, ensures a high level of standardization and connectivity between the systems, making infrastructural technology changes, such as the switch from full HD to 4K production and distribution, possible at any time.

“We are delighted that we have been able to impress Asharq News Services Ltd with our expertise in the digital transformation of the media sector,” said Philipp Glänzel, Principal at Qvest Media.

MBC Group scoops exclusive MENA rights to FIA Formula One

MBC Group has won the exclusive rights to broadcast the FIA Formula One World Championship from 2019 to 2023. This marks the return of the world’s biggest motorsport event to a free-to-air network in the MENA region. The FIA Formula One World Championship aired on MBC Action last month, with the channel covering all stages of each event, including training sessions, qualifiers and Grand Prix day. As part of MBC Group’s agreement with FIA (Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile), MBC Action’s production team has ensured special technical and logistical arrangements to provide the best live broadcast experience for Formula One fans across the region.

Avid powers Bloomberg Asharq’s news production

An Avid MediaCentral platform will provide the foundation for Bloomberg Asharq’s news production environment, optimising collaboration across all aspects of the production cycle. Avid MediaCentral | Cloud UX will allow production teams located anywhere to access content through a simple, user-friendly graphical interface. Production teams will also rely on Avid creative tools including Media Composer non-linear editing systems and Pro Tools digital audio workstations.

Avid NEXIS, Avid’s software-defined storage platform, will reportedly give the broadcaster unprecedented media performance, scalability and reliability.
du partners with Telstra to offer dedicated video connectivity to MBC

Telco du and Telstra have partnered to launch a new video contribution solution for MBC in Dubai with a dedicated, fully managed video network service on the Telstra Global Media Network. The Telstra Global Media Network is a highly resilient worldwide network built on a four fibre path system. The service is specifically designed for the seamless delivery of video content using the latest technologies.

Hany Aly, Executive Vice President – Enterprise Business, du, said: “Dedicated video solutions for moving content are gaining traction, as they allow higher video rates and flexibility in terms of permanent or occasional use. du is increasingly trusted to distribute live content, because we always ensure our solutions are customised for specific needs to maintain the highest levels of quality. Our distribution network offers reliable access across multiple platforms.”

In other news, Telstra provided Lagardere Sports (commercial partner of the AFC Asian Cup) with a professional overlay media network to deliver all audio, video and data services from eight stadiums in the UAE to the International Broadcasting Centre (IBC) in Abu Dhabi. It also provided an international fibre and satellite teleport network to deliver the feed from IBC to rights-holding broadcasters beIN Sports and Al Kass Sports.

beIN in scuffle with AFC

beIN Media Group said it will initiate legal proceedings against the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for breach of the sports broadcaster’s exclusive multi-million-dollar regional rights deal. This is in response to the AFC’s decision to revoke beIN’s exclusive rights to air Asian football matches in MENA. The AFC announced that it will live stream matches featuring KSA clubs in the AFC Asian Champions League for free on its digital channels.

DishTV India dealer booked for UAE copyright infringement

The UAE’s highest court, the Court of Cassation, has sentenced a DishTV India dealer to three months in prison and a fine of AED 50,000 for infringing on the copyrights and related intellectual property of OSN. The court upheld the decision to destroy all confiscated DishTV India set-top boxes, smart cards and remote-control units. Simon Wilkes, General Counsel of OSN, said: “The ruling sends a very clear message that selling DishTV India subscriptions in the UAE is criminal, and any dealers doing so will be prosecuted. We hope that the stern and decisive actions being taken will continue to discourage the practice of selling or using pirate IPTV decoders and DishTV India in the UAE.”

Ruptly to launch Arabic service in MENA

Ruptly, a global multimedia agency, has announced plans to launch an Arabic version of its video news agency this summer. Revealing the latest development at the CABSAT Content Congress in Dubai, Dinara Toktosunova, CEO of Ruptly, said: “It will be a fully localised Arabic website and live platform. It will allow us to be more accessible to our clients in the region and will provide a platform for us to cover more MENA stories.”

E’shailSat’s brand new state-of-the-art teleport, built to support broadcast and telecommunication companies with flexible, reliable and high quality services to meet current and future needs. Media management, playout, OTT, VSAT, managed hub services and others can be rolled out swiftly from the teleport. Contact sales@eshaisatsat.qa for more information.
MyHD to support mini football federation with sponsorships and broadcasts

MyHD Media has announced a one-year sponsorship and broadcast partnership with the Fédération Tunisienne de Mini Football (FTMF). This multi-tournament deal guarantees funding of the planned mini football events by FTMF in 2019, which includes the Tunisian Continental Cup, the Tunisian Lebanon Super Cup, the Superleague, the Cup of Tunisia Mini Football, the Women’s League and all national team and mini football friendly matches.

Speaking about the partnership, Carmen Chen, CEO of MyHD, said: “MyHD is eager to contribute to the growth and development of mini football in the MENA region, particularly in Tunisia. It has been less than one year since MyHD launched My Sports 1 channel and while professional football is followed on a global scale, the company recognises the importance of supporting country-wide and community-based tournaments, as competitions like these positively help bring people and societies together.” Achraf Ben Selha, CEO of FTMF, added: “With the success of the mini football World Cup in Tunisia in 2017, mini football has grown in the last two years in many African and Arabic countries. This broadcast partnership and sponsorship of MyHD will boost the sport’s popularity in the Arab world. FTMF is extremely thankful and it is a pleasure for us to have this partnership with MyHD.”

New Bollywood station on the cards for Shock Middle East

New Bollywood station on the cards for Shock Middle East

Shock Middle East will launch three new radio stations this year, with a Hindi-Language station on the cards in the near future, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. The radio network also intends to expand its premises within Dubai Media City. Speaking exclusively to BroadcastPro ME, Group Managing Director Cameron Plant said: “Our research has shown that the three most popular formats in radio here are Arabic, English and Hindi, so we will launch a Hindi-Language radio station with only two ads in each commercial break. We hope to grow our number of stations this year.” Digby Taylor, Programming Director at Shock ME, added: “We will remain at Dubai Media City, as it has that edge and is the heritage place now for media. We have been able to establish ourselves very quickly. We like to innovate and do things differently. We have around 53 people and that will increase soon.”

Novo Cinemas launches at IMG Worlds of Adventure

Novo Cinemas has launched its largest IMAX with laser cinema at the IMG Worlds of Adventure in Dubai. The complex comprises a 12-screen multiplex with more than 5,000m of LED strip lighting in customised colours, and mirror lighting from floor to ceiling.

beIN adds three Fox channels

FOX Crime HD, FOX Rewatay HD and FOX Life HD will be available on beIN’s Entertainment, Complete and Elite packages. With this addition, beIN will now host a total of 15 Fox channels on its service.

MBC Group 37th most viewed globally, #1 in Middle East on digital platforms: VideoAces Awards

MBC Group has been ranked the 37th Most Viewed Global Media Property in the world – and number one in the Middle East – by the latest VideoAces Awards, which measure videos viewed across all major social media platforms worldwide. The global top 100 were chosen from 3,200 leading brands, media organisations and content creators.

Tanzanian and Iraqi channels choose Pebble Beach Systems

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Irish channel Dijlah TV has selected Pebble Beach Systems’ Dolphin integrated channel device and Marina automation solution to upgrade its playout operations. Dijlah TV was looking to implement a fully redundant automation solution with no single point of failure that encompasses ingest, content management and playout functionality. “The combined Dolphin and Marina offers to control third-party devices, maximising their technology choices. For the operators, the transition is seamless with minimum disruption to their existing workflow,” commented Samir Isbaih, VP of Sales for Middle East and APAC at Pebble. In another deployment by Pebble Beach Systems, Tanzanian firm Azam Media Ltd, a direct-to-home (DTH) pay-TV satellite service, also selected the Marina automation solution to control its existing playout infrastructure.
Sharjah Broadcasting Authority orders NOA mediARC system for archiving

Sharjah Broadcasting Authority (SBA, formerly known as Sharjah Media Corporation), a government organisation dedicated to developing the media industry in the UAE, has ordered a second archive asset management (AAM) mediARC system from AV digitising and archiving specialist NOA GmbH.

Aisha Alzaaref, Director of Broadcast IT at SBA, said: “Our patrimony is simply too important to have it stored in only one location. That’s why we decided to apply this innovative approach to have it accessible as a complete replica with reliable availability. This is crucial for the long-term preservation of our archive.”

Jean-Christophe Kummer, NOA Managing Partner, added: “This concept is quite unique for a legacy archive in the region. SBA will benefit from having a full duplication of its repertoire constantly available at two sites. The set-up will also permit future-born digital material to be collected in one central repository which is duplicated in two sites.”

Metafora Production chooses Ross Video systems for Syrian channel in Istanbul

Metafora Production, a private Arabic media company based in Istanbul, has chosen Ross Video and local partner AVITENG to build and launch a new facility for its new channel Syria TV.

Mohamad Ibrahim, CTO, Syria TV, said: “I had worked with Ross products and had positive experiences with the Furio robotic camera system and the Carbonite production switcher. If therefore wasn’t hard for us to choose Ross as a technology partner and build our production workflows around products like the Carbonite Black switcher, XPression graphics and both Furio robotics and the VR600 PT robotic heads. We are satisfied with the result and the support and training provided by both Ross and AVITENG.”

Al Arabiya shows global warming impact in AR

Al Arabiya put global warming in focus at its studios last month by creating an immersive augmented reality (AR) scenario using the lake at Dubai Media City to show global warming’s impact. The effects included creating storms with strong wind and rain for the broadcast. Fadi Radi, Creative Head at Al Arabiya, said: “The segment’s 3D graphics were powered by Vizrt’s Viz Engine and created in Viz Virtual Studio with camera tracking by Stype. The impact of our AR scenario was widely shared on social media.”
The first Al Ain Film Festival will be held from 30 April to 3 May in Al Ain. It will showcase movies from the UAE and award prize money worth a total of $81,670 (AED 300,000) to filmmakers.

Speaking exclusively to BroadcastPro ME, Amer Salmeen Al Murry, Director of the Al Ain Film Festival, said: “The festival is our attempt to showcase regional movies and place Al Ain on the map of tourism in the UAE and globally. It offers filmmakers a great chance to showcase their movies in the feature, documentary or commentary genres. The festival has competitions in various categories for Emiratis, residents and children. We want to offer a chance to everybody through the festival to hone their filmmaking skills. Filmmaking is not easy to undertake, and that’s why we are offering the prize money. We want to encourage good and quality movies that can go to festivals and showcase the region globally.”

The festival’s official competitions include the Emirati Falcon Award for best long movie; this will be awarded to the winning film's director and is worth $13,610. Additionally, an award of $5,445 will be given to the best actor/actress in the winning film, and the Best Short Film Award is valued at $10,980 and will be given to the director. In this category, an additional $6,806 will be granted to a winner by the judging committee, and the best actor in the winning film will be granted $2,722. The festival has instituted many competitions, which are open to all UAE residents with an interest in making quality films. The list can be found on their website.

Colors has announced the launch of Kitchen Champion, an ultimate cook-off for celebs vying to win the coveted title in the region.

Hosted by Arjun Bijlani, the show features celebrities such as Karanvir Bohra, Surbhi Jyoti, Rashmi Desai and Debin Bonnerjee. The show premiered last month and will air Monday to Friday at 5pm in the UAE, and 6pm in KSA.

Middle East Film and Comic Con comes to Dubai

The Middle East Film and Comic Con will be held in Dubai, April 11-13. Arrow superhero Black Canary (played by Katie Cassidy) will be there to meet with visitors. Arrow is part of the DC CW Universe, which also includes The Flash and Supergirl and is known for its story cross-overs. Cassidy will be taking part in celebrity panels and Q&As and will join a line-up of celebrities including Mike Colter from Marvel’s Luke Cage, Ross Marquand from The Walking Dead and voice actor Tara Strong.

New show from Colors tests celebrity culinary skills

Colors has announced the launch of Kitchen Champion, an ultimate cook-off for celebs vying to win the coveted title in the region.

Emirati comedy to be screened during Eid

Emirati feature comedy Rashid and Rajab will be released in cinemas across the region on Eid Al Fitr in June. Shot in Dubai, the UAE production is the first live-action feature film from Emirati director Mohammed Saeed Harib, best-known as the creator of iconic animated TV series FREEJ. The film was produced by Emirati filmmakers Ali Mostafa (The Worthy, From A to Z) and Majid Alansari (Zinzan), alongside Breakout Film’s Rami Yasim (Shabab Sheyab).

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Professional Camera Cart that is dedicated to the whole industry of movie. Assembly / Disassembly takes only 2 minutes, fully customizable with all our accessories.
Gracenote brings Global Video Data to MENA, announces deal with Etisalat

Gracenote, a Nielsen company, has launched its Global Video Data offering in the Middle East to help drive next-generation TV and movie search, discovery and navigation for emerging digital and IPTV platforms. Alongside this, Gracenote has also announced that Etisalat’s E-Vision, a major provider of TV content and advanced TV technologies, is one of the first pay-TV providers to deliver Gracenote-powered viewer experiences for IPTV, OTT, VOD and mobile platforms, using Global Video Data. Etisalat will leverage a unified collection of metadata spanning TV and movie content from around the globe with country-level detail. Once implemented, the product powers advanced content search, discovery and recommendation features, using a global ID structure, which enables providers to quickly and easily connect users to the TV shows and movies.

Hans Nipshagen promoted at Akamai

Hans Nipshagen, MD of Akamai Benelux, has been promoted to Head of EMEA channels and alliances. He will be tasked with growing its regional partner programme and increasing sales.

HDTV footprint growing rapidly across MENA, says ASBU head at group meeting

The Arab HDTV and Beyond group concluded its 10th annual meeting last month in Dubai under the patronage of Eng Abdallah Salem, Director General of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU). Headed by Hasan El Sayed Hassan, Chairman of the Group and MD of Master Media, the meeting brought together 70 professionals to discuss pressing issues in the HDTV segment. 2019 also marks the 50th anniversary of ASBU.

ASBU’s DG briefed the attendees on the organization’s activities. He also spoke about the upcoming 20th edition of the Arab Radio and TV Festival, to be held in Tunisia 27-30 June.

The meeting concluded with Hasan El Sayed Hassan re-elected as Chairman of the Group for another three-year term, together with Vice Chairs Dr Fares Labbadi and Hassan Ghoul. Eng Abdallah Ahmed Al-Balooshi, Assistant Undersecretary of Technical Affairs at Bahrain’s Ministry of Information Affairs, was also elected as Vice Chair.

The Arab Radio and TV Festival, to be held in Tunisia 27-30 June.

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Hans Nipshagen

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Sharjah Media City to set up JV with Exceed Media

Sharjah Media City (Shams) has signed an agreement with Toronto-based Exceed Media to establish a joint venture company that will act as the media training arm for the free zone. The JV is intended to provide training services in media, computer and software, among others, to both individuals and the corporate sector.

Hans Nipshagen

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FilmQuip launches Zeiss Supreme Primes in UAE

FilmQuip Media has acquired the first set of Zeiss Supreme Prime lenses in the UAE. The lenses are colour matched across the full range, and most feature a fast T-stop of T1.5.

The set includes 25mm, 29mm, 35mm, 50mm, 85mm and 100mm, and covers large sensors and full-frame, bigger sensors with an image circle of 46.2mm. The lenses are designed for use in a variety of media experiences in the creation and broadcast of a variety of media content for television.

Pharaon Broadcast to distribute Argosy in Lebanon

Argosy has appointed Pharaon Broadcast as its regional distributor in Lebanon to strengthen its market position in the region. Speaking about the partnership, Rażullah Bal, Regional Sales Manager, Middle East for Argosy said: "We are striking up new partnerships in the region, which will help us understand the technological trends in different countries across the Middle East. They will also help increase brand awareness for Argosy."
**Saudi-based Skyband chooses LeoSat Enterprises**

**CONNECTIVITY**
LeoSat Enterprises has entered into an agreement with Saudi-based Skyband, a member of the Inteltec Group and a major communications provider of satellite and networking solutions in the Kingdom. Skyband is an arm of Luna Space Telecommunications Co, one of the first VSAT communications providers in KSA. It will use LeoSat to upgrade its existing satellite solutions, giving customers access to a low-latency network which is expected to revolutionise data connectivity.

Osman Ouieda, CEO of Skyband, commented: "At Skyband, we rely on the latest satellite and VSAT communication technologies for data, voice and video transmission. Our network provides high-speed, reliable, robust, cost-effective, scalable and secured communication across the Kingdom which can be used by all industry segments. We look forward to adding LeoSat’s new system architecture to our portfolio.”

**Telearabia PRO deploys Eutelsat’s CIRRUS**

**BROADCASTING**
Telearabia PRO, Mondo Globo’s new Arabic-language SD TV channel platform, will deploy Eutelsat’s CIRRUS delivery solution targeting the European hospitality sector. Video distributor Mondo Globo/MCNC will be the first customer for Telearabia PRO, specifically targeting the European hospitality sector and comprising six premium Arabic lifestyle and entertainment channels, including three MBC Group channels. Fully assembled through Eutelsat CIRRUS, the platform is available on Eutelsat’s HOTBIRD neighbourhood at 13° East and features five channel broadcasting, channel numbering, programme information and content security.

**Emirati astronauts prep for historic trip to ISS**

**SPACE PROGRAMME**
MBRSC has announced that the first Emirati astronaut will go into space with the International Space Station (ISS) on 25 September. Hazza Al Mansoori and Sultan Al Neyasi are the two Emiratis who have been trained for the project, though only one will eventually head to the ISS.

**Newtec deploys two Arabsat hubs in Europe**

**CONNECTIVITY**
Newtec has successfully deployed two Newtec Dialog hubs in the UK and Finland, to enable Arabsat to deliver HTS services in the Middle East and African markets. The contract will enable Arabsat to deliver a new suite of services including enterprise and VNO services, IP traffic routing and mobile backhaul for 3G and 4G services. The first hub was installed in December 2018.

The Network Operations Centre (NOC) recently installed at Arabsat subsidiary Hellasat in Athens will see Arabsat reach all platforms and remote sites with its services. In combination with a variety of Newtec DVB-S2X wideband modems, the Newtec Dialog platform will enable Arabsat to offer vertical-specific solutions to deliver the best connectivity experience for any satellite application.

**MBRSC signs MoU with Bahrain’s National Space Science Agency**

**PARTNERSHIP**
The Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) has signed a cooperation, information and data-sharing agreement with Bahrain’s National Space Science Agency (NSSA) for the application of satellite images and space research sciences. The MoU was signed by HE Hamad Obaid Al Mansoori, Chairman of MBRSC, and HE Eng Kamal bin Ahmed Mohammed, Bahraini Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications, Supervision & Control of NSSA, during the second Global Space Congress in Abu Dhabi.

The MoU states that MBRSC shall supply NSSA with multi-spectral satellite images and high-quality and corrected panchromatic images. These images will be captured via MBRSC’s satellites. NSSA shall also develop the current and future requirements associated with remote sensing and satellite images, provide MBRSC with them for consideration, approval and provision according to priorities and available possibilities, and provide the MBRSC with spatial and geographical data agreed to by both parties for processing satellite images and data.

Speaking about the collaboration, HE Al Mansoori said: “This cooperation will contribute to building smart and distinctive cities based on the latest space science and remote sensing systems and applications. The agreement will also contribute to enhancing cooperation for both sides through the exchange of practical experience and human resources development in the space and scientific fields.”

HE Eng Kamal bin Ahmed Mohammed added: “This MoU will open new horizons of cooperation in the field of space and its sciences and applications; it also enhances the presence of Arab countries in the space sector, which reflects the vision of the leadership in both countries and their efforts to achieve sustainable development and prosperity.”

**Es’hail-2 ready for commercial service**

**SATELLITE**
Es’hailSat has announced that its new satellite has entered commercial service to serve MENA sectors. Es’hail-2, designed with Ka-band spot beams and Ku-band wide beams, joins Es’hail-1 at the 25.5°E / 26.0°E MENA broadcast hotspot and will augment the capacity already available at the hotspot to support premium services in the region.

**Es’hailSat celebrates 10 years of service**

**BROADCASTING**
Es’hailSat is celebrating 10 years of successful operations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The satellite has been in service since 2009, providing a wide range of services to more than 300 satellite service providers in the region. It offers high-quality video distribution with multi-standard coding options and a wide range of channel numbers, as well as dedicated spot beam coverage for enterprise and VNO services. Es’hailSat continues to invest in advanced technologies to ensure its customers are always at the forefront of the industry.

**Newtec Dialog launch in Europe**

**INTEGRATION**
Newtec has successfully deployed two Newtec Dialog hubs in the UK and Finland, to enable Arabsat to deliver HTS services in the Middle East and African markets. The contract will enable Arabsat to deliver a new suite of services including enterprise and VNO services, IP traffic routing and mobile backhaul for 3G and 4G services. The first hub was installed in December 2018.

The Network Operations Centre (NOC) recently installed at Arabsat subsidiary Hellasat in Athens will see Arabsat reach all platforms and remote sites with its services. In combination with a variety of Newtec DVB-S2X wideband modems, the Newtec Dialog platform will enable Arabsat to offer vertical-specific solutions to deliver the best connectivity experience for any satellite application.

**Es’hailSat: 10 years of service**

**SATELLITE**
Es’hailSat has been in successful operations for 10 years, providing premium video distribution services to the MENA region. The satellite has a powerful payload capable of delivering high-quality video content to more than 300 service providers. Es’hailSat has invested in advanced technologies to ensure its customers are always at the forefront of the industry.
ARRI lights up MENA broadcast

We completed close to 18 projects across the region last year for major broadcast players. Some of the regional projects in which our latest technologies are deployed include the Salmaia project in Kuwait TV, Studio 101, also in Kuwait; SBC in KSA, and three studios for Sharjah TV. Of the current lighting equipment range, Arri’s new ALEXA LST was also installed at some of the studios in KSA. We have also developed into other areas like master control, playout and automation both for graphics and content for linear channel delivery. It was time to have a full-time sales person in the region, and that’s where Mark Barkey comes in. He recently joined Pixel Power as Regional Sales Manager. Also, Pixel Power was acquired by Rohde & Schwarz last year, but we very much continue as Pixel Power and we are here to stay and are even stronger than before.

Dave Letson, Vice President of Sales

Calrec Type R IP-based radio system debuts in Middle East

For the first time ever in the Middle East, Calrec showcased its Type R modular, expandable, IP-based radio system at CABSAT. The Type R makes use of standard networking technology and combines it with configurable soft panels that can be tailored to operator needs. Each is compatible with COTS hardware and powered over Ethernet to keep cabling to a minimum. We have designed it to be a very software-oriented, and customers can customise it to their needs. The same tool offers different levels of control customisation for different needs, ranging from EMUing to talk shows.

Umesh Tyagi, Country Manager

Bitmovin powers video quality with low bitrates

Bitmovin technology innovations focus on video encoding, playback and analytics to improve user experiences. Innovations include the co-authoring of the MPEG-DASH streaming protocol, and massively parallel cloud-native encoding. Essentially, we are a cloud-based video controlling service that constitues our showcase at CABSAT. The Type R makes use standard networking technology and combines it with configurable soft panels that can be tailored to operator needs. Each is compatible with COTS hardware and powered over Ethernet to keep cabling to a minimum. We have designed it to be very software-oriented, and customers can customise it to their needs.

Dave Letsen, Vice President of Sales

Leader’s all-new Zen series attracts visitors

For us, the objective at CABSAT was to bring our product showcase to our customers in the Middle East region and gain their confidence. Last year, for our 65th anniversary, we launched the Zen series and that constitutes our showcase at CABSAT. Everything at our stall is new this year. Other than Leader products, we also have products from our partner associates, like upscale and downscale converters by Astro Design from Japan and SDI-over-IP analysers from Bridgetech. We are promoting their products. The show was quite good for us and we were also able to get some key customers.

Dave Letson, Vice President of Sales

Nice People at Work empowers broadcasters with business intelligence

We help with online video services for MBC and Starz Play here in the Middle East, to help them get real-time analytics and monitoring of their performance of their video services, audience metrics and video consumption patterns on different devices. Our information is largely used to better monetise their content and reach their audience. We offer a whole solution to collect the analytics and provide calls to action that the broadcasters can use.

Mahdi Afellat, Sales Director

Pixel Power strengthens market presence in MENA

We started off as a specialist in graphics for TV broadcast, and since then we have also developed into other areas like master control, playout and automation both for graphics and content for linear channel delivery. It was time to have a full-time sales person in the region, and that’s where Mark Barkey comes in. He recently joined Pixel Power as Regional Sales Manager. Also, Pixel Power was acquired by Rohde & Schwarz last year, but we very much continue as Pixel Power and we are here to stay and are even stronger than before.

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SOUND BITES FROM CABSAT

Procabsat
Flowcine gets a grip on accessories for cinematographers

Flowcine produces accessories for professional cinematographers and the film industry. Having spent many years in film and TV production, we have a good grip on products that are missing in the market, including what we wanted on set for our productions. We started Flowcine to put those missing products on the market. We create products that have to do with stabilisation, such as the black arm and the dual black, which we know to ensure that they are on any kind of a vehicle. The Xarm is a double-section articulated stabilisation arm made from aircraft-grade aluminium, solid carbon fibre infused titanium shafts and large stainless-steel precision ball bearings. The Xarm design is built with simplicity in mind—solid and robust, with up to 25kg lift capacity. Thomas Kyryakis, Product Specialist

Harmonic highlights disaster recovery for different workflows

Harmonic showcased four SaaS-based solutions at CABSAT. Harmonic’s new Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS) solution provides the flexibility to support any use case—playout, OTT or broadcast-related. The DRaaS solution mixes the benefits of a resilient offering with a usage-based pricing model, making it ideal for users who would like to pay as they use the services and not incur heavy one-time set-up costs. Leveraging the public cloud, the new solution can scale to match the evolution of channel line-ups. The service also works well with the VOS360 SaaS media processing service, which is cloud-based and not incur heavy one-time set-up costs. Leveraging the public cloud, the new solution can scale to match the end-to-end network of broadcast infrastructure to supply all needed equipment, like connectors, wall boxes, patch panels and racks. Testing is important to us, and quality is sacrosanct. Our quality assurance separates us from others. As part of the research and development, we are looking at ways to customise the wall box to develop a new splice box. At present, we are active in ten countries in the Middle East. Lemo has been present at all major sports tournaments since 1995. Among our recent projects in the region are the AFC Asian Cup, and we staffed the Shahjal stadium from end to end. Ahmed Abdallah, GM

Ross Video launches Ultracool at CABSAT

Ross Video launched Ultracool, a highly-configurable 1RU external cooling system designed to complement the thermal performance of existing rack-mounted equipment in extreme weather conditions or confined spaces. Ultracool can be configured to provide directional airflow from front to back, front to right side or front to left side, depending on equipment requirements. Offering both automatic and manual control options (via Ross Video’s Dashboard control platform, direct front panel override and/or RossTalk), Ultracool ensures that end users’ rack-mounted products work at their optimum temperature and helps avoid the unnecessary shut-downs and reboots that can be caused by overheating. Stuart G. Russell, Senior Communications Manager

LEMO connects broadcasters with network solutions

We would like to address total broadcast network solutions in the MENA market. We are looking at building the end-to-end network of broadcast infrastructure to supply all needed equipment, like connectors, wall boxes, patch panels and racks. Testing is important to us, and quality is sacrosanct. Our quality assurance separates us from others. As part of the research and development, we are looking at ways to customise the wall box to develop a new splice box. At present, we are active in ten countries in the Middle East. Lemo has been present at all major sports tournaments since 1995. Among our recent projects in the region are the AFC Asian Cup, and we staffed the Shahjal stadium from end to end. Ahmed Abdallah, GM

BE grows footprint with Elenos in MENA

CABSAT offers us the ability to meet with our existing customers and potential customers. This is an important trade show in the MENA region–especially now that we are a part of the Elenos group, it is important that we promote our brands and products, establish relationships and partner with new customers. The trade shows are no longer grounds for closing business deals, they are more about building relationships which then culminate in business deals. We have some excellent partners in KSA and Oman; we are looking forward to growing the business partnerships in the region. Elenos has some great partnerships in Abu Dhabi and we plan to continue to work on that. Ethiopia has been a very good country for business for us. Bob Demuth, International Sales Manager

Canon registers presence with regional partners

Canon is purely focused on youth and professionals in the region with our portfolio of products and solutions. We have bespoke solutions offered for our customers in micro-rocket lenses, robust DSLR products, a range of printers and more. We are represented at CABSAT through our partners, and it is a collaborative effort to showcase our partnerships in the region. It is evident that not only are we present with our partners who are our business associates, but we want to see that how we are a part of the ecosystem. We are meeting up with end users. From a showcase point of view, the cinema 700 full-frame launched last year is receiving a lot of attention, so that’s the hero product for us at CABSAT. Our market share is growing. Nick Grande, CEO, and Heda Karayemi, Client Director, mena.tv Content Hub

DTC Broadcast brings live HD capabilities into focus

DTC Broadcast is known for its picture performance and the new HEVC SD, HD and 4K encoding technology of AEON lite helps us push this market now, with the development of 4K. We are trying to promote and are highly vested in sailing and on-boat technology. DTC Broadcast is known for its picture performance and the new HEVC SD, HD and 4K encoding technology of AEON lite helps us push this market now, with the development of 4K. We are trying to promote and are heavily vested in sailing and on-boat technology. DTC Broadcast is known for its picture performance and the new HEVC SD, HD and 4K encoding technology of AEON lite helps us offer best-quality content. The Middle East is a strong market for high-end transmitters and receivers, and we look forward to taking full advantage of the visibility CABSAT provides. JF Dalpolt, VP, Broadcast Sales

Canon registers presence with regional partners

We facilitated the whole content experience at CABSAT through the P2C on 86 initiative. We organised the mena.tv Arabic: Original screening, where it was an opportunity to come to a public screening of new regional productions. Eid al-Adha, Senior Manager at Sharjah Media Corporation, who attended the show, bought four titles for this Ramadan. He commented that the variety and quality of the titles was really good. Nick Grande, CEO, and Heda Karayemi, Client Director, mena.tv Content Hub

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Sennheiser goes compact with transmission in live environments

The highlight for Sennheiser at CABSAT was the SK 6212 prototype. The product will be launched next month. The SK 6212 is a compact transmitter for broadcast, theatre, musical or live show that requires an inconspicuous, compact and lightweight package offering reliable and spectrum-efficient transmission. A hand-held device featuring rounded corners and edges, the mini-bodypack is 63x47x20mm in size and together with the battery weighs just 112g. The SK 6212 can be synced via IR. The flexible antenna is detachable and field-replaceable, and its removable BA 62 lithium-polymer battery offers an operating time of up to 12 hours.

Ryan Burr, Head of Technical Sales & Application

Sawa Media shifts focus to esports

Esports is an emerging genre and we are managing the leading sports channels in the region. We represent two esports channels, Game 2 and ES24, and they are popular. ES24 covers all major leagues in the sports world. We have licensed this to Saudi Telecom (STC) for its Jawy TV platform, along with 36 other channels. We recognise the importance of esports in the region and are focusing on it now. Sawa Media has about 250 TV channels, which we license to all kinds of pay TV channels through Sawa Rights Management (SRM). At SRM, we have agreements with almost every single telco platform that runs an IPTV solution in the Middle East. We cover the full spectrum for supplying channels to pay TV channels across the region.

Ali Ajouz, Managing Partner

Tulix brings use value with streaming to Middle East

This is our fifth year at CABSAT, and we bring value for broadcasters and new content producers, especially in explaining how streaming works and how to put a new solution in place. We are highlighting our end-to-end solutions, from signal acquisition to application and distribution. We are focused on showing our new multiCDN product and explaining how it works. We are also highlighting our cloud-based playout to show how anyone can start a brand-new channel if they have the content. We have very cost-effective solutions that are ideal for new business development. The world is changing, and we have the knowledge and experience to bring to this market.

Dr Nino Doijashvili, EVP

Ali Ajouz, Managing Partner

Ryan Burr, Head of Technical Sales & Application

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When Lebanese director Nadine Labaki speaks about Capernaum, the film that catapulted her to fame, first at Cannes in May last year and later when it was nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, we can see why the theme of undocumented immigrants in her country and the consequences for children had “become an obsession” until it found its voice through cinema.

‘It was my need to talk about these undocumented children who were paying the highest price for our wars, and how insensitive we had become,’ says Labaki. ‘It was the igniting point of this journey and I just wanted to be in their head and see how they viewed us adults. If a child could reveal his feelings, what would he say and how would he address the whole journey he has experienced?’

‘That led to the making of Capernaum, which received a 15-minute standing ovation when it premiered at Cannes and went head to head with Netflix Roma in the Oscars race. Though it didn’t win the Oscar, it won the hearts of audiences around the world.’

The plot revolves around 12-year-old refugee Zain (Zain al Rafeea), who takes his parents to court for giving him life and demands that they be stopped from bringing any more children into the miserable existence that he is subject to. Zain runs away from home after a row with his parents and ends up with an Ethiopian refugee, Rahil (Yordanos Shiferaw), and her baby son, Yonas (Boluwatife Treasure Bankole). The story is set in Lebanon but is a universal tale of the tragic conditions in which undocumented immigrants and their children live.

With powerful performances, strong direction from Labaki and the steadfast support of her husband Khaled Mouzanar, producer and music composer on the film, Capernaum lays out a compelling argument for revisiting how we view immigrants and their children. ‘The story is fictitious, but it is based so much on reality because we did three years of research while writing it,’ says Labaki. ‘We went to unfortunate neighbourhoods, detention centres, shelters, homes and prisons. We spent hours in court just sitting and watching cases. So everything we wrote was built on what we saw, and sometimes we were shooting scenes that were so close to reality that we could not longer tell the difference between fact and fiction.’

‘Two days after we shot the scene of Rahil getting arrested at the cybercafé, for instance, she actually got arrested. Like in the film, Rahil had indeed run away from her employer in real life. She didn’t have a baby like in the film, but she was living in Lebanon illegally, and while we were working on her papers, she got arrested.’

‘If you look at the little boy Yonas in the film, he is played by Treasure, an illegal girl child living in Lebanon with her parents, without any papers. For all practical purposes, she is invisible. Her parents were arrested along with Rahil in the same raid. So the whole time, we felt like we were capturing reality, because what we wrote as part of a fictional script was literally happening to those who were playing those roles in the film,’ Labaki says.

Owing to the quasi-documentary nature of the film, where the lives of her actors mirrored those of her characters, Labaki made a conscious decision to go with the flow and adapt her screenplay instead of going strictly by script. ‘Sometimes you let things happen the way they are happening. The code between us as a team and crew was to have minimal interference.’

‘Capernaum possible, Labaki says.

‘The script had a strong base as a starting point and a landing point. If your script is solid, you can still improvise but remain grounded and focused. This way, when life throws you an opportunity or if the circumstances and the actors take you somewhere else, you are not afraid to explore those opportunities because you know that eventually you will navigate it back towards the script that was written. It was like life was giving us those gifts that helped make our film better, so we were never scared to explore them because we were shooting so close to reality,’ she says.

Fortunately, her crew shared that passion and freedom to explore other journeys along the way without questioning the idiosyncrasies behind it. “This is what made Capernaum possible,” Labaki says.

“Sometimes you let things happen the way they are happening. The code between us as a team and crew was to have minimal interference.”

Capernaum’s actors won praise worldwide for their portrayals of characters in the movie. What makes it more interesting is the fact that they were all non-actors.
Our characters were not actors who came to the set prepared and knew their lines by heart. We had to create the right space for them to be who they are and to react to the situations that we created as filmmakers and screenwriters. Therefore, they reacted spontaneously.

“And this was the same for all situations. For instance, if the set designer had to bring a mattress to the scene, he had to bring one that had lived the same situation, not a new mattress. Everything had to be authentic and part of that experience. That’s why we shot for six months and in chronological order, something that is not done in traditional filmmaking,” she explains.

The team never stopped traffic or asked people to stand by while they shot a scene. They just blended in with the crowds – again, quite uncommon for a traditional film shoot. “While we were working on this script, we understood that we needed a lot of time to get the right level of performance from the kids. We needed a lot of time to shoot, to edit, and so we ended up doing six months of shooting and two years of editing, and we realized no producer would accept this. “We did our previous film in the classical way, so we had a French producer and funds; all the post was done in Paris. Those are the traditional ways to produce films in the Middle East and it’s hard to change from the violin to the Cretan lyra, which is more primitive, and yet it had to adapt to each other. This impacts the production, but because we did it at home, it cost a lot less. But it was hard.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Mouzanar was scoring the film. “We had around 520 hours of footage, which we then edited down to 14 hours. How do you score for a film like that? Where do you begin? Initially, I had planned this very romantic and sentimental music to go with what we had scripted. And then when I met the real actors, they were nothing like the soft, sweet music I had planned. “My perspective changed when I lived in the slums with the people there. Being a producer helped in that way. I had to live in the smell of the slums and feel its violence and its dirt. So the music had to be dirty and humble at the same time, and I had to change from the violin to the Cretan lyra, which is a more humble sound… so the music was more primitive, and yet it had to be contemporary because it was almost prophetic. It was no longer a local Lebanese story because every city in the world in the next 50 years will have a Capernaum and such slums in the suburbs, with people living in the most inhumane conditions. The music, therefore, had to have that raw and primitive feel to it while also taking on Biblical, futuristic tones.”

Mouzanar also realised that music was not very easy to place in the films, due to its quasi-documentary nature. After a lot of trial and error, the team divided the film into chapters. In some, there is no score, just the sound of the city. “For the viewer to be immersed in this Capernaum, in this chaos, sometimes we just kept it dry, and in other places, where the documentary becomes more poetic and dreamy, with slow motion and aerial shots, where we felt the score had something to say, we allowed ourselves to put in a real score. So the whole film was like this, very dry in some places and very poetic.”

“From left: Khaled Mouzanar with Zain and Nadine Labaki at Cannes in May 2018 for the premiere of Capernaum. “It was my need to talk about these undocumented children who were paying the highest price for our wars ... [that led to the making of this film]” Nadine Labaki, Director, Capernaum

The filmmakers made a conscious decision to shoot the film in chronological order to show the gradual attachment between the children, who were initially strangers.

“They are kids, not actors. When they meet for the first time, they are complete strangers. Six months later, you can see that they have bonded and become friends, and that shows by the end of the film. This was a psychological choice we made to ensure that the kids could adapt to each other. This impacts the production, but because we did it at home, it cost a lot less. But it was hard.”

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in others,” explains Mouzanar.

Shooting in 4K, mixing in 5.1 Surround and editing 500-plus hours of footage brought along a whole set of technical challenges. “I had to re-equip my music studio with Dolby Surround so we could mix in my studio, and I had to learn to mix in 5.1. In hindsight, the whole thing was crazy because while shooting, I was trying to see how many editing venues we needed. We started with one and ended up with four. We had four stations for editing, four for sound editing and two for cutting, because we had 500 hours of footage and we needed to be ready for Cannes.”

It was only three months after Cannes, though, that Capernaum was fully ready. “We re-edited, re-recorded and remixed.”

Asked if the team would do things differently in hindsight, Mouzanar says: “Artistically, no. We shot in a manner that afforded us full artistic freedom. No one has done anything differently in hindsight, Mouzanar says. “There’s a lot of arguing, but both of us are conscious that art is bigger than us and at the end of the day, art is more important.”

They also declare that the film has changed them forever. “I have matured along the way. With your first film, you don’t know what tools and expertise or skills you need to achieve your vision. I was experimenting and learning how to lead the crew and hold the rhythm of the film, which is not a 30-second ad,” says Labaki, who previously worked in advertising.

“I have always dreamt of achieving something. When I see this reaction, I feel we have achieved something,” she says. 

“Sometimes we were shooting scenes that were so close to reality that we could no longer tell the difference between fact and fiction”

Nadine Labaki, Director, Capernaum

When we reached Cannes, I was even selling the film. Now I know all aspects of filmmaking, although the one I like best continues to be music composition.”

On how the director wife and the producer husband addressed creative tension, Mouzanar says: “There’s a lot of arguing, but both of us are conscious that art is bigger than us and at the end of the day, art is more important.”

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Starz Play organised a roundtable last month to announce that it had exceeded the one million subscriber mark and addressed the reasons for its rapid growth, subscriber churn and market share. We bring you the highlights from different members of the management team.

The journey, in the words of Maaz Sheik, CEO and co-founder of Starz Play
When we first launched the service, we had 2,500 hours of content, and now we have more than 10,000 hours of content. Five years ago, we launched with four major studios, and now we work with all the majors. We are one of the few services globally that licenses content from all major US studios. It is unusual for an OTT service to do that, but in a high-growth market like this, where traditionally pay TV penetration has been quite low, platforms tend to have uniform prices across different countries. We think charging customers in their local currency is important and putting the service according to the affordability in each country is important, as each market is unique. This has been a very successful strategy for us.

Funding for Starz Play
We have raised $125m since our inception. State Street Global Advisors and Lionsgate-owned Starz are our major investors with HSQ Capital Partners, our seed investor, and Delta Partners, which came into our last funding round. It is a unique set of investors because this is a capital-intensive business and so the business model and the markets always need to be validated by a strategic Hollywood investor that understands the economics of this business. State Street is a household name in the financial world with over $7tn under management. Having a strategic investor from Hollywood like Lionsgate, combined with the financial strength of State Street, has given this company a sound investor base and allowed us to not only raise capital but also have credibility in the market to do the growth and expansion we have been doing.

Starz Play content
Lionsgate and Starz have an incredibly large library of content. 'The Twilight' series from Lionsgate, The Hunger Games and La La Land are all from Lionsgate. Starz has been producing very successful TV shows like Power, which is one of our most-watched shows across all markets. It is a top-performing show, with 50 Cent having established himself as one of the most successful rap artists of our time. Having him as a co-producer has been a very successful journey for us in the production of Power.

We are very proud of the combination of Hollywood, Arabic, Bollywood and French content we have. When the next season

Danny Bates, CCO and co-founder
What percentage of your clients have you been able to convert from free trials to subscriptions? In general, I would say around 60%, although it varies from market to market.

How many of your subscribers come through telcos as opposed to direct partnership? Most of the subscribers pay through a telco, but 78% of our customers are direct customers. That is indicative of the low credit card penetration in the region.

How do you measure success and how do you drive that further? One of the things we are proud of having achieved in 2018 is bringing down our acquisition costs. So the lifetime value that each subscriber will bring in is greater than the cost of acquiring each subscriber. For some companies, it is profitability; for some, it is free cash flow; and for high-growth e-commerce companies like us, it is all about market share and growth.

What are you doing to reduce subscriber churn? We see customers follow the content they want. We have learned that volume is key, and this is why our churn rate is lowering. We are also a very data-driven company, so we look carefully at what genres and content subscribers search for. The selection and breadth of appeal have been important for us. The churn rate was high, but by increasing the content and revisiting the breadth and relevance of our catalogue, our churns have dropped each year by half. Also, we have been able to create a lifetime value for our subscribers and that has helped control our churn rate.

As a business it appears as churn, consumer’s view it as flexibility and choice. That flexibility of not being locked into a contract is one of the reasons for the growth of OTT services. There is no cabling, no dish, no STB and no need for a 24-month contract. That choice and flexibility has been an important part of our growth because it gives you the freedom to come and go as you please.

As a business, we do want to reduce churn – but we also accept and appreciate that there is a certain consumer behaviour, and that they can leave any time.
In 2018, we were blessed with a strong five-year partnership with Etisalat and followed that up with retail distribution with eXtra in Saudi Arabia. Having our pre-paid cards in retail stores with a premium retail network.

“We have announced partnerships with most of the telcos and have covered the map from Muscat to Marrakech”

Maaz Sheikh, CEO and co-founder, Starz Play

In our key markets, therefore, we allow customers to pay for their services through their mobile phones.

Having our pre-paid cards in retail stores with a premium retail network.

“What percentage of your content is exclusive – and with the price of Arabic content rising, do you see yourself moving to more original productions?”

Khaled Benchouche, SVP Programming and Acquisitions

We have four or five years of data on people’s consumption habits. Around 75% of our content is exclusive. What makes us unique is that we often deal with the local heads like eXtra that took that forward.

We announced other partnerships last year with Saudi Telecom Company (STC), we launched on Android TVs in September, we expanded beyond greater MENA and launched in Pakistan – again a very successful initiative for us.

We have Hollywood content, Pakistani dramas and movies, as well as Bollywood movies for that market. In October, we announced a major partnership with Samsung and, depending on the TV you purchased, you could get our service free for a period of six months. We signed a partnership with Mobile, and that again was hugely successful.

Market performance, according to analysts

The IHS Market report on OTT subscriptions, according to which Starz Play is leading with 23.97% of the market share, Shahid at 21.69% and Netflix in third position with 18.26%.

This is the second consecutive year that IHS has done this report, and the top three players seem to be Starz Play, Shahid and Netflix.

It looks like it may be a three-horse race in the market. As we expand more in populous and large markets, whether in North Africa or Pakistan, we expect the same growth rate.

“We try to find content that matches people’s search requirements. We have that data and it is part of how we personalise that content”

Maaz Sheikh, CEO and co-founder, Starz Play

For our customers. We try to offer the right content for each market.

One thing we have noticed is that when new customers come to our services, we see what was first watched. 80% of people who download our app immediately watch something on it, and what they are watching is usually these two shows – Vikings and Power.

But what show has been consumed the most in the last three years? That’s Grey’s Anatomy. Friends and The Big Bang Theory are also huge consumption shows, and the latter is catching up with Grey’s Anatomy.

But there are others where we see spikes. So, for instance, with the next season of Billions now out, it has been one of the most-watched.

Do you have any aspirations to serve the Arab diaspora outside the region? This continues to be our home turf, but we are looking at options for content and services for the Arab diaspora. We have seen how valuable self-showing is and we have four years of history doing it, and right now, we are working very hard and we would like to take advantage of that to serve the diaspora.

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With the stakes in sport increasingly high, it’s important to ensure there are no errors in judgement. This EVS paper looks at how AI-enabled Video Assistance Referee (VAR) systems offer easier, faster and more precise refereeing.

Football is a year-round hot topic for millions of people around the world. The immense popularity of the sport means there is a lot at stake, and leagues and governing bodies need to constantly adapt to fans’ evolving expectations.

Technology is increasingly being used to improve the game and aid fan engagement. Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology, for instance, helps referees make more accurate decisions and to shape the game in important ways.

Since 2018, following a positive and encouraging two-year worldwide trial in major competitions, VAR has been written into the laws of the game by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) on a permanent basis. Its use is currently restricted to the review of four categories of match-changing decisions: handball, fouls outside the box, penalty decisions and red cards.

In 190 matches, VAR recommended 55 reviews to the referee, 37 of them related to goals. This means it corrected 6% of decisions related to goals, a substantial amount considering the impact a goal has on the outcome of a match. The statistics also show how VAR helped reduce protest: 14.5% and simulation by 83.3%, compared to the previous season.

According to Carlos Velasco Carballo, LaLiga’s VAR Project Head and Chief Refereeing Instructor: “With VAR, players understand that all the action is being watched and analysed, which is leading to better on-pitch behaviour.”

This reinforces FIFA’s statement following its unanimous approval of VAR: “This landmark meeting, chaired by FIFA President Gianni Infantino, represents a new era for football with video assistance for referees helping to increase integrity and fairness in the game.”

From the fan perspective, a survey of 1,000 football supporters during the 2018 World Cup revealed a whopping 75% of respondents believed VAR improved the quality of refereeing. While many were worried that VAR would slow football down too much, 81% felt it was worth losing playing time if VAR resulted in the correct decision.

It’s likely the use of VAR will continue to provoke passionate debates in the years to come, but one thing is sure: VAR systems are here to stay, and the good news is that what humans are capable of. One example is the use of Al to augment and enhance the decision-making process for referees by facilitating the identification of Offside offences. The new-generation VAR system uses this neural network technique to automatically calibrate the field of play and produce an offside line with a three-dimensional component from multiple viewing angles.

The AI performs a continuous analysis of the images generated by the broadcast cameras in real time and calculates the transformation between the camera image and the 3D model of the field, allowing the display of the offside line in augmented reality at any moment and with the right perspective. And because it’s integrated in the system, the need for tedious and time-consuming manual calibration is eliminated. With Al, the offside line is generated in less than a second.

In addition, should the camera position change, the system will automatically recalibrate itself so that operators can feel confident that their graphical overlays are always placed on the calibrated field with the highest level of precision.

AI MEETS VAR ON THE FIELD

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Where is VAR going next?

Just as humans learn by example and adjust our behaviour based on new experiences, the more AI is trained, the better it gets. This means the development of AI-enabled VAR systems will be refined over time with the right level of human supervision and a powerful infrastructure in place. Olivier Barnich, Engineering Manager at EVS, says: “Besides the use of AI for the automatic calibration of the field of play, there are other real-world applications that we are currently developing for live sports productions – some of which could also benefit VAR, such as automated camera selection and automated robotic camera steering.”

With automated robotic camera steering, AI is trained to locate the action and steer each robotic camera to what it thinks is the most relevant part of the field of play. This could lead to having dedicated robotic VAR cameras in addition to the broadcast cameras surrounding the field. While the broadcast cameras would be used primarily to generate interesting and visually appealing images for the narrative, the dedicated robotic VAR cameras would only be used to show the most relevant part of the field of play.

Where is VAR going next?

With automated camera selection, AI is trained to select what it deems to be the best or most appropriate camera angles. If we apply this technique to VAR usage, we can imagine AI learning to detect incidents on the field and suggesting the right camera angles to be reviewed by VAR. This would help speed up the decision-making process, as the VAR assistant would have a reduced number of camera angles to choose from. “These are exciting times for video technology in general. The potential of AI is huge, and our teams are looking forward to being part of this journey towards smarter and more efficient production,” concludes Barnich.

Another determining factor is the increase in image quality in broadcast. With the adoption of high-frame-rate cameras or newer formats such as 1080p or UHD 4K, it will become easier to zoom in and still keep a high-resolution image, helping to provide a clearer image and analyse the action with better precision.

The success of VAR largely depends on how well it is implemented and understood. Ultimately, the referee has to make the final call. This is why leagues and federations are beginning to develop intensive training programmes for officiating authorities. LaLiga has designed a course that involves workshops, studying other leagues, simulations for referees and communication with clubs, media and fans. Sergio Sánchez-Castañer, Technology Director for LaLiga’s VAR Project, says: “The key to VAR success is transparency and communication. From the first day we knew that it could be a success in Spain, but not before we brought all of the stakeholders together to understand the aims of VAR and how to use it.”

It’s likely we’ll see more and more training programmes of this kind being offered to referees, to prepare them for any situation and to guide them towards even more efficient use of VAR in real-life competitions.

VAR has now become an integral part of football, and it seems hard to go back to a world without it. Despite lingering scepticism, the first statistics behind the worldwide use of the technology show very positive results.

However, VAR is still in its infancy and there is always room for improvement. As more and more officials become accustomed to using it, and as technology continues to evolve, VAR systems will be fine-tuned over the next few years and best practices will strengthen over time. The technology will work even more efficiently, to help the quality and accuracy of the game as well as make it more honest and transparent.  

**“Besides the use of AI for the automatic calibration of the field of play, there are other real-world applications... for live sports productions – some of which could also benefit VAR, such as automated camera selection and automated robotic camera steering”**

Olivier Barnich, Engineering Manager at EVS

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The VAR system uses a neural-network technique to automatically calibrate the field of play, enabling multiple viewing angles. 

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**Combating Content Piracy**

Bringing together legal, technical, regulatory and community stakeholders to work towards a piracy-free environment for the MENA region. Learn about the latest threats to content and protecting IP, and how the industry and regulators are innovating to educate the consumer on the menace of piracy.

23 April 2019
Ritz Carlton JBR
Dubai, UAE

antipiracyconference.com
BBC BREAKS NEW GROUND

BroadcastPro ME had the opportunity to be part of the BBC Studios Showcase, the world’s largest international content market hosted by a single distributor, now in its 43rd year. Key MENA takeaways from the Showcase were the benefits of merging BBC Studios and BBC Worldwide, and the organisation’s new regional deals.

The integration of the BBC’s production and commercial aspects of content financing and sales under one unified model will enable executives to talk all the way from acquisition to commissioning, according to Paul Dempsey, President, Global Markets. More significantly, it throws up a whole array of new opportunities because with the integration, BBC Studios no longer has to produce all of its content for UK audiences only. It can now make a programme to be shown on other channels regionally or globally, not necessarily the BBC. “Previously, BBC Studios could only technically produce content for the home service. So if the BBC public service said it didn’t like an idea we proposed, production couldn’t take it anywhere else,” Grant Welland, EVP for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East & Africa at BBC Studios, tells BroadcastPro ME.

“Now, under the new unified entity, we are free to take our stories to PTV, Channel 4, Channel 5, et c. in the UK, or ZDF in Germany, or MBC in the Middle East. That’s the difference. Again, in the past we were able to bring international co-production money into the UK only if the BBC would take that production. If we didn’t cater to our home audience, we couldn’t do volume and breadth of British content available, with a potentially damaging impact on distinctiveness, risk-taking and innovation. Joining forces and deciding to take their stories outside if they didn’t find relevance on home ground was an important part of the decision. More specifically in MENA, the BBC has made significant inroads since the last Showcase. Earlier last year, it launched BBC Earth and CBeebies on beIN, and later on Digiturk in Turkey. Now it has BBC First and BBC News as well in the region. “On top of that, we signed a production MoU with beIN Media Group to explore co-production and development opportunities on the scripted and the factual side,” explains Natasha Hussain, Vice President and GM for the Middle East and Mediterranean, BBC Studios.

Other interesting developments in the UAE were announced at MIPCOM in October 2018, with the BBC’s first international format licence deals for No Kitchen Required with Quest Analytics and Astronauts: Toughest Job in the Universe with Dubai Media Inc. No Kitchen Required, a 10-part series based on the BBC America original commission, was produced across Saudi Arabia, the
Astronauts’ ‘Toughest Job in the Universe’ will soon make its debut as a local format with Dubai Media Inc on Dubai TV. The 10-part series follows 14 ordinary people as they take on a demanding training regime usually reserved for real-life astronaut candidates. As the candidates push themselves to the limit, they’re assessed by a doctor, a psychologist and an experienced astronaut to determine who has what it takes to attempt the toughest job in the universe. Filming will take place this year. “Essentially, these licensed agreements allow our partners to take our formats and repurpose them for their markets,” explains Hussain. “But we are very hands-on and have production offices globally. We see how to convert our content with our partners successfully on the ground, whether that is in the factual or scripted space. For that, we fly in producers that go and spend a certain amount of time in those territories. They work on the evolution of the scripts, discuss casting, where the series is heading, how to develop the right talent and how to make the show really stand out.”

With Dancing With the Stars, a big hit in the Arab world, Hussain says it is interesting to see the sale of high-energy and very different male-skewing factual formats like Astronauts and No Kitchen Required in the region. “That these programmes work for a different segment of the population, and are being adapted, is very exciting.”

But that’s not all. A recent deal with BBC Studios and MBC Shahil Plus means a mix of factual and drama titles such as Luther, Silent Witness, Inside the Factory, Ancient Invisible Cities and Secrets of the Bermuda Triangle are now available on the online platform. The Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle was sold to MBC as part of a second-window deal. Alhurra picked up factual titles from the BBC including North Korea: Murder in the Family, Diana and 7 Days. The BBC Arabic factual package includes Earth’s Natural Wonders, Ancient Invisible Cities and Deadly Dinosaurs. More recently, Kuwait TV ‘picked up natural history and factual packages such as Animals with Cameras, The Hunt and Spy in the Wild.'

“In the past, we were able to bring international co-production money into the UK only if the BBC would take that production. If we didn’t cater to our home audience, we couldn’t do it. But that is no longer the case”

Grant Welland, EVP for Central & Africa at BBC Studios
Grass Valley adds slo-mo support to LiveTouch

Grass Valley will debut the latest version of LiveTouch, which incorporates 4K UHD slow-motion replay, direct playout and full super-slow-motion support (2x, 4x, 6x, 8x) at NAB this year. The new super-slo-mo speeds and dedicated internal hardware for HFR make it ideal for pairing with the high-end capabilities of Grass Valley LDK cameras in either remote or at-home productions. The new integrated LiveTouch HFR capability easily handles colour mapping from any format to the production format of choice. In addition, this latest version of LiveTouch offers an advanced audio editing suite with intuitive controls for quick, easy editing and smooth playout sequences during a live event. Audio and video can be split and edited independently to advance or delay audio in a playlist, and auxiliary audio tracks can easily be dropped into a LiveTouch playlist to add music or sound effects. The tight integration between LiveTouch and Grass Valley’s editing environment is maintained in at-home production with the browser-based SGI production suite. This allows editing of content from any device that supports an internet browser.

Chris Merrill, Director of Product Marketing at Grass Valley said, “LiveTouch sits at the heart of a complete sports workflow that supports unmatched, fast tournament replay and highlights creation, with a unique distributed production model at a substantially lower cost than any other system. With its all-access to all content design, collaborative workflows in either SGI or IP have never been so easy or fast. We are excited to demonstrate the utmost capabilities of this system to visitors at our NAB booth.”

NAB Booth: SL606

**VITEC announces low-latency contribution solutions at NAB**

VITEC will demonstrate sub-5ms, ultra-low-latency SDI contribution with its new HD-SDI and 3G-SDI encoder/decoder configurations. VITEC’s HD-SDI and 3G-SDI encoder/decoder configurations will offer several key advantages over other systems on the market by providing ultra-low latency, HD-SDI, and 3G-SDI encoders and decoders in a single 2RU openGear card module form-factor. The initial MD9200 series consists of encoders and decoders in stand-alone, desktop configurations, and in the popular openGear card module form-factor. The openGear encoder and decoder modules are compatible with the broader openGear community of infrastructure products. Both encoder and decoder modules can be mixed and matched to create a complete solution for a variety of use-cases.

NAB Booth: SL6005

**MultiDyne enters the compression market**

MultiDyne Fiber Optic Solutions will officially enter the compression market with a specialised range of professional 4K/HD broadcast-quality encoders and decoders for streaming and storage workflows. The new MD1200 range strengthens the company’s value proposition with OTT and IPTV service providers moving SD, HD and 4K/UHD content over public and private IP and fibre networks. The initial MD1200 series consists of encoders and decoders in stand-alone, desktop configurations, and in the popular openGear card module form-factor. The openGear encoder and decoder modules are compatible with the broader openGear community of infrastructure products. Both encoder and decoder modules can be mixed and matched to create a complete solution for a variety of use-cases.

NAB Booth: SU6221

**Bittree announces Dante patchbay**

Bittree will unveil the new Bittree Dante patchbay at the NAB Show. Bittree’s Dante patchbay will eliminate the complexity of analogue and Dante audio patching in the broadcast infrastructure. It provides a ramp to instantly move 16 channels of analogue audio over Dante networks, and serves as a natural bridge to units legacy audio equipment with IP systems. Beyond broadcast, the Dante patchbay provides connectivity solutions to recording studios, post-production facilities and commercial AV environments (houses of worship, live event and performance venues, and large corporate and higher education campuses).

NAB Booth: C1539

**Barix steps up broadcast audio quality**

Barix will unveil the new Silence Monitor solution at the NAB Show. Silence Monitor is a web-accessible, analogue input audio monitoring device that promises the highest levels of quality assurance, monitoring audio streams 24/7, and sending real-time alerts when an outage or silence is detected. Silence Monitor offers optimal LTE 4G/3G/4G-LTE transmission for RF-out-of-band connectivity. This back-up communication link ensures alarm detection signals are transmitted, even during an IP network outage. Other products with silence detection send alarm notifications over the same network where the audio should be transported—a definite limitation. Silence Monitor allows the use of both local and out-of-band connection technology at the same time, for robust reliability. Users can monitor the status of the network and video transmission online through a cloud-based management portal. Users can also listen live to the audio at each monitoring site through the web-based management interface, with specific location designations identifying points quickly and easily.

NAB Booth: SU6221

**Bittree’s Dante audio patchbay will eliminate the complexity of analogue and Dante audio patching in the broadcast infrastructure.** It provides a ramp to instantly move 16 channels of analogue audio over Dante networks, and serves as a natural bridge to units legacy audio equipment with IP systems. Beyond broadcast, the Dante patchbay provides connectivity solutions to recording studios, post-production facilities and commercial AV environments (houses of worship, live event and performance venues, and large corporate and higher education campuses).

Consultants and systems integrators benefit from reduced labour and integration costs by removing the need to hardwire devices into the patching systems. This eliminates the costs that come with it. The Bittree Dante patchbay will interface with Dante Virtual Soundcard, countless Dante devices and almost any analogue component in the same system, including audio distribution equipment, digital audio workstations (DAWs), digital signal processors (DSPs), mixing consoles, multi-track recorders and video routers. The compact stand-alone or rack-mounted 1RU speaker-coat enclosure carefully incorporates DT patching for audio (16x16), redundant DC power in, external word clock in, network status and audio Yu multi-level LED metering.
Telestream debuts media processing platform

Telestream will unveil Vantage Cloud Port, a new approach to media processing workflows that can create hybrid cloud-based deployments with predictable SaaS pricing.

Max Denton, Product Manager at Telestream, said: ‘Vantage Cloud Port can implement jobs from a repository of containerised version-matched Vantage processing engines in the cloud. This enables flexible, intelligent hybrid media processing workflows.’

Vantage Cloud Port allows customers to modify workflows, without any onboard. Any existing user can augment on-prem processing. It couples the power of Vantage with the simplicity of SaaS. Vantage Cloud Port, running on Telestream Cloud, is a simple, deterministic approach for billing based on output content minute.

NAB Booth: SL3108

Cartoni will steer new lightweight pedestal at NAB

Cartoni will launch the new lightweight Steering P70 pedestal at NAB. With smooth performance and the ability to handle a payload of up to 75kg, it offers the highest up-to-date technology at a competitive price, Elisabetta Cartoni, President and CEO of Cartoni, said: “Cartoni is looking for cost-effective ways to add value to their telecasts without compromising performance. The new Steering P70 Pedestal offers an incredible payload capacity and precise, smooth movement in a compact and portable design.”

The new Steering P70 is a single-stage steering system for studio and OB production, with a removable steering wheel for extreme portability. Its column design promises outstanding stability and smooth, precise movements. The Steering P70 offers extensive on-site movement capability, with full cradling for easy manoeuvrability. The Cartoni pedestal comes with a five-year warranty.

NAB Booth: C9020

Slomo.tv goes affordable with VAR technology

Slomo.tv will introduce a new entry level of its Video Assistant Reference solution – videoReference-ST. Claimed to be the market’s most affordable VAR system.

With 12 SDI video inputs, it meets the minimum FIFA/FAB VAR requirements of supporting at least eight cameras, one of which is high speed. videoReference-ST has an adjustable input delay for the VAR and RO (red, green and blue). The system supports gesture control via the touch screen reference monitor and also provides SDI Output for the replay review area (RRA) monitor on the side of the playing field and broadcasters.

When it is necessary to increase the number of input channels, users can expand the capabilities of the system to 16 by acquiring an additional license. Also, the system can have the optional second workspace for VAR assistant (AVAR). The second workspace allows two replay operators (RO) to independently and work with different questionable moments or on the same cameras for different camera angles. This can significantly speed up the replay process – one RO works with VAR, the other one – with AVAR.

The four graphical systems output freely scalability in organising any configuration of interfaces. It is 6U, 19sm and weighs 19.5Kg.

NAB Booth: C9020

LYNXTech launches HDR to SDR converter

LYNXTech announces LYNXTech 40, an enhanced video image engine powered by the greenMachine HDR Static Conversion solution, to support single-channel 12G SDI (UHD) conversions or can be configured as a four-channel device for 3G/HD applications. 4K Quad 2G inputs and optional 12G lasers (correctly matching with almost any system. A wide array of conversion possibilities are available, including pre-processing HDR to 4K, SDI and HD-SDI and even conversion between HD standards. LYNXTech HDR also supports a range of open standards for conversion, tone mapping and colour gamut, including HLG, PQ, SDR and EQIP.

NAB Booth: NS27

GatesAir scales new heights with Intraplex Ascent

GatesAir will unveil Intraplex Ascent, a scalable, multichannel audio over IP transport solution that addresses the convergence of broadcast operations with IT infrastructure. The complete working solution will be officially introduced at NAB.

Ascent offers a direct connection to traditional digital and analogue audio interfaces and is compliant with both the AES67 standard and AoIP networking solutions (Ravenna, Livewire and QDE). Ascent is available in two form factors: a JRü server with configurable options for physical and AES67 channels, and a software-only solution that operates in a virtualised container.

Both versions support up to 32 audio channels (AES3, AES67, analogue) and are interoperable with most multichannel audio-over-IP codecs.

Intraplex Ascent provides broadcasters with a highly scalable, redundant and cloud-based transport platform for multichannel contribution and distribution. The platform streamlines installation and management by removing the need for many separate codecs and auxiliary hardware components, freeing multiple equipment racks in enterprise-level facilities.

Keyur Parikh, VP and GM, Intraplex Product Line, said: “Audio over IP has become a widely accepted technology, with a growing number of hardware and software solutions for broadcasters to choose from. GatesAir is taking the next logical step for our customers with direct integration into the IT infrastructure. With our Dynamic Splicing application and SRV capability to tank stream and reliable our customers now have a simple platform to manage many channels coming in and out of the studio or headend – all on a single, highly-redundant, multi-core server.”

NAB Booth: N3303

VSN helps customers with NewsConnect

VSN will showcase VSN NewsConnect as an INCS plug-in for NRCS that allows users to create a news production environment specifically suited to their requirements, complementing and improving the media production workflow at any facility. It simplifies and increases the speed at which news is generalised, and improves efficiency and predictivity by eliminating the need for users to work with and switch between different tools and interfaces. Users can also see in real time how the final stories – including graphics and videos – will look.

An add-on for the VSNExplorer platform for media and workflow management, the web plug-in allows users to visualise all the assets and videos stored in the VSNExplorer MAM/PAM system within the interface of the large majority of NRCS systems available on the market, and it quickly allocates and drag and drop files into NRCS stories in order to complete their localראש

NAB Booth: SL4706

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NAB Booth: SL4706
Marshall Electronics introduces wide viewing angle monitors

Marshall Electronics introduces the new 24-inch V-R241-4K Master Confidence Monitor with a wide viewing angle that can display resolution inputs all the way up to 4K. The monitor supports SDI inputs up to 12G and HDMI inputs up to HDMI 2.0, all with HDR. Marshall’s V-R241-4K will be on display at the show.

The V-R241-4K comes with waveform and vectorscope functions along with on-screen tally lights, image flip ability and a headphone jack for confidence monitoring. In addition to being feature-rich, the V-R241-4K is eco-friendly with low power consumption in standby mode and remote wake.

Among other features, the standout features of V-R241-4K include UHD/4K support via 12G SDI, Quad 3G SDI, Interleaved 2SI and HDMI 2.0. It displays all HD, UHD and 4K resolutions along with built-in confidence speakers to confirm the presence of embedded audio.
The immersive future of broadcast sport

Improving live streaming – 5G and reducing latency

As streaming live sports relies on high connectivity, especially as viewers tend to log in just before a sporting event kicks off, being able to scale up and down is important. Ericsson’s November 2018 ‘Mobility Report’ forecasts that video traffic in mobile networks will grow by 35% annually through to 2024. 5G will play a key role in helping content providers draw out new user experiences by reducing the strain placed on network operators.

It will also play a significant role in opening new avenues for live sports broadcasting, especially given the rising demand for new streams such as VR and ultra-high definition/high dynamic range (UHD/HDR). In May 2018, 5G was used to live stream the US Open golf tournament in 4K video. 5G wireless technology was used to transmit 4K HDR images from two Fox Sports cameras through the production truck to viewers at home.

New formats for immersive viewing

Delivering live productions to multiple screens with the best possible delivery mechanism opens up new opportunities for engagement and viewing – especially in the context of audience fragmentation and consumer demand for a more personalised viewing experience. CBS Sports, for example, used this year’s Super Bowl to deploy multiple 4K and 8K cameras to deliver a variety of new viewing angles and close-ups. These new perspectives were supplemented by VR, enabled by a live wireless hand-held camera that displayed AR pictures via an up-close camera tracking the field.

Another technological innovation saw the delivery of the world’s first multi-channel 8K tiled 360-degree live sports event – a basketball game between Telekom Baskets Bonn and EWE Baskets Oldenburg – thanks to a collaborative project involving Deutsche Telekom, MediaKind, Magnum Films, TiledMedia, INVR.SPACE and Iconic Engine. The live streams were delivered to customers of Deutsche Telekom’s commercial Magenta VR service. This demonstration enabled customers to experience the event from the front row of the stadium or from behind the hoop. What made it successful was the ability to live stream in high quality through low bitrates.

The future of live sports streaming

The challenge today is to leverage the increasing use of second screens and to convert content via multi-platform compatibility. By generating highly connected, aggregated audiences through a single platform, sports broadcasters have opportunities to find new methods of monetisation and deliver new technical developments which will drive the future sports entertainment experience.

Arun Bhikshesvaran is CMO, MediaKind.

Huge expectations meet a compact design.

The SK 5212 once defined the industry standard for compact wireless transmitters. Its digital successor, the SK 6212, is now heralding a new era. This mini bodypack provides 12 hours of operating time, and its intermodulation-free transmission concept enables more reliable channels, even in congested frequency ranges.

Size matters — performance counts.

sennheiser.com/SK6212
The Next Stage of Innovation

- Single/Multi Channel Playout/IP Streaming Automation with Interactive graphics
- Cloud Solutions • IPTV and WEB TV Solutions • Media Asset Management
- Remote Redundant Playout • Ad Insertion and DPI • Disaster Recovery Playout
  • Time Shift