CREATING A WINNING FORMULA

7 Production heads full-throttle to cover F1 races for MBC Action
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To digress a bit, we had the pleasure of listening to renowned American musician Joan Baez sing to a packed audience at Stravinski Auditorium and were also treated to the behind-the-scenes production of the festival. The Kudelski Group has, over the years, extended a great deal of technical support to the festival and has played a seminal role in creating its high-resolution digital archive.

But coming back to IoT, Susanne Grasenick, VP IoT of Business Strategy Group at NAGRA, related an incident in the US to emphasise the need to secure every part of the IoT ecosystem. A casino in the US had a fish tank with sensors connected to a PC to regulate its temperature, food and cleanliness. A clever hacker used the tank to gain entry into the casino and steal client data.

Emonet, VP IoT of Business Strategy Group at NAGRA, related an incident where a clever hacker used the tank to gain entry into the casino and steal client data.

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The first step may be to dig deeper into the power of data, says Jacques Guillemot
Abu Dhabi Media offers exclusive live streaming with UFC Arabia app

Abu Dhabi Media has launched UFC Arabia, the first Arabic-language UFC app in the MENA region, following its partnership with the world’s premier mixed martial arts promotion.

The app enables fans in the region’s 21 countries to exclusively live stream events as well as access a range of fight videos. It is downloadable through all major online stores and will be available on the web, smartphones and tablets. It will allow fans to track real-time updates of all UFC events and live-stream fights anytime, anywhere, enabling them to switch from English to Arabic with ease.

Commenting on the launch, Abdulrahman Awadh Al Harthi, Executive Director of Television at Abu Dhabi Media, said: “We are very excited to welcome UFC back to Abu Dhabi through the launch of this first Arabic-language application, UFC Arabia. Abu Dhabi Media is keen to serve its audiences through diversified media channels, and online and digital platforms.”

David Shaw, UFC Senior Vice President, International and Content, added: “UFC Arabia will provide fans in the MENA region with one place to view all UFC live events as well as hundreds of hours of shoulder programming. We are committed to growing the sport across the region and the new app will help us achieve this common goal.”

The digital subscription service will offer customers live online access to all UFC events, as well as a comprehensive content library available in English and Arabic.

Subscribers of the application will be able to enjoy a 30-day free trial period, which can be cancelled at any time, free of charge, before the expiration of the trial period,” added Al Harthi.

UFC Arabia will be available in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, the UAE and Yemen.
Globecast brings Total AFCON to viewers in 4K

Globecast extended its relationship with the organisers and rights holders of the Total Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Egypt, bringing the 2019 tournament to the world. The tournament began on June 21 and ended on July 19. Globecast worked in partnership with the Egyptian Local Organising Committee (LOC), Lagardère Sports, managers and marketers of sports rights across Europe and Africa, and the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF).

For additional on-the-ground logistics support, Globecast partnered with KAR Technology, which provided logistical expertise and liaison with the LOC. Globecast also collaborated closely with Iris Media, which provided SNGs and additional technical support. Globecast provided a range of services to CAF, including contribution, distribution and VOD content preparation and storage. The opening match and the final were broadcast in 4K for the first time, using HEVC encoding. In total, there were 52 matches in four cities across Egypt.

Philippe Bernard, Chairman and CEO of Globecast, said: “This year we see particular innovation with the use of both 4K and VOD content supply, with our Content Marketplace providing broadcast affiliates with new ways to extend viewer engagement. We have worked very closely with both KAR and Iris Media. The LOC has done a fantastic job in the UAE capital.”

Ayrton appoints NMK Electronics as Middle East distributor

Ayrton has appointed NMK Electronics as its new exclusive distributor for the GCC countries, effective immediately. Commenting on the announcement, Alek Kemane, CEO of NMK, said: “The lighting industry has changed rapidly over the last few years with the introduction and acceptance of LED fixtures as suitable replacements to conventional lamp-based fixtures. Ayrton is on the rise globally, taking a large portion of the market share of the entertainment lighting industry by consistently developing state-of-the-art lighting fixtures which reduce operating costs while maintaining high output.”

He added: “Our team was very impressed with Ayrton’s current portfolio and future roadmap. Our appointment to work with Ayrton in the GCC will further cement NMK’s name in the live events industry as a distributor of premium brands.”

NetflixFootball announce Arabic-language Original series Dollar

Netflix has announced the release of Dollar, a new Arabic-language Original drama that will stream from August 8. Dollar, a 15-episode series starring Lebanese actor-comedian Adel Karam and Algerian actress Anaa Boucheoucha, will be available with subtitles in 20 languages.

Dollar is an Arabic-language Original series that explores the challenges and triumphs of two families navigating the complexities of life in a rapidly changing Egypt.

Advanced Media announces availability of Angenieux Optimo Primes in Middle East

The Optimo Prime series completes the Angenieux FF zoom lens offering, including the Optimo Ultra 12x, and will be available from UAE distributor Advanced Media Trading. The series of 12 lenses provides full-frames 4.6mm image circle coverage with a consistent 1.8 T-stop (except on extremes). Available as PL and LPL and designed as smart lenses, the Optimo Prime Series is compact and lightweight. The lenses support both Cooke/1 and Arri LDS, and offer a common gear size and position for all lenses in the 12-lens set.

The Optimo Prime series has been developed on the same business model settled for the EZ series, in partnership with two major sales stakeholders of the market: Band Pro in the US and Jasion Cinecast in China.

Nat Geo offers environmental shows on MENA channels

National Geographic has announced two environmental programmes for its channels. Nat Geo Kids Abu Dhabi has launched a highly interactive 16-episode environmental series, Green Thumb to educate children while igniting their creativity in developing their own environmentally friendly and sustainable farms. Nat Geo Abu Dhabi has also partnered with Environment Agency Abu Dhabi for a five-part documentary series titled Explore Your Environment that showcases the UAE’s diverse flora and fauna, and steps that can be taken to preserve this natural heritage in the UAE capital.

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Maite Venture appointed LaLiga’s new MENA MD

LaLiga, the Spanish football League has appointed Maite Ventura as the new Managing Director for MENA, based in Dubai. She will report to LaLiga’s International Director, Oscar Mayo. Ventura’s appointment is another step towards LaLiga’s commitment to boosting female talent. Currently, over 30% of LaLiga’s staff is made up of women. Ventura said: “We have a big opportunity to strengthen our global presence as well as the engagement with our fans in MENA. I am excited to be part of this team as I believe we have a bright future ahead of us in this part of the world.”
Focusrite Pro RedNet system bridges studios at Dubai-based Al Aan TV

Dubai-based Al Aan TV has upgraded its audio systems with Focusrite’s Pro RedNet system, which helps distribute different audio signals between its audio rooms on two separate floors with no audio latency. Focusrite Pro is distributed by MediaCast. Al Aan TV required access to analogue as well as digital channels in each of the rooms on both floors, without the need to change the entire infrastructure, which would have cost a significant amount to execute. Focusrite’s RedNet was able to resolve this problem by providing a cost-effective solution. The DANTE ASR and DIGR provided access to 16 channels and through the DANTE network connecting both audio rooms on both floors, additionally, the X2P was used as a portable monitoring/capturing unit on both floors as well.

Each audio room had a unit of ASR and DIGR installed to provide a connection between both floors, all through just a spare LAN in the organisation. Upon preliminary testing, it was found that the audio channels being sent to and from each audio room were of superior quality and more than acceptable latency turnaround time, as reported by the TV station. Commenting on the technology employed, Naas Hajji, Senior Audio Engineer at Al Aan TV, said: “When we undertook the ITD revamp, we had to shut down the PCR and audio room on the fourth floor. At this time, RedNet’s solutions rose to the challenge by helping us connect the fourth-floor studio mics and ear monitoring to the fifth-floor audio room through the DANTE network. This was a simple and cost-effective solution that also ensured we could retain high standards.”

Hajji added: “When we knew that Focusrite Pro’s RedNet products were ideal, we knew that Focusrite Pro’s RedNet products were ideal for their needs, with RedNet’s audio technology combined with its capability to harness the power of DANTE.”

Broadpeak expands presence in Middle East with Dubai office launch

Broadpeak has opened a new office in Dubai in order to address the growth in OTT video consumption and increased demand for its technologies. With local sales and support presence in the Middle East, Broadpeak will now be in a better position to help content providers and pay-TV operators in the region take advantage of video streaming opportunities. Commenting on the announcement, Jacques Le Manouc, CEO at Broadpeak, said: “Content providers and operators in the Middle East are looking for innovative ways to drive new business growth and capitalise on the video streaming market. Having a local team on-site in Dubai will give Broadpeak a better perspective on the day-to-day challenges facing our customers and allow us to quickly respond to their needs with solutions that deliver better QoE across all screens in the most scalable and cost-effective way possible.”

Thibaud de Rohan Chabot, Sales Director at Broadpeak, will field all Middle East sales inquiries.

Sawa teams up with Huawei to offer cloud-based video service

UAE-based SAWA Rights Management, a TV channel aggregator and content service provider and the licensing arm of SAWA Media and SAWA Technologies, has partnered with Huawei to enhance consumers’ choice of video content available through regional telecom operators. The partnership will see SAWA and Huawei implement a new cloud-based convergent video service. SAWA will also extend its portfolio of TV channels and encrypted channels to telecom operators in the MENA region. The service will give viewers access to pre-integrated SAWA entertainment channels as well as features which enable multi-service offerings, such as an electronic programme guide, catch-up services, a time shift function and a network personal video recorder (nPVR) function. It will also offer a big data analysis function which gives users individualised content recommendations.

SAWA’s Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Huawei, as part of the MoU, the two companies have agreed to cooperate in the launch of a video cloud service and boost home business services from regional telecom operators, especially in the home (FTTH) services. The new video service promises to tackle many of the challenges facing traditional players in the broadcast industry, particularly rising costs, sub-par user experiences and the growing demand for immediate high-definition content. For operators this coincides with the recent announcement of the channel’s biggest enhancement since its 2012 launch.

The service will provide SAWA’s channel offerings on-demand through Intelligent Video Cloud solution, a one-stop-shop for content consumers and telecom operators. The solution provides premium private-line services by reducing service provisioning time from weeks to days, allowing users to subscribe to services in just minutes on their own, as stated in a press statement by the two companies. The service will give SAWA’s content consumers and telecom operators a new way to distribute content, which coincides with the recent announcement of the channel’s biggest enhancement since its 2012 launch.

Sky News Arabia renews internship programme for media graduates

Sky News Arabia [SNA] will provide budding journalists, producers and directors with an opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills, as part of its annual graduate internship programme. Aimed at Arab-speaking graduates or students seeking to embark on a career in media, the programme has welcomed 15 applicants this year. It kicked off on July 21 and will last 11 weeks. This year, the programme will include a new focus on creating media content with an emphasis on digital skills. This coincides with the recent announcement of the channel’s biggest enhancement since its 2012 launch.

Upon completion of the programme, SNA will then offer internship placements to the best candidates. Mahra Al Yaqobi, Learning & Development Manager, SNA, said: “Sky News Arabia is committed to supporting young journalists who want to take their first steps in this industry. With so many talented young people studying in this region, the SNA programme is an excellent platform to build their knowledge and skills and give them exposure to a real-life newsroom.”

ZEE5 launches outreach programme in region

ZEE5 has rolled out a slew of initiatives across multiple markets in the Middle East the first, as part of its ‘Full-on Entertainment’ campaign. South Asian audiences in the Middle East will be treated to a set of on-the-ground experiences curated by ZEE5, including movie screenings every Thursday at different locations. Archana Anand, Chief Business Office, ZEE5 Global, said: “Given the vast diaspora of South Asians in the Middle East as well as its appetite for desi content, this is the first of the three markets where ZEE5 kicks off a range of consumer engagement activities. Our new campaign, ‘Full-on Entertainment’, invites people into a world of exciting entertainment and keeps them on the edge of their seats. For us, this is redefining the scale of interactive initiatives where we have the chance to engage with our audience across the Middle East and build deep conversations with them.”
Art Format Lab announces first Saudi film to be shot in KSA, Egypt and Italy

UAE production house Art Format Lab has announced that it is in the process of producing Mukhtar, the first Saudi movie to be shot in KSA, Egypt and Italy. The plot revolves around a Saudi explorer who runs a travel channel on YouTube, narrating a story about one country in each episode. The YouTuber completes 99 stories, with only one story remaining in his 100 Stories with Gharib series.

Speaking about the film, Dr Mustafa Alaidaroos, CEO of Art Format Lab, said: “The film celebrates the dialogue and coexistence with different religions, and aims to convey the right image of the Saudi modern young gentlemen who call for moderation and tolerance with others. It is a Saudi film in terms of production, idea, script, music and acting. We are optimistic that in the coming period we will see opportunities to develop young talents in Saudi Arabia, as this industry has shown great potential in enriching local content. We aim to guide those energetic talents on the path to a Saudi cinema that has great global outreach in the near future.”

Robe appoints NRG crew member

Robe has appointed Jordan Tinniswood to its International Exhibition team. Tinniswood’s appointment is a result of the Next Robe Generation (NRG) initiative, in which he has been actively engaged throughout his academic career. Tinniswood takes on the role of Lighting & Media Technician, working alongside Nathan Wan, Andy Webb and Tomáš Kohout.

Sennheiser hires new Middle East Marketing Manager

Sennheiser has announced the appointment of Shraddha Mukul as its new Regional Marketing Manager in the Middle East. In this newly created role, Mukul will take charge of Sennheiser’s brand and trade marketing activities across sales channels. She will report directly to Mig Cardamone, Director of Sales and Marketing at Sennheiser Middle East.

Cardamone said: “We have been steadily growing our footprint in the Middle East and believe it’s now the right time to onboard an experienced marketing manager. Shraddha brings with her a unique 360-degree insight into the region’s commercial and consumer electronics segments.”

Telecom Egypt, Ericsson demo 5G capabilities

Telecom Egypt and Ericsson partnered to showcase two demos based on augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality (MR), as well as AI object and face recognition, at Alexandria Stadium.

Eng Adel Hamed, Telecom Egypt Managing Director and CEO, said: “Consumers are always seeking new ways to experience their favourite sports content. Through the evolution of technology, we have the potential to push boundaries and take the consumer to the heart of the game itself. Alexandria Stadium is a great venue to demonstrate how far we have come technologically, and why it will matter to fans.”

Telecom Egypt and Ericsson went live with a full-stack telco cloud infrastructure with the deployment of AI as proof of concept, focusing on transforming the wireless network and providing a 5G-ready core.

Brio: Our biggest tiny console, ever. Now with 96 channels.

Calrec’s Brio console has been boosted by new channel expansion packs. Packs increase the Bro12 DSP count from 48 to 64 input channels and the Brio36 from 64 to 96 input channels.

Brio is packed with pure broadcast features as standard; broad IP functionality, MADI connectivity, comprehensive monitoring, automixers, loudness metering, full 5.1 capability, extensive IFB resources and built-in I/O.

Still small in size, now even bigger in stature.
Advanced Media brings industry together for REDucation Workshop

Dubai distributor Advanced Media hosted a three-day workshop on RED cameras at its studio in Al Quoz. The course was conducted by Futurist Digital CEO Steve Johnson, who has been involved with US firm RED Digital Cinema’s REDucation programme since 2009 and regularly conducts courses around the world in cities such as Berlin, Brisbane, Oslo, Moscow, Los Angeles and Singapore.

This particular workshop focused on offering a fully immersive, hands-on, practical training course on the RED DSMC2 cameras, including the MONSTRO 8K and Dragon X 5K S35 systems, for both on-set and post-production practices. “We look at various aspects of getting the best out of a RED camera, from how to operate it and how to expose correctly using a RED camera, to post-production. It is a three-day intensive course. Most of our attendees own a RED camera, which makes the dynamics a bit different because we’re not trying to get them to buy,” explains Johnson.

Noting that digital transitions and upgrading formats can determine the success of camera production brands across the world, he adds: “During RED’s initial days we were in 4K, and then we moved up to 5K and then 6K. Now we’re looking at VISTAVISION, which is a VistaVision sensor which is 8K, large format. This is great for cinematic films, so films like Guardians of the Galaxy II were shot in 8K VistaVision. Then we’ve got the RED Weapon 8K S35 and the 5K Dragon. The GEMINI is an interesting camera because of its dual ISO sensitivity. The GEMINI was built specifically for NASA and the International Space Station, so it works well in low light. Because of its success in space, RED offered it to a select number of operators. Having been able to move that ISO to 3000 and get a clean image is a big move for RED.”

Johnson notes that with more big players looking at filming in 8K, RED’s new cameras give end users an edge. “I think with this camera range, RED is at the cutting edge of what can be done, especially with 8K cameras. Next year, the Olympics in Tokyo is being broadcast in 8K. Netflix, which is the gold standard of deliverables, is looking at filming in 8K, even though it is not an old brand like ARRI – has great technology, quality and offers ease of use to professionals all the way down to independent filmmakers – and is the best type of camera to use. You can build it how you want, you can customise it. I think slowly we’ll start to see RED take over. It’s already employed for 80% of Netflix shows.”

“The aim of the workshop is not to push any sales of the RED cameras. Rather, we focus on providing attendees with an in-depth knowledge of how to use their tools”

Ardalan Khosravi, Sales Executive & RED Brand Manager, Advanced Media
For the first time ever, a Dubai production house is trotting the globe with the FIA Formula One World Championship to bring exclusive content to dedicated fans in the Middle East. From the stables of 7 Production, BroadcastPro ME brings you all the behind-the-scenes action.
In its history spanning decades, the FIA Formula One World Championship has enjoyed a steady and devoted fan base both globally and in the Middle East. Like every edition, the Championship will tour the world before culminating in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, which has been running since 2009 and is testimony to the popularity of the premiere motor sport in the region.

The sport’s popularity can in large measure be credited to its TV viewership over the years. Free-to-air broadcast network MBC Group secured exclusive MENA broadcasting rights to the championship for the first time this year. The rights previously lay with beIN Media Group, which did not bid for 2019. MBC wanted to elevate the level of the race coverage for viewers by bringing an additional slice of the action through highlights, pit lane and paddock interviews with drivers, as well as other bits of information. This was not done by beIN when it had the same rights.

Hadi Ghanem, CEO of 7 Production, says the success of this project has already attracted other new international projects to the UAE company.

The first time in the Arab world, an Arab company is travelling the world to undertake these productions on a par with other international broadcasters, who have their own film production units there. For us to be selected for such a production is testimony to our work and our reputation.”

Although Formula One retains the exclusive rights to produce the races, broadcasters traditionally carry out their own independent coverage as part of their efforts to offer additional news from the races. 7 does this for MBC, giving viewers a look at other aspects of the Championship in a way it has never been done in the past.

“Previously beIN had the broadcast rights, but they didn’t have presenters, reporters and commentators on the ground, as we have for this project,” explains Tabet. “We have worked with MBC on other projects, and they know the quality of the work we produce. They recognise the quality of the equipment and the service delivered by 7 Production and thus got us along not just for the Middle East, but globally this time. Previously, companies that provided similar services were selected country-wise; the fact that we are accompanying MBC for the entire season across locations is truly prestigious.”

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“Our team has gained the confidence to go ahead and undertake such projects, and now we have proved our ability to take on projects of such large scale not just regionally but also globally”

Hadi Ghanem, CEO, 7 Production

footage. For 7 Production, this landmark partnership does not just mark a prestigious undertaking but also serves to test its production prowess beyond regional shores.

Sharing the pride 7 Production takes in this partnership and what it means for both the company and the region, Pierre Tabet, Managing Director at 7 Production, says: “What makes this year’s broadcast special is that for the first time in the Arab world, an Arab company is travelling the world to undertake these productions on a par with other international broadcasters, who have their own film production units there. For us to be selected for such a production was testimony to our work and our reputation.”

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“It is the first time we have undertaken such a massive global production. We have around 20 people at each location following the schedule for F1, including the cameramen and the operations team”

Tony Jabbour, Head of Engineering, 7 Production

reputation in the market for its coverage of live events in the region, across different genres.

It was sought out to cover the National Day celebrations in several GCC countries; more recently, it produced Cirque du Soleil for MBC, live in Saudi Arabia. It has covered several sports, including the 2019 King Abdul Aziz Camel Festival in Saudi Arabia, the AFC Asian Cup, Al Gaffal Dhow Race in the UAE and the FIA World Rally Cross Championship. 7 also covered the Porsche GT 2018, which is of a similar magnitude to the F1 championship.

These successes, however, were considered regional accomplishments. What has truly catapulted the production house into a new league of international production houses is its ability to cover F1 live across the globe at short notice.

“7’s infrastructure and technical expertise have had a big role to play in this undertaking and its ability to take up a number of big projects simultaneously. The company has 12 OB vans and five flight cases. Only one large flight case was required for the F1, which gives a good idea of the vast inventory the production house has.

“All equipment used is privately owned by the company. When we purchase equipment, we keep in mind the different kinds of events we need to film. So we have systems designed for fast-paced sports events where our cameras can capture every detail, even at the highest speeds. Our crew have shot in so many different environments and as a result have been exposed to so many different challenging situations, and this has made them skilled at what they do,” says Tabet.

“For this series of productions, we had an all-European crew. We are a team on the ground, filming all the footage required. We take the feed and provide it to MBC, who then broadcasts it for the Middle East. Eurovision was enlisted to provide 7 Production with the satellite link to send the feed.”

The team includes camera operators, EVS operators for the EVS XT3 and graphics operators. During the F1 championship, cameras were strategically placed across the pit lane, paddock and starting grid.

“We had a total of five cameramen covering one GP. Two cameras were used to capture the paddock, two covered the pit lane and one camera was dedicated to filming the starting grid and action around it, including the commentary,” explains Tabet. Wireless Vislink cameras with 16db antennas were deployed for long-distance filming.

“7 used Sony cameras to shoot the additional footage.

“Interviews conducted by MBC in the pit lane and paddock were filmed by 7 as part of F1 coverage shown on MBC Action.”

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“We have never been to some of these countries before, and the time frame was too short for us to do a site visit. In each place, the team is assigned a new space for a gallery within the TV compound. Installing a big flight case, wireless systems and connecting the fibre optics with varying measurements at different locations that have different rules, has not been easy. In the UAE, we are pretty familiar with the rules. In this case, our team needed to gauge the situation quickly and work within the parameters set in each country. All this is in addition to what we are doing, in terms of filming the interviews in different areas of the race.”

Tabet adds that the challenge is to “make sure we are not one second over the scheduled time frame”. “We are moving from one country to the next. We have three production days plus one set-up day for us to use our wireless cameras to film live. Being mindful of time has been critical to this operation. Our equipment is all shipped by DHL, and we have had to ensure timing is calculated to the dot so no outside factors cause delays. The equipment needs to be packaged in top condition to make sure nothing is damaged. Once the set-up day and three production days are complete, the team packs up and moves on to the next country to follow the same drill again.”

So far, Jabbour claims 7 has “not had a single drop”, having just completed the Austrian Grand Prix as we go to press. Tabet says this is no mean feat. “I would like to emphasise the skill set required to cover the F1. Wireless cameras can go wrong very quickly if used incorrectly. Time frames can go horribly wrong if one small detail is overlooked – especially when all this is being telecast live on air. So we have ensured that only the best talent is filming the F1.”

For 7 Production, this project has been prestigious for several reasons. CCO Hadi Ghannem explains why. “This project is testimony to our capabilities and the skill we are able to bring to the table. On a macro level, our team has gained the confidence to go abroad and undertake such projects, and now we have proved our ability to take on projects of large scale not just regionally but also globally. On the back of this, we have had some international media houses approach us to undertake projects. So on a more macro level, what we do also helps put the region on the map in terms of production. There are films and drama series that are travelling from the UAE and the Arab world to the rest of the globe. Now we have also proved that we, as a regional production house, can compete with international players, and this attracts more projects to the region.”

Having said that, only nine Grand Prix races are done and dusted. 7 Production must keep the tempo up for the remaining races, with everyone waiting in anticipation for the grand finale in Abu Dhabi this November.
Jinn, the first Arabic-language Netflix Original, premiered in Amman, Jordan at a red-carpet event on June 13. The series, shot over 55 days in Petra and parts of modern Amman, stirred controversy among Jordanians following its global debut, on grounds of being too modern and unrepresentative of Jordanian culture.

In response to critics, Netflix MENA issued a statement: “Jinn seeks to portray the issues young Arabs face as they come of age, including love, bullying and more. We understand with shows such as Al Rawabi School for Girls and Paranormal lined up for the coming months?

Kelly Luegenbiehl, VP International Originals, Netflix, talks to Kelly Luegenbiehl about the making of Jinn and the rest of its MENA line-up.

Since filming began last August, how has the experience been collaborating with the Dassani brothers and Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya? The Dassani brothers brought us the idea originally, and they’ve been working a lot in Jordan. They had this idea about young adults with a sort of sci-fi element to it, and then when we connected with Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya, he sort of brought to life the stylistic vision and tone, and was really able to pull out something special with these actors – a lot of whom didn’t have a ton of experience but who were instrumental in giving their characters that voice, that specificity. I think these kids sound like real kids, and I think that’s something the world is going to respond to. Just having them be such active participants in the creation of their characters was a really fun and exciting experience for us.

What were some of the guiding decisions behind Netflix launching with Jinn as the first Arabic-language Original? How is Netflix positioned within the region, and how amazing they were to work with. That makes it more exciting to do more in the region.

What kind of audience does Jinn seek to cater to? Well, definitely when we make a local language series, we want members from that country or region to love that show. But what’s so exciting for us is to see how that local language series can travel globally. We just saw that recently with The Protector from Turkey; it was well loved in Turkey but then we saw that the show also appealed to people in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. That’s really our hope for a show like Jinn, and so, the idea of Arabic-language programming

What kind of market research did Netflix conduct before entering the Middle Eastern market? We’ve always done studies and consumer insight testing, but it’s not necessarily facts and figures-based; it’s just listening to people and learning about them, their culture and the kind of stories that they want to hear. In the case of Jinn, we did hear from young adults and teens that they hadn’t seen themselves necessarily reflected on screens, speaking their language in their country, in this way before. So for us, it was a great opportunity to give them that mirror moment to see themselves on screen in a unique and new way.

Tell us a little bit about the incubation process of this series. I was involved in the process, but we also had a team in LA and a team in Amsterdam – everyone was working together to sort of bring the story to life. I think for us it’s really exciting to work with people like Elan and Rajeev Dassani, the writers of the series, and directors Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya and Amin Mataqla, and to support them through that process of getting the ideas that are in their head ultimately onto the screen.

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How has your experience been with giving fresh talent a platform? What I love about series and my whole career in television is that you can make stars in television, in a way that you can’t in almost any other medium. We’ve seen that happen globally – the kids from Elite, our first young adult series from Spain, they’ve become global household names just like the cast in La Casa de Papel, Quicksand, The Rain. I think the kids from Jinn are really going to find that global audience. We don’t have to have stars to make that happen; we just have to have super talented people.

Can you tell us about scoring for the series? I believe you worked with Mashrou’ Leila, a famous band in the region, for a couple of songs? Music is something that can help bring a story to life. When we can, we work with local bands and artists to add that extra layer of authenticity. Lynn Fainchtein, our music supervisor, has helped us all over the world to tap into the up-and-coming from that region or from that country, and I think she did that in Jinn as well. I’m hopeful everyone will be clicking on Spotify and listening to the playlist.

Is it true that Netflix searches for the most authentic story of a region? Tell us about that in the context of Jinn. We really do believe that the authenticity and specificity of a story is what makes something universal. In the case of this story, it’s a very specific group of kids in a very specific place in Jordan itself. And through that specificity, we hope that teens and people who love young adult shows all around the world will respond and find a little bit of that relatability with the struggles of kids in terms of love, friendship, school and parents. There is something very relatable in the show that doesn’t just speak to people from Jordan, Italy or Korea – there are these universal elements within that which sort of make human connection possible.

What kind of investment in MENA is Netflix looking forward to in the coming months? Is it planning to open an office in the Middle East? We don’t currently have plans to open an office in the Middle East. We’ve just opened an office in Madrid and will be opening one in Paris and Berlin. So I think we’re quite excited to see how our office expansion works in terms of our business and working with our creative talent on the ground. But even without an office, we have plans to continue to invest in stories from this region. The history and tradition of storytelling from the Middle East is so strong that just very few of them have been seen globally before. For us, this offers a real opportunity to filmmakers to tell local stories on a global scale in a way that they haven’t, and it’s something we’re passionate about as a company and something we’re working toward. So we have Jinn, Al Rawabi School for Girls and Paranormal.

“In the case of Jinn, we did hear from young adults and teens that they hadn’t seen themselves necessarily reflected on screen. So for us, it was a great opportunity to give them that mirror moment to see themselves on screen in a unique and new way.”

Kelly Luegenbiehl, VP International Originals, Netflix
With the entry of Amazon Prime and Disney+, what is Netflix’s strategy to counter competition?

For Netflix, we just need to stay focused on what we’ve done in the past and what we want to continue to do well in the future, which is tell stories our audiences are going to love. I think for us, staying focused on that will be the most important thing. Personally, I’m curious to see the shows that are made by these different companies. I used to work at Disney; it’s a great company and I think just as a viewer it’s exciting to have stories coming from all these different places and all these different creators.

How can storytellers pitch a story to Netflix?

There are different ways that we connect with storytellers. First, we’re just fans of some people’s work and we reach out to them. Then there are those who know us and will reach out to us. We spend a lot of time going to film festivals, film schools and book fairs. We were chatting with the Royal Film Commission (RFC) on the film festival they’re planning in Jordan. That seems to be an exciting way to connect with storytellers. So for us, we’re always looking for new ways to connect. We’re also all on LinkedIn. People generally figure out how to reach us if they have a great idea.

How instrumental has the RFC been in the making of Jinn?

RFC has been a fantastic partner, and the series wouldn’t have been possible without their support. As we look forward to our next series in Jordan with Al Rawabi School for Girls, we’re continuing to have conversations with them and partner with them. We’ve spoken to Princess Rym Al-Ali, Managing Director-Interim of the RFC, about how we can continue to grow the great ecosystem and infrastructure here in Jordan, but also across the region. I think it’s an exciting time to be a content creator in the Middle East right now.

How do you hope this series adds to Arabic-language drama overall?

The legend and the history and tradition of Jinn was something that was really fun for our creators to get to play with in a way that was unique to this story. So I think, for them, it was important that it be brought to life through the lens of those young characters. For me, Mira is my favourite; she’s just such a strong, young, empowered woman and it’s an opportunity for her to save her friends and be a hero. To have a girl that you can root for and who’s doing all that in the midst of everything else that is going on in the world – I think people are really going to respond to a character like that.

Can we expect more Netflix releases in the region in 2019?

Yes, we’re working on them right now. We’ve just been doing a tour around the region, meeting with filmmakers, hearing their ideas, and then we’re going to figure out which ones make the most sense for our next few series.

“We really do believe that the authenticity and specificity of a story is what makes something universal”

Kelly Luegenbiehl, VP International Originals, Netflix
In keeping with the rising demand for filming projects in the UAE, Icon Art has revamped its kit and studio facilities as part of a $4m investment. CEO Zakir Hussain takes us on a tour of the facility and shares his plans for the future.
such as script approvals, location scouting and government approvals, filming permits, design, props sourcing and set building, as well as film set services such as script breakdown and shoot scheduling, cost reporting and budget management, negative processing, transfer, editing and grading, sound mixing, post-production and animation.

Attracting foreign film projects was a big driver for Hussain in setting up Icon Art Productions in 2008. He observed that many overseas clients were hesitant to shoot films in the UAE and saw an opportunity. Icon Art has now supported approximately a thousand international production shoots – TVCs, corporate films, videos, TV programmes, feature films, documentaries and events.

“When we hear the nature of a project that is coming to Dubai, we try to ensure that we have all the equipment to meet those demands, and that includes keeping up to date with technology”

Zakir Hussain, CEO, Icon Art Production

Although he initially supported independent projects, he soon learned that it was more beneficial to support actual filmmakers, making both commercial and non-commercial movies. The first film he lent his kit to was Heartless in 2013. He explains that the project taught him everything required to build his inventory. It also inspired his career. Although he didn’t have an exhaustive inventory list back then, the support he offered with his cinema camera, lenses and accessories helped him win the client over. Over the course of his career, Hussain has learned every aspect of the filmmaking process, including budgeting and budget control.

“I’ve worked as a cameraman, DP, director, producer, assistant and anything that came my way. I ensured I had strong technical knowledge. Whenever a technical requirement came our way, I’d spend hours doing the budgeting for it. This is because I noticed that many projects didn’t come to Dubai because the budget set by local vendors and suppliers was too high. I tried to address that challenge.”

With his 15-odd years of production experience, including reading and vetting scripts, budgeting for productions and participating in different parts of the filmmaking process, Hussain is gearing up for his biggest job yet.

“I want to produce a film and want to start with Bollywood. We have four scripts ready, two of which have been approved by the Dubai Film Commission. One is a family drama and one fiction.”

The CEO of Icon Art also has his eyes firmly set on a new aspect of the filmmaking business, one he believes will see growing demand in Dubai. Although we get a glimpse of an area of the facility that is still a work in progress, the details remain secret for now.

Icon Art boasts a wide range of equipment for rental purposes and intends to invest in a range of ARRI Master Primes, ARRI Ultra Primes and RED anamorphic lenses in the near future.

“With this upgrade, we have tried to meet the needs of clients that work with us. This involves ensuring clients can edit, record and even screen their movies here”

Zakir Hussain, CEO, Icon Art Production

“Although he initially supported independent projects, he soon learned that it was more beneficial to support actual filmmakers, making both commercial and non-commercial movies.”

Zakir Hussain, CEO, Icon Art Production

“The facility is designed to handle indoor shoots for TVCs, TV programmes and feature films, with the capacity to support projects from conception all the way to screening.”

The 10,000sqft facility features an infinity wall, a sound and video editing suite, and a screening room, as well as other areas to facilitate complete indoor filming.
BroadcastPro ME and its sister title used the occasion of its ninth anniversary to celebrate women in MENA TV, production, film and satellite. More than 120 guests attended the event at the Plantation Lounge, Sofitel JBR, Dubai, for a scintillating evening of fun conversation and giveaways.

Themed around ‘women in media’, the party sought to bring more women to attend the annual event, with the aim of showcasing the diversity we have in the sector.

BroadcastPro ME and its sister title welcomed industry professionals and guests from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Europe. The guest list included notable names in the MENA broadcast and satellite industry, among them TV professionals, satellite industry and telco professionals, filmmakers and content owners.

A special thanks to Sennheiser, Lawo and Newtec, who have supported our events, and to new sponsors RCS, Shure and Art Format Lab.

The highlights of the exclusive evening were the special giveaways for guests. A special thanks to Advanced Media, BS Broadcast and Sennheiser, as well as consumer brands like CAHO Chocolates, CRYO and Bright White Dental Centre, for supporting the event with impressive gifts.

“It’s really important that we celebrate women in media, and it’s great BroadcastPro ME creates these opportunities. We’re great friends of the magazine and the website. We’ve had a really great evening; it’s been nice to see our colleagues and friends and talk about the industry as a whole and celebrate women in media.”

Tracey Grant, VP Content and Channels, Viacom (VIMN SWEMEA)

“It was lovely to meet so many people from the broadcast industry in the region, and especially to meet with women who work in the region from TV channels, production companies as well as suppliers. I think it’s important that women are represented within the industry, because that gives diversity to the conversation.”

Ed Abis, Commercial Director, Never.no

“I have worked in the media for over 18 years and really appreciate such events, as I think we really need motivation for women’s empowerment in media. Over 40% of graduates from cinema and media schools are females, but we are less than 4% women in management roles and thus such events are necessary.”

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Peter Van Dam, CTO, Alamiya

“I'm glad BroadcastPro ME is recognising women within the broadcast industry and writing more about them. If one were to attend an event like this five years ago, it was male-dominated, so it’s good to see more women. I hope this continues to grow and we see more equal opportunities within creative and technical fields.”
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Megahertz drives production with all-IP OB truck

Systems integration partner Megahertz will showcase "Spiritual Productions’ large-format sound and video outside broadcast (OB) truck at IBC. Based on an IL Caprice body, Mercedes-Benz Antos chassis with coach body built by Spectra Specialist Engineering Ltd, it contains an end-to-end IP infrastructure. The truck is Dolby Atmos-capable and designed in collaboration with Dolby, and audio runs entirely on a Dante Network.

The Megahertz-built luxury mobile production vehicle, named Spiritland One, was delivered to the broadcast audio specialist in early June, and went on the road following just one week of testing, covering a week of live television and radio broadcasts on BBC Four, BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio Wales for the Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

Stand 12.F20

Cinegy herds SRT for software-defined TV

Cinegy will demonstrate the multiple advantages of the inclusion of secure reliable transport (SRT), as well as the benefits of its entire product range at IBC.

Lewis Kirkaldie, Head of Product Management, Cinegy, said: “SRT breaks the restrictive chains of having to establish connectivity by plugging in a cable somewhere. Through SRT, the ability to ensure a signal gets to – and from where it needs to be – now both feasible and widely available. What that means is that with SRT, you can locate content, tools and services wherever your business needs them, be it in the cloud, on rented virtual machines, on-premises or remote data centres. SRT is built into Cinegy software, including the licence. Cinegy has optimised its entire product line to be SRT-ready deployed in the cloud.

Stand A01

Black Box goes remote with Emerald Unified KVM

Black Box will showcase its MXC AV-over-IP system for the first time at IBC. It will also debut its Remote App for the Emerald Unified KVM platform for the first time in Europe. This software-based solution goes authorised users simultaneous remote access to one or more sources – PCs, servers or virtual machines – across an Emerald KVM network, promising cost savings as well as greater flexibility, ease of access and efficiency.

The software-based solution supports multiple simultaneous connections and performance for full-HD video up to 4Kps, the new Emerald Remote App is suitable for tasks such as remote process and applications monitoring. With authentication against the Boxilla KVM network manager from Black Box, it offers users a list of connections and provides access, just like a standard hardware-based system. However, since the Remote App is not tethered to a fixed location, users can access the Emerald KVM network from anywhere using their own computers or laptops.

Stand 6.B97

Livell to take 5G to new heights at IBC2019

Livell will display its portfolio of 5G-enabled solutions for live newsrooming and sports coverage at IBC. The big focus will be on Livell’s flagship LUV100 4K HEVC portable transmission solution, which offers video with bandwidth efficiency. The 4K-TG edition facilitates professional 4K60601 streaming for production, supporting VR and 360 applications. Another solution in focus will be the LUV600 HEVC unit for live streaming. Promising high flexibility, the LU200 can also serve as a stand-alone video encoder or be used as a Livell DataBridge mobile hotspot for general connectivity in the field.

Livell will also demo the 1U 4K HEVC rackmount, LUV10 AK HEVC, customised for vehicles and fixed locations.

Stand 3.B62

EVS to launch multi-camera positioning and framing system at IBC

EVS will launch a new automated multi-camera positioning and framing system for the first time at IBC 2019. The new autonomous camera system analyses the images of robotic camera feeds from remote locations, on the move and stationary, and guides cameras toward live action with the appropriate zoom. Designed and tested to precisely mimic the movements of human camera operators, the system uses machine-learning and AI-driven functionalities and assists operators to focus more creatively on the automation of certain tasks.

The new solution integrates seamlessly with the EVS X-One unified production system for live production. X-One inputs up to six camera feeds, no matter the source – humanly operated cameras, autonomous cameras or a mix of both – enabling low-cost, broadcast-standard live productions of small and mid-size events.

Also featured will be the latest version of EVS’ unified production system X-One which offers new storyboarding features that enable a single operator to produce highlights and dynamic live productions quickly and cost-effectively.

Ideal for niche sports and featuring new small form-factor hardware, X-One provides multi-screen slip creation and editing, automated highlights, new replay speed settings and picture-in-picture effects capabilities.

With X-One’s intuitive user interface, a single operator can do live switching, create replays, control audio, create and import graphics, play back content and now create highlights.

Stand 8.B90

Serial Control Protocol (CSCP) allows the audio console to be completely controlled by an automation system. VP2 provides the station with many benefits of using a Calrec console without a physical control surface.

Calrec will showcase its VP2 virtualised mixing system at IBC for the first time. It will also introduce its Assist software for set-up and control. The software-based solution goes authorised users simultaneous remote access, just like a standard hardware-based system.

However, since the Remote App is not tethered to a fixed location, users can access the Calrec’s Assist software can be accessed from multiple locations via a web browser. Also on display at the show will be the company’s Impulse core audio processing and routing engine.

Stand 6.C19

Rascular at the helm with CastAway

Software design company Rascular will debut its CastAway solution, a new Helm application which provides NDI master control switching in software. Rascular has continued its integration of NewTek’s NDI protocol, announcing the development of CastAway, which allows users to find and view incoming sources, presented in a multiviewer. In addition, CastAway includes action mixing® presentation switching capabilities to handle transitions and so on.

Stand 8.B97

EVS’s latest version of X-One is expected to make its debut at IBC 2019, with a new range at IBC.

Spiritland One

The 4K-SDI edition facilitates live streaming for live newsgathering and field production, supporting HEVC portable transmission and NDI protocol, announcing the live streaming of live newsgathering and field production, supporting HEVC portable transmission and NDI protocol. 

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More power with Anton/Bauer Titon batteries

TAG Video Systems will highlight IP at IBC

TAG Video Systems will demonstrate its flagship MCM-900 at IBC, with an expanded feature set that will provide more IP workflow tools to better manage complex configurations. The TAG MCM-900 platform combines monitoring of compressed and uncompressed signals all within the same system and on the same screen for all four primary video applications.

TAG’s advanced software skills also allow it to break the software bandwidth limiting limitations of ST 2110 in COTS hardware, and bring a high-density solution with multiple 10GBe interfaces and support for ST-2022-7 network redundancy. TAG’s cross-application solution presently supports more than 40,000 channels in facilities around the globe.

Monitoring with Interra Systems at IBC

Interra Systems will demonstrate its BATIC ABR QC and ONYX-OTT monitoring solutions at IBC. In a streaming media workflow, for large volumes of VOD files encoded at different bitrates, BATIC’s QC, including ABR-specific checks, ensures that the prepared content meets service provider and end user quality expectations. ORION-OTT can be used to proactively perform HTTP checks and monitor the quality of each stream. Interra Systems will also showcase its ORION real-time content monitoring and video analysis for linear channels. ORION provides operations groups with a monitoring platform that links to each aspect of video streams such as GeI, GeI, and so on.

Monitoring with Interra Systems at IBC

Leader Electronics introduces new 25GBe options for the LYS600 portable broadcast-quality waveform monitor and its LV7600 rasterizing equivalent will make their European debut at IBC.

The LYS600-5ER32/LV7600-5ER32 is an IP test pattern generator that can generate HD and 3600 × 2160 UHD test signals for delivery via SMPTPE ST 2110-20/30/31/40 IP. IP channel stress testing can be performed by adding jitter and errors to IP packets.

Leader to demo options for LYS600 and LV7600

Leader Electronics’ new 25GBe options for the LYS600 portable broadcast-quality waveform monitor and its LV7600 rasterizing equivalent will make their European debut at IBC.

Leader’s LV7600-5ER32/LV7600-5ER32 is a 25GBe single-mode video-owl (IP)-multi-mode fibre IP interface which provides full conformance with the SMPTPE-2110 standard for transmitting 4K content in a non-compressed format via an Ethernet port up to 25Gbps per second.

Video Progetti to use IBC to expand international footprint

Italian broadcast systems distributor and systems integrator Video Progetti will be at IBC 2019 as the company prepares for rapid international expansion in 2020.

A team will be spread throughout IBC’s halls on the stands of the companies it represents – from Barndred to Wehler – discussing Video Progetti’s wide-ranging capabilities, its growing ability to undersell new projects around the world. “So far in our 25 plus year history we have focused on the Italian market,” said Carlo Shuzzi, CEO of Video Progetti. “We’ve worked with the largest number of high-profile companies – including Sky Italy, Telecom Italia and RAI, Italy’s national broadcaster – and we believe the experience and expertise we’ve built up will be attractive to organisations across many geographies. We have already begun to put in place the resources that will support our plans.”

Video Progetti projects have included the delivery of a completely new HD broadcast infrastructure for a regional TV station; the design and construction of Ka-Sat SNGs; the creation of post-production collaborative workflows; the transcoding of thousands of hours of film to HEVC in 360; the development of an OB van with two completely separate production control rooms, able to produce SD, HD, UHD, SDR and HDR video and capable of leveraging the latest technologies such as IP; and the building of a 65-channel playout centre for Italy’s largest independent television network operator.

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400 speakers have been lined up for this year’s IBC Conference, under the theme: Consumers First: A New Era in Media

IBC will recognise social responsibility as part of its awards programme this year for the first time, with its Social Impact Award

SSIMWAVE to debut SSIMPLUS VOD Monitor

SSIMPLUS VOD Monitor

SSIMWAVE will show for the first time at IBC a tool that enables the media industry to optimise video processing and delivery using human visual system. The SSIMPLUS VOD Monitor delivers frame-by-frame and pixel-by-pixel analysis of video content, using SSIMPLUS VOD’s ability to predict and score perceptual video quality of experience by accurately mimicking human visual perception.

Embrionix will showcase the company’s compact emFUSION-4 SDI-to-IP gateway, which will support its new IP solution for HD, 3G and SMPTE ST 2110 UHD.

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PROGUEST

For digital disruptors such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google (FAANG for short), much of their success lies in the ability to gather data and use it effectively. FAANG’s business-making processes are built around data, and as a result, their users are glued to their apps on a daily basis. All well and good for the tech giants, but the pay-TV industry has hardly reaped the same rewards when it comes to data. In fact, it has been slow to adapt to this increasingly analytical and AI-driven world. With legacy systems, old ways of thinking, old organisational structures or indeed a combination of all three, few pay-TV operators have been able to collect, implement and use data to gain valuable insights. They have thus failed to improve their pay-TV service and day-to-day business operations.

But why exactly has the pay-TV industry been slow to adapt to this digitally transformed world of data? There are a few factors at play. The first is old business practices: automation, improving customer service operations, reducing churn, delivering more targeted advertising, personalising content recommendations, helping to optimise the full value and cost of their content portfolio – these actions are all crucial for modern pay-TV operators. The second, perhaps ironically, isn’t down to a lack of data, but rather an excess of it. With hordes of data siloed away, fragmentation is inevitable – even though individual teams may be performing well. Data needs to be connected end to end and holistically if it is to be useful.

The third sticking point is technology. Operators face a fragmented playing field with technologies and capabilities that are more advanced than ever before, not to mention evolving extremely fast. With this in mind, technological issues are bound to arise. But if we allow ourselves to dream big for a moment – what if the entire industry was to share its data? FAANG currently has access to data from the point of content creation to delivery, which is a strong competitive advantage. But what if the industry (studios included) ensured that all data from across the entire value chain merged? Naturally, you’d have to agree on clear standardisation on how content and ads are sold. But working together to find a common, shared approach to data could have amazing benefits, with greater flexibility in the business models of content, advertising and ultimately subscription.

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Five golden rules for pay-TV success in a data-driven world

First, for data, we should prefer quality over quantity. It’s better to have fewer quality data points than lots of rubbish. Overflowing data lakes are the best enemy of business-minded data usage. Second is to adopt a standard that ensures your different systems can contribute to your overall data effort. Again, data needs to be connected end to end and holistically, if it is to be of any use to an industry interested in collaboration.

Third is to start with the real questions, the tangible business issues that operators want to address. For example, what issues do we want to solve with data? Do we want to address churn? Can we implement predictions and recommendations to address it? What’s the best way to encourage the use of the service? Is it a marketing action? Or is it a recommendation action? Fourth is to bring the topic back to the top management table. To be successful, this needs to be a transversal endavour. It cannot be driven by just one department. Fifth and finally, keep in mind that the output must be real business actions, not just graphs or data sets. Data is all well and good, but it’s what you do with it that counts. Now, sticking to these golden rules to the letter doesn’t guarantee success for every operator; after all, the goal posts are always moving in the pay-TV world. But with challenging times ahead, they might serve as a handy guide for those bold enough to adapt, grow and navigate the road to success.

Jacques Edouard Guillermot is SVP Executive Affairs at NAGRA.

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