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Welcome

I wish all of you a very happy New Year. 2020 is a very special year for BroadcastPro ME as we step into our 10th year. I recall it was four months after the launch of BroadcastPro that Marc-Antoine d’Haluin announced his departure from OSN.

And now we have come full circle, as he returns to Dubai to take up the mantle from Sam Barnett as CEO of MBC Group. Personally, I can’t think of a better fit for the role than Marc-Antoine as MBC gets ready for its next phase of growth.

His arrival in the market raises some very pertinent and obvious questions about MBC Group’s own plans. Is a partial or complete move to Saudi Arabia on the cards for the Saudi-owned broadcast network, given the kingdom’s new strategies?

It’s all conjecture, of course, but it’s not without legs.

In the meantime, BroadcastPro is also planning some new events next year as part of efforts to remain at the forefront of bringing expert knowledge and experience to the regional market.

To that effect, we plan to introduce an OTT conference alongside our 10th anniversary celebrations this June. We hope to bring new faces and companies into the fold, so if you’d like to sponsor, speak or submit a research paper, please get in touch. We have other surprises in store, but we will unveil them slowly over the course of the year.

Until then, enjoy the New Year.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director

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Dubai Media Inc. appointed official host broadcaster for Expo 2020 Dubai

State broadcaster Dubai Media Incorporated (DMI) has been appointed the official host broadcaster for Expo 2020 Dubai. The agreement was signed by Najeeb Mohammed Al-Ali, Executive Director, Expo 2020 Dubai Bureau, and Ahmed Saeed Al Mansouri, CEO, DMI. DMI is the official media organisation of the government of Dubai, incorporating a number of print, radio and TV channels under its umbrella. It serves consumers regionally and internationally with content across multiple platforms, including Dubai TV, Dubai One, Al Bayan and Dubai Radio.

Najeeb Mohammed Al-Ali, said: “The media holds a major role in informing global audiences about Expo 2020 and its messages, and is a key pillar in achieving our goals. The collaboration with DMI will significantly bolster the media coverage of Expo 2020, contribute to the event’s success and help to share a positive image of the UAE to millions of viewers around the world.”

Ahmed Saeed Al Mansouri, CEO of Radio and TV Sector, DMI, added: “As Official Host Broadcaster for Expo 2020 Dubai, we are excited by the opportunity to create outstanding legacies for Dubai and the UAE in broadcast content production and delivery.”

The Expo 2020 site will boast a display of architecture and the latest in technology and sustainable solutions from its opening on October 20, 2020 until April 10, 2021.

MBC Group Chairman Waleed Al-Ibrahim has announced the appointment of Marc Antoine d’Halluin as the incoming CEO of MBC Group. D’Halluin replaces Sam Barnett, who was with the broadcaster for the last 17 years, and is scheduled to join MBC Group on January 5, 2020.

Beginning his career at Sony Pictures Entertainment (1995-1997), Marc Antoine d’Halluin is a prominent media executive with an international career in television broadcasting and production. Prior to joining MBC Group, he was Chairman of the Luxembourg-based M7 Group (2016-2019), which operates satellite pay-TV bouquets in the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. M7 Group was recently sold to Vivendi’s Canal+ Group.

Marc Antoine d’Halluin joins MBC Group as CEO

From left: Ahmed Saeed Al Mansouri with Najeeb Mohammed Al-Ali.

VIVA and Intigral partner to bring Jawwy set-top boxes to Kuwait

Kuwait’s telecom provider VIVA has collaborated with MENA digital entertainment provider Intigral to bring its Jawwy TV HOME set-top box to the country’s homes through local agent Kuwait NHE Group.

The launch was announced following a strategic partnership with Intigral, the developer and provider of Jawwy TV. Haneen Al-Fulaij, Chief Consumer Officer at VIVA, said: “This strategic partnership with Jawwy TV is a key step in the delivery of our vision for a new era in entertainment across Kuwait to deliver market-leading OTT products and services and a world-class customer experience.”

Hamoud Al Rumayan, CEO at Intigral, added: “This is a step in the right direction for Intigral’s regional expansion strategy, aiming to position Jawwy TV at the forefront of the digital entertainment sector.”
Image Nation to create animated TV series with KSA's Vision Entertainment

Image Nation Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabian firm Vision Entertainment, a company specialising in creating locally inspired content, announced a new creative partnership last month to produce an animated television series.

The Arabic-language series will centre around dates, the traditional fruit, and will showcase the cultural and historic traditions of Saudi Arabia and the wider Arab region.

The project, tentatively titled Tannu, is currently in pilot production, with the actual production slated to begin in 2020. The partnership with Vision Entertainment is part of Image Nation Abu Dhabi's foray into Saudi Arabia's media industry.

Princess Sarah bint Faisal bin Bandar Al Saud, Executive Producer and co-founder of Vision Entertainment, said: "We set out to create iconic characters that are rooted in our traditions and culture. The palm is such a big part of our history and heritage and the date is a ubiquitous staple in our homes, so we decided to bring the world of dates to life. We are creating this series to embody our rich heritage and culture and hope audiences of all ages across the region will relate to its authentic, homegrown story."

Ben Ross, Chief Content Officer at Image Nation Abu Dhabi, added: "The region is home to a broad consumer audience with a major appetite for locally made content that represents and resonates with them. Through this partnership, we're attracting top talent and creating dynamic content."

Robert Knesevic, co-founder and Executive Producer of Vision Entertainment, remarked that the team is "taking a holistic brand-building approach to the project. "The television series is just the start. We're creating a 360-degree brand experience with live shows, digital content, mobile games, products and merchandising; even a feature film is in the works. The region is ripe for a truly locally-inspired consumer brand."

StarzPlay and Image Nation to produce original content series

StarzPlay announced a landmark partnership last month with Image Nation Abu Dhabi to create its first original content series. Production will commence in 2020, with the Arabic-language series set to be released in Q4 of 2020.

The production was an anthology of urban legends, with each episode telling a different story. The series will explore regional tales and fables from the Middle East and will be produced by Yasir Al-Yasiri (Shebab Sheybab) under his production company, with Mansoor Al Feeli of Starship Entertainment. Al-Yasiri will also direct one of the episodes, with further regional directors to be announced in the coming months.

The announcement follows Image Nation’s recent focus on episodic content, having released the landmark documentary television series History of the Emirates, which was launched in time for the UAE’s 48th annual National Day. Speaking about the agreement, Maaz Sheikh, co-founder and CEO of StarzPlay, said: "This is a real milestone in StarzPlay’s development as we enter into a new realm, producing our own original Arabic content for the first time. We are pleased to have reached an agreement with one of the region’s leading production houses that has gained international acclaim for its quality films, series and documentaries. We hope this is the beginning of a long and productive journey with Image Nation as we enter into the original content space, initially with a focus on Arabic."

Michael Garin, CEO of Image Nation Abu Dhabi, added: "We are delighted to enter into this partnership with StarzPlay as it begins producing original content for the MENA region, and we continue to build a self-sustainable and creative media industry in the Middle East."

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Advanced Media hosts Rotolight workshop

UAE distributor Advanced Media held a training workshop at its Dubai HQ last month, to present the Rotolight Titan X2 soft LED light. The demonstration was conducted by Dirk De Bont, International Sales Director at Rotolight. “We were delighted to have Dirk De Bont, Rotolight International Sales Director, in Dubai to present Titan X2, the latest RGBWW light by Rotolight. We are ready to take pre-orders now,” Advanced Media said in a statement. “Titan X2’s diffusion system is where the magic happens,” commented de Bont. “As you can see, it [the Titan X2 screen] is fully transparent now, with zero diffusion. In this case, I can just dial it in and diffuse it. We can go from a beam angle ranging from 52 degrees all the way up to 150 degrees.” The product will be shipped to the region later this month. Initially developed for the cinematography market, Rotolight plans to release another version in April specifically designed for the broadcast market.

BelN secures exclusive MENA broadcast rights for next two Club World Cups

BelN Media has signed a two-year media rights agreement to be the sole broadcaster for the Club World Cup football competition in 24 countries across the MENA region, beginning December. Set to take place in Qatar, both the 2019 and 2020 editions will be broadcast live and exclusively on beIN Sports across the region.

Simon Thomas, Chief Commercial Officer of football governing body FIFA, said: “We are thrilled to have belN Sports on board for the next two editions of the FIFA Club World Cup. They are already an immensely important broadcast partner of FIFA’s, being the premier broadcaster in the host country of the FIFA World Cup 2022.”

Marrakech film festival offers $66,000 in prize money

The Marrakech International Film Festival, which concluded last month, distributed prizes with a total endowment of more than $66,000 as part of its Atlas Workshops. Prizes were awarded to Sweet Annoyance by Hwee Adnasa Getaneh (Ethiopia), The Original Lie by Assmae El Moudiri (Morocco) and Ikmanouka – Seasons of the Weary Kind by Samuel Ishimwe (Rwanda). Presented for the first time, the Artikon Prize from the Franco-German channel Arte was awarded to Les Mentees by Kamal Lazraq (Morocco). The Jury of the Atlas Post-Production Awards presented awards to The Gravedigger by Khadat Ahmed (Djibouti) and Zakia Contact by Imsaïl El Idrizi (Morocco). Furthermore, the Network of Alternative Arab Screens (NAAS), a collaboration of sixteen cinemas in Arabic-speaking countries, held its general assembly during the workshops and awarded the NAAS Prize for film circulation to The Gravedigger. Launched in partnership with Netflix, Atlas Workshops is a programme dedicated to African and Middle Eastern cinema. The workshop brought together 270 international professionals and 28 projects led by a new generation of Moroccan, Arab and African filmmakers.

Absen celebrates fifth anniversary in the Middle East, launches new LED display series at event

Absen launched a series of its latest LED displays at the Atlantis, Palm Jumeirah, Dubai last month. The launch coincided with the company’s fifth anniversary in the Middle East. One of the highlights of the evening was the launch of Absen’s LED display Aries, aimed at professional rental companies for high-end corporate events, auto shows and broadcast applications. Aries promises to deliver laser-sharp, life-like images with its 1.5mm pixel pitch.

Another highlight was Absenicon, a presentation solution for conference rooms, boardrooms and auditoriums. Absenicon comes in four different standard sizes, ranging from 110” to 220”. It features a wider viewing angle with higher levels of brightness, contrast and colour saturation than traditional projectors and LCD displays. Absen also launched its new LED display for retail applications. Absen took the opportunity to announce that it will strengthen service localisation and establish its own offices in the region, though no concrete details were released. Eric Chen, the company’s Asia GM, said: “In the past five years, Absen Middle East’s sales have increased rapidly. In addition, the team has grown and continues to grow. The progress that we made, whether in sales performance or service network development and other aspects, is remarkable. Our cooperation with customers is very close as well. As a result, we have decided to strengthen our operations with more service centres in the region.”

Absen’s latest LED displays on display at the event.

Afridocs streams African migration documentaries

Afridocs, Africa’s free streaming platform, launched the 2019 edition of Migration Stories to its platform last month. It consists of six documentaries about the various realities of migration from an African perspective. This diversity of films from Kenya, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Burundi and Europe brings into focus the hardships that drive many Africans to leave their homelands. The films are being screened to increase awareness around migration in the communities most affected. They are available on Afridocs Anytime.

AfriDocs streams African migration documentaries

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First Kurdish TV channel Rudaw launches in UK

Rudaw, the UK’s first Kurdish-language TV channel, was launched last month and is available on Freeview channel 271 via the Channallop platform. It delivers news from Iraqi Kurdistan and the Middle East.

Hejar Berenji, CTO at Rudaw Media Network, said: “This is a new step by Rudaw Media Network to impart news and information in an easy manner to the Kurdish diaspora in Britain. On the occasion of this service and the start of the New Year, we congratulate the Kurdish people of Britain.”

MBC Original Narrative film fest promotes Arab filmmakers

MBC organised the fifth edition of the Original Narrative Short Film Festival at the Mohammed Bin Rashid School for Communication at the American University in Dubai last month. The festival showcased 36 films, selected from hundreds of documentary and feature film submissions. Included in the shortlist were productions from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon.

Commenting on the film festival, Festival Chair and Director Sophie Beutres said: “This festival provides participants with the opportunity to showcase their work and network with a number of renowned names in film and TV, from both Hollywood and the Arab world.”

MBC Group TV Director Ali Jaber added: “Support begins from the stage of discovery, to provide platforms for the filmmakers to showcase their work, right through to training and mentorship through workshops made possible by the support of specialist scholarships.”

IPV secures $5.2m investment to accelerate global growth

IPV has raised $5.2m in funding to expand the global reach of its MAM product, Cursor. The Series A funding round was led by SAGE focussed VC from Mobeus Equity Partners, with additional ongoing finance secured from Calculus Capital.

Commenting on the new funding, Mark Fagan, IPV CEO, said: “Multiple industries are rapidly expanding their use of video but are facing significant challenges during the content creation process. Cursor makes it easy to remotely edit, collaborate and publish high-quality video content – enabling customers to ensure consistency of messaging and sustained audience growth via digital, online and mobile platforms.”

This capital will enable IPV to deliver the benefits of Cursor to an even wider audience, expanding into areas of digital marketing, customer experience and enterprise video management. IPV’s client base includes HBO, Monster Energy, NASA, Nintendo, P&G, Turner and Turner, who use Cursor to manage and create complex video content.

Manga Productions to illustrate KSA history through animation

Manga Productions, an affiliate of the Prince Abdulaziz Foundation (Misk), announced a partnership last month with the Saudi Media City to illustrate the history of Saudi Arabia through animation, according to Saudi Press Agency.

The project aims to document historical figures and important events in the history of the Kingdom, from the first Saudi state in 1744 to modern history. The production is scheduled to start within weeks. Darah’s role will be to supervise in charge of the project.

IPV’s investment will provide training opportunities for the talented Saudi youth men and women from the Kingdom, in addition to providing local training courses in the field of comics and animation.

Sharjah Media City announces winners of the UAE Entertainment Experience

Sharjah Media City (Shams) announced the winners of the UAE Entertainment Experience project with an award presentation ceremony at Sharjah University City Hall last month. The ceremony recognised 13 winners across different categories, with prizes totalling approximately $75,000.

Some of the winners were Hacoub Eld Ein from LI for Best Director, Raed Yousaf Al Nahrawi from The Seventh Art for Best Screenwriter, and Movisate for Best Trailer. LI won the Gold Award for Best Film, with Passion winning Silver. The Best Director of Photography award went to Ghassan Younis and Diana Fawaz from Movisate.

Speaking exclusively to BroadcastPro ME, Dr Khalid Omar Al Midfa, Chairman of Sharjah Media City, said: “Through this initiative, we wanted to attract the talent among us who want to participate in the filmmaking industry. They’re there but no one is giving them the right advice, the right direction on how to join this industry.

“Since it is within our mandate to attract this talent, bringing them closer to creativity and the media sector, we thought that such an initiative is a must for us. It will expedite the results we were hoping for, it shows from the number of people who participated in the initiative. It proves that we were successful in reaching the right audience. This is the base of the pyramid.”

There is more to come.”

Khulud Abu Homos, CEO of the UAE Entertainment Experience, added: “Under the leadership of the dream team, we have managed to use an innovative method of developing and guiding filmmaking talents through 25 experimental films, using one script and different directing visions and ends.”

Moroccan filmmaker Laila Marrakchi drives two female-centric projects

Paris-based Moroccan filmmaker Laila Marrakchi is developing two female-centric projects. One project, Casa Girls, is a series about four single women in their twenties living in Casablanca, and the other is a drama based on a real-life sexual assault scandal set against a Spanish agricultural backdrop.

The latter, currently being developed with Estrella Productions, will explore the story of underprivileged Moroccan women who travelled to Spain and were sexually abused, leading them to rebel and file a class action.

Casa Girls will follow Kenza, a young woman living in Paris for 10 years who returns to her homeland in Casablanca, where she becomes friends with women from different backgrounds.

Commenting on the series, Marrakchi said: “Although the girls all come from different horizons, they go through similar struggles with love, intimacy issues and difficulty to find their sense of selves and womanhood in a society that seems schizophrenic at times.”

Besides these projects, Marrakchi is also in the process of raising financing for My Sister Lives on the Mantepiece, an English-language project based on Anabel Pitcher’s novel about a boy whose sister is killed in a terrorist attack in London and is raised by his Islamophobic father. Marrakchi was born and raised in Morocco and has been living in Paris for many years.
**Russian company launches AR services in Dubai**

Russian company AR MORE officially launched in the UAE last month with its first studio in Dubai. The company recently received the UAE’s first virtual business licence, introduced in October 2019. AR MORE focuses on developing tailor-made filters for content creators, musicians, vloggers and influencers, among others, with the aim of enhancing their images on Facebook and Instagram. “To make this possible, they create filters compatible with Spark AR, a Facebook-owned platform that allows digital artists to create AR experiences for Facebook and Instagram. The company recently collaborated with local social media influencer Mohammed Sultan, and created six filters. Company founder Mina Litvinova explained: ‘AR is a booming industry that is estimated to grow up to 180% over the next five years. The UAE has one of the world’s highest smartphone penetration rates. I represent digital creators mostly from Russia and Ukraine – countries that are known to be the cradles of excellent developers.’”

**Allen & Heath appoints NMK Electronics as new MENA distributor**

UK-based audio mixing consoles manufacturer Allen & Heath has appointed UAE-based NMK Electronics as its exclusive distributor for the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. Responding for the company, Allen & Heath’s MENA Sales Manager, said: “As our product range grows, we continue to seek out the very best distribution partners to represent our products around the world. NMK is a leading company in the region and has a strong reputation among the professional community.”

**Discovery switches off OSN channels over payment issues**

Discovery and OSN have been in a tussle since last month, after a dispute over payments led Discovery to pull all its channels from the OSN platform. The termination included withdrawal of Discovery’s channels from OSN’s partner platforms. In a statement, Discovery said that the decision was made owing to “non-payment for the provision of our channels and content during 2019”. "Discovery regrets to advise that despite negotiations for several months, it has been forced to cease broadcast of our channels on OSN. It proposed several different options to OSN to ensure that our MENA fan base could continue to watch the shows they enjoy. Unfortunately, OSN has refused to finalise negotiations. Due to this, Discovery has been forced to terminate the agreement,” Discovery said.

**Premier League Productions chooses Evrosision as distributor**

Evrosision Services will be the principal global distributor of the Premier League for three seasons, starting from the 2019/2020 campaign. Evrosision Services will distribute and monitor content produced by PLP in both HD and UHD worldwide. Commenting on the development, Marco Tininelli, CEO of Evrosision Services, said: “Football fans across the globe are now watching Premier League matches in HD or UHD, transmitted via our dedicated Evrosision Global Network to rights-holders around the world.”

**Red Sea film fest restores rare films by late Saudi photographer Safouh Naamani**

The Red Sea International Film Festival has restored two rare films by Saudi photographer and cinematographer Safouh Naamani (1926-2016), one of the pioneers of colour photography in the Kingdom. The festival will present a documentary on Hajj made by Naamani in 1961, in addition to a movie compiling never-seen-before footage of Jeddah. “The Pilgrimage to Mecca is a 35-minute colour documentary filmed during the 1961 Hajj season. The festival will also present a cinematic panorama of Jeddah captured on Naamani’s 16mm camera. The Red Sea International Film Foundation was able to restore five reels of raw footage into a short 30-minute film. Scenes in Glimpses of Jeddah include the celebrations of the return of King Saud after receiving medical treatment abroad in 1954, as well as footage of commercial life in the port of Jeddah. Festival Director and CEO Muhammed Sabrihah said: “This discovery rewrites the history of national cinema in our country. Discovering a film that was made in 1961, complete in all aspects and production, adds an original element to the story of Saudi cinema.”

**StarzPlay teams up with Asiacell in Iraq**

StarzPlay has formed forces with Asiacell, a mobile telecommunications and data services provider in Iraq, to make its service available to all Asiacell’s ‘Unlimited’ monthly package subscribers. With a subscriber base of more than 14m customers, Asiacell is the first mobile telecommunications provider in Iraq to achieve nationwide coverage. Ragidia Abu-Fadel, VP of Sales & Business Development, StarzPlay said: “One of our objectives as a business since we launched in the region was to establish a clutch of partnerships with mobile communications providers so that we could offer the best value deals to customers with flexible payment options through existing mobile phone contracts to customers.”

**Empire Cinemas opens first multiplex in Jizan**

Empire Cinemas opened a 10-screen multiplex in Jizan last month. The multiplex has been built at an investment of over $11m.

**AMC Cinemas opens second location in Riyadh**

AMC Cinemas launched its second cinema in Riyadh last month. The 10-screen, 800-seat theatre is located in the city’s Panorama Mall. The first AMC theatre opened in the King Abdullah Financial District in April, 2018, and was the first cinema to officially open in the country.

**Viu announces fund in partnership with CIFF**

Viu has launched the Viu Short Films Production Funding in partnership with Cairo Industry Days, a segment of the Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF). The initiative is aimed at encouraging the development and production of short films directed by emerging Egyptian filmmakers. Any script in the final stage of development may be submitted by January 20, 2020. The initiative is open to filmmakers of Egyptian nationality or Egyptian origin with a creative dossier on a non-professional level. The script for the film must be an original work by the scriptwriter. The running time should be between 10 to 30 minutes. This year the festival is under the presidency of Mohamed Hefzy, president of CIFF, said: “Emerging professionals in the regional world have the chance to be recognised and directly contribute to the evolving filmmaking scene.”
**Spacetoon plans major releases in 2021, holds workshops for local talent**

We have many live shows and animations in development and are exploring this between 2020 and 2021, with the aim of releasing them in 2021. Spacetoon is attempting to build more talent in the region, from writers to animators and directors.

**New streaming service TenTime hopes to make mark in MENA with global content**

TenTime is an Arabic-language OTT platform that was launched in April 2019 by a group of Arab investors. We have offices in Abu Dhabi, Amman, Beirut and Baghdad, and are licensed from the UK. We currently have drama series on the platform from Europe, India, Latin America and so on, but one day we hope to have content from every country in the world. All of our content is dubbed into Arabic, as we target Arab audiences.

Although our focus was initially on acquiring drama content, we will soon populate our platform with movies, kids programming, documentaries and so on. We intend to launch a new series during Ramadan and currently charge a monthly subscription fee of $10.

Eyad Qatana, Acquisition Administrator, TenTime

**Clue Media claims to have raised the profile of The Million’s Poet and Prince of Poets**

Clue Media has produced the last two seasons of The Million’s Poet and Prince of Poets. We secured the deal in 2016. We produced Seasons 7 and 8 of Prince of Poets and Season 8 and 9 of The Million’s Poet and Season One of Al Mankouz, which is our own production.

What we have brought to these productions through new technology and better talent is more obvious. By working with some of the best in the Arab world like director Bassam Charieh and light designer Joe Saad, we have raised the profile of these programmes. We introduced the Cablecam and a robotic camera to provide new views you can’t get from normal camera placements. Perhaps our biggest feat has been introducing Ali in a live show. This can be a lot more challenging than doing it within a controlled space like a studio. In this case, the poet is standing against a transparent holographic screen, which has an LED screen behind it. Essentially, we have created three layers on set with the poet to complement his poetry, and that makes the show look outstanding on television.

Every season, we try to bring new elements to the shows. We have produced both Prince of Poets and Al Mankouz within the same week with the sets switched overnight. Both are big, live shows with completely different sets and to do both productions within one week was exceptional. We believe our productions are on a par with shows like The Voice, Marieme Sabriat, ETI, Production and Karl McMonagle, Director of Operations, Clue Media.

Kamal Weiss, Business Development Manager, Spacetoon

**Manga Productions to release 2D animation series Future’s Folktales in 2020**

We focus heavily on the Arabic language through our productions. Since this IP is co-produced with TOEI Animation, we added the Japanese language to reach a wider audience in different markets locally and globally and engage with the significant number of Anime fans who prefer watching the production in the original language. We are particular that the characters speak formal Arabic that is understood across the Arab world. We ensure that lip syncing is done for Arabic when the animations are drawn.

Manga has around 30 people in Saudi and Tokyo office, but 160 people worked on this project. Our mandate from the government is to create a whole ecosystem and IP while also training our local population. We train people in our industry by collaborating with international studios like TOEI Animation. Students get on-the-ground experience whether they work with us, our competitors or for their own business.

From left: Sarah Almawali and Mariam Ali, Marketing Specialists, Manga Productions

**More content partners to join Weyyak**

Weyyak has been very active in terms of partnerships for content and distribution. We are in talks with three partners to put their content on our platform, but details aren’t under wraps yet.

Weyyak’s YouTube channel now has 1.5m subscribers that have been grown organically. Given that Weyyak is a new product and only posts 30-second teasers or promos of our programmes on YouTube, this is interesting.

What we want to tell the market is that we are willing to explore different content models with partners, depending on their objective. Being in the digital space gives us the flexibility to accommodate requirements outside of traditional models and explore any opportunity that offers a win-win for both parties. We are already working with clients in this way and have helped them generate revenue.

Nadine Samra, Civil Business Officer, Weyyak.com

**Demand for Turkish content continues**

Inter Medya was launched in 1992. We distribute Turkish content, whether they are drama series, feature films or animation, to more than 140 countries. There are two kinds of series in Turkish content. One is the long ongoing series consisting of 150-300 episodes. The other is a new series for digital platforms that consists of 5-13 episodes each season.

The production value of Turkish content has always been quite high. Each episode for the period dramas is valued between $600,000-700,000, while the contemporary dramas are valued between $350,000-400,000 per episode. When some channels declined to host Turkish programmes in 2018, we went to local stations in the GCC, the Levant and North Africa to keep the viewership of Turkish content alive. There is still a huge demand from regional viewers for Turkish content, and I believe, in the future, we will see big regional broadcasters air them again. Can Okan, founder and CEO, Inter Medya
StarzPlay has been hailed as a success story in the MENA region, with more subscribers than Netflix and Shahid Plus – the other members of the region’s big three. The SVOD platform recently enhanced its recommendation engine and added another 30 features to its technology stack of 350-plus micro-services. In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, senior executives Faraz Arshad and Cagdas Direk outline the company’s tech strategy and how their feature-rich recommendation engine promises greater engagement and discoverability.

StarzPlay has made a mark in the Middle East and North Africa with a market share of 29%, slightly ahead of global giant Netflix and Shahid Plus, both at around 24%, according to a 2019 IHS Markit Report. With more than 10,000 hours of content refreshed regularly, partnerships with most regional telcos and flexible payment models, the streaming service has marched ahead of its competitors by a significant margin of subscribers.

The streaming service, however, has not just developed commercial strategies to stay ahead of the game. A technical team distributed between its offices in Dubai, Lahore and Madrid is responsible for the continuously evolving StarzPlay Connect platform, which is the company’s 350-plus micro services embedded in a technology stack developed over the last five years. The most recent feather in StarzPlay’s cap is enhancements to its recommendation engine, which promises a greater personalised service with improved discoverability and user engagement, hopefully resulting in less churn. The StarzPlay Connect platform has evolved to such a level that it has now become attractive to other OTT service providers like Lionsgate, which has licensed the platform in India in order to launch its own streaming service.

“StarzPlay has a continuously evolving in-house technology platform that is being developed to keep pace with new technologies and user engagement,” explains Faraz Arshad, VP of Technology & Infrastructure at StarzPlay. “This newly improved recommendation engine offers greater agility and scalability, with myriad algorithms embedded to help us personalise the dynamic carousels for each user, i.e. the personalised user experience and the way the content is being recommended. Essentially, every user is being recommended something based on their viewing habits, preferences and search keywords.”

A number of factors lead to better recommendations. Besides the normal methods, scoring content and referencing a recommendation based on third-party data, even if it is not present in the database, is now becoming key. Cagdas Direk, StarzPlay Director of Software Engineering and the man in charge of the platform’s user interface, elaborates: “There are two phases of recommendations. One is based on user consumption, and the second is content to content. This is based on third-party metadata that is available on open source platforms, and we use some of these services to match the content to content. For instance, if you have watched Spiderman, it’s likely you will want to watch Spiderman 2 and perhaps other superhero movies as well. Irrespective of whether that content is on our service or not, the engine then starts to deduce what kind of content you are likely to watch.”

“That’s the kind of algorithms we are working on to create scores based on third-party data, internal matches and user consumption. Scoring is not just based on what content you consume but what you search for as well, even if it is not available on our platform. That search is scored and enables us to make sharper recommendations. Why? Because we know your likes through the different content choices you make, not just one. Therefore, third-party data is becoming increasingly important to enrich and address the customer’s demand.”

Arshad says discoverability “is another key factor that drives more interactivity … based on what you watch, the platform keeps making recommendations, ensuring that
“This newly improved recommendation engine offers greater agility and scalability, with myriad algorithms embedded to help us personalise the dynamic carousels for each user”

Faraz Arshad, VP of Technology & Infrastructure, StarzPlay

The team is also experimenting with new codecs such as AV-1 and CMAF, though their adoption would be dependent on the global device adoption roadmap as well. On an infrastructure level, StarzPlay has partnered with several regional telcos and ISPs to reach customers directly through an internet exchange (IX) served from StarzPlay Connect’s points-of-presence (PoPs). “Since we are mostly connected through internet exchanges, it gives us the flexibility to serve our customers from the closest edge location. This gives an opportunity to local ISPs to deliver the best quality video streaming experience to their OnNet customers while saving their international IP transit carrier costs, and helps us to optimise and maintain the overall user experience,” explains Arshad.

Furthermore, StarzPlay Connect’s advanced technology stack allows the streaming service to add or alter functionality and capability without relying on any third-party development timelines, which means the team is not constrained by external factors. “The in-house implementations are fully equipped to adapt and scale while considering the time-to-market factor,” says Arshad.

Direk explains further: “Whenever we come up with new ideas and different ways of achieving them, we embed them into our existing technology stack. We have not built them on proprietary algorithms to ensure greater integration with global technologies, but the platform itself is StarzPlay’s intellectual property (IP). When we want to expand our services across any region, we just have to deploy this same footprint into different regions.”

He goes on to add that the way the team has built the system enables greater compatibility with other platforms and allows communication between different recommendations, thereby meeting the bigger objective of personalising the user’s journey as much as possible on the platform. “All the services we develop are based on API-driven technologies. They are not super customised but have been designed to be modular. As a young company, we try to be lean and agile, and modularity helps us to maintain that. So whenever there is a new technology, which is quite often the case in a young sector like OTT where everything changes so fast, we have the ability to change aspects to the stack quickly and adopt new ones.”

Rellying on open-source technologies also enables the recommendation engine to recommend content to users based on the activity of their friends. “Well-defined customer events such as browsing and watching are recorded by the platform, so we have to ensure that this data is accurately reflected in our recommendations. The appropriateness and accuracy of those recommendations will depend on the integrity of the data we collect. That’s why we have 350-plus micro services to ensure that the level of integrity is maintained when a user starts browsing.”

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Cagdas Direk notes that data integrity is becoming increasingly important for making recommendations.

“We are training machines to get a better score calculation. This is where we think our technology is sharper and more accurate than other technologies”

Cagdas Direk, Director of Software Engineering, StarzPlay

attributes of friends to friends. Asked if it is the same technology that Netflix uses, Direk says StarzPlay’s objective and strategy are both considerably different.

“For us, it is important that customers are consuming all the content that they would like to see, irrespective of the region they go to,” says Arshad, clarifying that StarzPlay viewers can access the content on its platform in all regions where the service is available, unlike other OTT service providers, where access to content changes according to region.

The biggest lessons at StarzPlay have come from the better understanding of subscribers’ varying tastes across the many countries and regions it covers, says Arshad.

“Since no two viewers are the same, it is imperative that our platform serves content closer to their own preference, especially when new content is constantly being added. This is where our in-house developed recommendation engine comes into play, with better analytics collected from each user, allowing us to serve custom content covering multiple genres, languages, ratings and any other preferences, allowing the user to discover more content suited specifically for him or her,” he says.

Perhaps due to being a young company, StarzPlay has also been quick to address piracy.

“With regard to content piracy and security, our DRM detects all the devices that are modified for a particular box. If the devices are not certified by firmware/operating system vendors, our content will not play on those devices. Additionally, we work closely with the device providers and keep updating our DRM policies with the latest, to be sure there is no possible piracy risk,” says Arshad.

At the moment, the SVOD service is available on ten different devices and the streaming service’s product teams are looking to expand its footprint. “We are in talks with major TV brands or set-top boxes to achieve this,” confides Arshad. In the meantime, BroadcastPro ME learned at the time of going to press that StarzPlay has partnered with Image Nation Abu Dhabi to create original content – a first for the regional platform, but also a sign that the streaming service will do everything it takes to keep its place right at the front.
What trends can we expect to see in the world of broadcast technology? We ask some manufacturers and solution providers.

**GB Labs**

Horland, CEO

I see 2020 as the year flexibility really comes into play in the media industry. Our challenge is that we have to process and store ever-growing amounts of data, because we are shooting with more cameras, at higher resolutions, for more programmes. And compressed production schedules mean that there is no time to sift the wanted footage – just get on with the edit. The shift towards software tools, running on standardised hardware, means that post architectures require fast, stable, flexible storage that connects to everything while offering in-depth analytics to keep track of workloads.

**ATEME**

Rem Bourdoz, Chief Strategy Officer

With new OTT services expected to launch in 2020, we may see an increase in consumers’ stacking and paying for multiple platforms. However, this saturation of the broadcast market could also lead to an increase in illegal streaming and torrenting as consumers struggle to cover the subscription fees. In turn, more broadcasters could begin to adapt initiatives such as BISS-CA to safeguard their most valuable assets – their content.

Additionally, there may be an increased uptake of cloud services among broadcasters and pay-TV operators in 2020 as they capitalise on the speed of cloud to innovate faster, store their content catalogue more effectively and add more personalised services, in order to keep up with and stand out from the competition.

**Quantum**

Eric Bassier, Senior Director, Product Marketing

With the performance advantages of NVMe (Non-Volatile Memory Express), and by leveraging new networking technologies like RDMA, we believe NVMe will erode the market for traditional SSD storage much faster than predicted.

In markets such as media and entertainment, where higher resolution content combined with higher frame rates, more bits per pixel and more cameras per project are putting pressure on storage architectures, NVMe will prove particularly appealing.

**Hitomi**

James Robinson, Director of Remote production is transforming the way broadcasters and producers cover sport, and is set to be a dominant trend in 2020. By carrying all the camera and remote studio signals back to base for live production and post, sports coverage can be crafted better, with more engagement for the viewer and cost-efficiencies for the production company through higher equipment utilisation. Global events can be – and are – covered from a single dedicated facility for consistency and ease of distribution. The world of esports led television still has a place, if it adopts new audience engagement technology - a huge opportunity to increase engagement, programme longevity, reach and new audience connections, not to mention stronger revenues.

**Cinegy**

Jan Wagner, CEO

The last few years have been dominated by the battle of the Ks – high-end GPUs – first everyone got excited by 4K, then the stakes were upped to 8K.

My prediction for 2020 is that the businesses that will get ahead are the ones who realise that resolution does not define what we do; it is just one of the elements we have to consider when managing and delivering video. Sometimes HD is plenty; sometimes (out of home displays, say) you need 32K or more. If you have the storage space and the bandwidth, you can handle the right resolution for the job.

**Never.no**

Scott Davies, CEO

In 2020, the attitude to new tools needs to change – especially towards new engagement concepts and strategies. We are still seeing senior industry peers pushing back on technology that enhances audience engagement, because they either don’t understand the technology or they are happy with the status quo of traditional broadcast programming. Linear television still has a place, if it adopts new audience engagement technology - a huge opportunity to increase engagement, programme longevity, reach and new audience connections, not to mention stronger revenues.

**Imagen**

Charlie Horrell, CEO

Over the course of next year, when traditional broadcast deals come to an end, we will see some of the more niche sports go it alone and try the direct-to-consumer (DTC) approach. Launching a DTC platform is a fraction of the cost it once was and is increasingly getting easier to set up.

However, despite this, many of these new platforms will struggle to attract wide audiences and will not be economically viable. Therefore, it’s likely we’ll end up seeing some of these platforms either being picked up by bigger sports organisations or consolidating to form groups.

Additionally, as broadcasters and brands cater to the growing generational divide in what people want from content, we will see the creation of short-form video increase. Nowadays, the younger generation does not have the time or attention span to watch longer-form content. A driver of the growth of short-form video in 2020 will be the Olympics in Tokyo, where the time difference could prove a problem for international audiences to watch events live. However, to cater to this, the Olympics has created its own platform for the provision of short-form video clips, meaning European and US audiences will be able to watch snippets of the highlights. This will be much more convenient for viewers worldwide to keep up with the action, and will allow social media sites to act as a distributor of this content.

“As broadcasters cater to the growing generational divide, in what people want from content, we will see the creation of short-form video increase”

Charlie Horrell, CEO, Imagen

*Image*
such as e-mentoring and practical tools, through initiatives up our sleeves and equip them with and entertainment industry. Let's roll to enter various sectors of the media create opportunities for young talent collaboration between professionals to gaming. As a result, there'll be more fields such as VFX, animation and ambitious students eager to get into inclusion across our creative industry.

The pace of change in the media world continues to accelerate. Broadcasters and content providers need to react rapidly to new expectations from consumers and challenges from device manufacturers.

The only way that the supply side can keep up is through collaboration and agility, technology alone is not the answer. By collaboration, I mean working closely with both customers and system integrators to create a solution with maximum flexibility while avoiding costly software customisation. By agility, I mean the ability to react quickly to new requirements and customer needs, supported by an agile scrum-based development and project delivery methodology.

We're going to see an avalanche of breaking tools and workflows to create more immersive, interactive experience on a global scale. Companies like Unity, Unreal and Notch are pushing more realistic and better graphics rendered in broadcast, and 2020 will likely see further growth. Companies like Unity, Unreal and Notch are pushing more realistic and better graphics rendered through higher quality media servers for incredibly glossy and reflective virtual studios and sets. We are seeing a demand in how we can work with these ground-breaking tools and workflows to create more immersive, interactive and collaborative broadcasting environments using mixed reality over green screen. This allows thought leaders, presenters, children, politicians, lecturers - anyone - to be within the environment and immediately interact with it.

In 2020, we will see increased data integration and interactivity so we can do more with content. Rather than just a virtual set that looks pretty, we are working to evolve the technology to allow for interactivity with real-time live data. We are also likely to see increased haptic feedback, skeletal tracking, frictionless motion capture – things that allow us to track the people within the virtual space and create more innovative use of the tools and technologies to create more immersive and engaging content.

The most apparent shift will be the adoption of remote production solutions (also called HREMI or at-home solutions). In 2020, broadcasters will save millions by backhauling all cameras and microphones from location to a central control facility, efficiently using resources and minimising travel and on-location spend.

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Blackmagic’s pocket cinema cameras have disrupted the film market. The 4K version was well received by the industry, and the manufacturer upped the ante with a new 6K version last summer. Dubai-based DoP Acen Razvi puts the camera through its paces and gives us his verdict.

Back in 2012, when Blackmagic released the classic BMCC 2.5K, I was really excited to try it out and own one. It was followed by the BMPCC camera, which boasted lots of dynamic range in the image, flat log, high bitrate ProRes and Cinema DNG codecs, all within a very small form factor. The image from these cameras still holds up today. It’s staggering to think we now have these high-end spec cameras giving us the same room in post for a fraction of the price of huge cinema cameras like the ARRI Alexa Mini or the RED Epic Dragon.

Unfortunately, the fairytale experience of owning those first new cinema cameras was short-lived; the clock struck midnight and the unwieldy form factor soon caught up with me on everyday projects. I hoped that by throwing more money at the camera, with cages, EVFs and shoulder rigs, it would all pan out, but the ergonomics became frustrating, especially with battery life, and I quickly realised that the new digital cinema cameras needed to evolve a bit more to deal with the rigour of a daily shoot for an owner op/DoP like myself – or perhaps it just wasn’t the right camera for me at the time.

Fast forward to 2019, and Blackmagic Design has come on in leaps and bounds. The company has transformed into one of the big players and has significantly disrupted the market with its mantra of value for money, catering to every filmmaker out there with its pocket series. This holds true with the launch of the latest line and the recent flagship camera release, the URSA G2, which now makes Blackmagic a real contender for the likes of ARRI and RED. It really seems to be dominating the industry with exciting tech launches year on year.

The newest launch, the BMPCC 6K, is what we’re looking at here. It looks like Blackmagic has once again delivered a very exciting piece of kit, one with a lot more long-term functionality and usability, finally putting the power of 6K RAW in the hands of the many for just under $2,500. That is truly extraordinary! The fairytale seems to be real after all.

First off, the camera feels quite sturdy in my hands, with a good firm grip but a lot of plastic at the same time, and in the form of a classic DSLR. It’s light and durable, like a Korean car, but with the high-end sheen of German tech – not a bad thing at all. It also runs on the legendary Blackmagic operating system, which is where this camera really shines, it is beautifully laid out and a joy to navigate without getting lost deep in the menus. It is accompanied by the very powerful DaVinci Resolve software, which makes the whole package even more irresistible.

Physically, the camera is very similar to the 4K version, which was released...
not too long before the 6K. The backside has an impressive hi-tech five-inch touchscreen, which looks great indoors but is a bit of a let down out in the bright sun. This is where you’ll wish it had a sun hood or an electronic viewfinder like on mirrorless cameras, as it’s almost impossible to pull focus or gauge exposure. It’s a beautiful screen, but I also wish the screen was articulating. In fact, third-party manufacturers like Tilta have already announced an articulating screen solution in the form of a user-installed kit. The kit doesn’t require you to make any permanent changes to the camera – it can be returned to its original configuration if needed. This solution has been welcomed by the BMD community, and I think it will be a popular modification.

Next to the screen are six buttons: auto-exposure, auto-focus, HFR (high frame rate), focus assist, menu, playback. Apart from the bigger lens turret and some large air intake vents, both the 4K and 6K models share the same materials, buttons and controls, and the Canon E6 battery system. The 6K camera features an S35-size sensor along with an EF mount, which means there’s no need for a speed booster adaptor.

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Acen Razvi, Director of Photography

On to media now. The Pocket 4K is 6,000 pixels across and 3,300 pixels down, but the 6K is 12,000 across and 6,600 down. Compared to the previous Pocket 4K, the 6K has improved the same amount, whereas the 6K has doubled the pixel count. For the single shooter owner-operator working on quick turnaround gigs, this camera punch above its weight.

Most digital cine cameras these days can be used on a variety of applications and genres and this holds true for the 6K as well, says Acen Razvi, Director of Photography.

With high bitrates and LOG10 image modes, footage can be graded in post to deliver any kind of look and feel to suit a project. On a film set, the BMPCC 6K is probably best used in H-RAW mode as a small factor b-cam alongside bigger cine cameras like the G2/ARRI Alexxa and RED, for instance. For the single shooter owner-operator working on quick turnaround gigs, this camera punch above its weight.

On to media now. The Pocket 4K has one SDI and one CFast slot, and has a very useful USB-C port as well. A fast 1TB SSD hooked up to the camera is probably more than sufficient for a full day’s work, thanks to the large SSD capacities now available on the market. You could use the CFast media too, but the expense of high-capacity CFast cards is a bit of a pill to swallow.

Some card manufacturers, such as Komputervision, sell them at more reasonable prices, but this is a risk until they are verified by Blackmagic. Recording to SSD, however, means you have to get a cage or a holder for the camera to mount the SSD. The SSD drive supplied with this demo unit was the Angelbird, which seems to be getting good feedback from the BMD community.

On the battery side, there’s not much to say. The performance of the Pocket equipped with the Canon LP-E6 batteries is well-known in the community, and below par by 2020 standards. It’s probably the only big flaw I see in the camera. You can carry a bag of E6 batteries around, but the frequent changes can be frustrating on a full-day shoot. For a documentary with a demanding schedule, be prepared to wake up in the middle of the night to charge a ton of batteries.

If you’re shooting in an exterior location without reliable charging points, low battery life will be a perpetual challenge. So, remember to turn off the camera when not in use.

On a positive note, most people have these batteries lying around from their DSLR years, so I’m sure you’ll find one down the back of your couch or in the side pocket of a long-forgotten camera bag. You’ll definitely need them in your local shops if you ever run out, so the practicality of the E6 battery system is probably a good consideration for travel jobs, at the price of frequent changes.

Also worthy of mention is the built-in mic and a mini XLR. This is a great feature, thanks to Blackmagic’s colour science. The camera punch above its weight.

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Film mode offers huge dynamic range and produces the flat log image that most have become accustomed to in recent years, straight out of the camera. There is huge data stored in those files, enabling you to push and pull the colours in any direction; with this, you can achieve all kinds of dramatically different looks.

Let’s face it, the BMPCC 6K is a niche product. It’s for the high-end professional shooter, or a B- or C-cam for high-end filmmakers. There really isn’t a limit to where this camera can be used; its size and form factor mean you can shoot more freely, and it’s very versatile for a travel job.

In terms of image quality, though, it far outperforms most mirrorless cameras, and even a few expensive cinema cameras. The RAW 6K video gives you flexibility in post, but you also need a computer system that can handle these huge high-bandwidth files.

Keep in mind that this is primarily a manual camera in terms of autofocus and exposure. If you’re used to a Canon R, Sony A7 III or Panasonic GH5, you’re probably going to have to prep yourself for a learning curve, but it’s not too steep. The post-production process is pretty simple if you’re used to shooting in LOG or RAW. You get all the flexibility of DaVinci Resolve, and dropping a base LUT and quick grade has never been easier with this powerful software that comes bundled with the camera.

I’ve always thrown caution to the wind when it comes to image over specs and practicality, but I’ve learned lessons in the past with the BMCC – but by today’s standards, the new BMPCC 6K is a walk in the park, with very little to complain about.

Acen Razvi is based in Dubai and is a seasoned cinematographer, editor and director.

### The verdict

**Pros**
- Strong ProRes codec, universal industry standard for editing
- 6K footage, high-resolution image
- Amazing UI and intuitive menu system
- Small form factor with high-res image
- Affordable price for high-end tech

**Cons**
- RF mount would have been better choice than EF mount
- Battery power low, causing frequent changes
- Lack of built-in EVF
- Rear screen not bright enough in sunlight
- Lack of sensor stabilisation

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Jordanian filmmaker Zain Duraie is making waves with award-winning movies that take a provocative stance on social and gender taboos. BroadcastPro ME spoke to her about her motivations, resources and convictions.

We’re all familiar with movies that save their biggest punch for the climactic closing scenes, with a last-minute twist that leaves us stunned. Brian Singer’s cult crime film The Usual Suspects waits until the eleventh hour to show us how the disabled, mild-mannered detainee is actually the near-satanic warlord hunted across the globe; Mike Hodges’ gangster masterpiece Get Carter ends with the unassailable anti-hero falling dead into the freezing waters of the North Sea. Zain Duraie’s Give up the Ghost, however, has its pivotal – and deeply shocking – moment in the middle of the movie, turning a short that studies a couple traumatised by infertility into a highly unsettling commentary on culture and tradition. As the director herself says, it explores “the act of injustice men and women go through in a highly codified society” and “poses essential questions of how the expectations that parents have on their children to rise up to a certain image can negatively influence a person’s character.”

Set in Amman, Jordan, it’s the latest film from a director who is successfully bringing the agendas and social mores of life in the Middle East to a truly international audience. Give up the Ghost had its world premiere this year at the highly prestigious La Biennale de Venezia, and at the El Gouna Film Festival, it won the Golden Star for Best Arab Short. Duraie herself is no stranger to the global stage. A graduate of Toronto Film School, the first movie she made in her own right, Horizon (produced by Philistine Films), had its world premiere at the Palm Springs International Festival of Short Films, winning Best of the Fest Selects. The success was repeated at the Montreal World Film Festival and Cannes Short Corner. Duraie’s earlier projects include The Reckoning, Thank You for Bombing, Mare Nostrum and Wajib. She was chosen in 2017 to work with acclaimed Bosnian filmmaker Aida Begic in Sanliurfa, Turkey on her recent movie Never Leave Me. Not to mention the fact that her screenplay was one of only two among entries from 70 countries to be selected for the prestigious Asia Pacific Screen Academy, and also found favour at Meditalents Residence and the Torino Film Lab. Even at the very beginning of her career in 2010, her nascent creativity attracted attention – working as a trainee at Philistine Films, she was paired with prestigious names such as filmmaker Annemarie Jacir and producer Ossama Bawardi.

Content is King

The resonance of Give up the Ghost is that it takes a real human issue and shows how its incompatibility with accepted gender roles can impel families to rip an otherwise loving and devoted couple apart. BroadcastPro ME asked Duraie how she managed to take this subject matter and bring tears to our eyes.”Give up the Ghost,” she says, “is inspired by real events and real stories; women are always blamed in a very patriarchal and male-dominated society. We still didn’t open the film in Jordan. But we hope we will get a good response like we did in El Gouna, where we won the Golden Prize for Best Arab Short. Also, the reception in Venice was amazing, our world premiere and Arab premieres in both festivals were sold out. Give up the Ghost is my second short. It was actually inspired by the story of someone close to me; I got so tired of how women victimise themselves

WINNING WAYS

Zain Duraie’s Give Up The Ghost won the Best Arab Short Film award at Egypt’s El Gouna Film Festival.
"Give up the Ghost was actually inspired by the story of someone close to me; I got so tired of how women victimise themselves that I had to do something about it and make a film."

Zain Duraie, filmmaker

Nonetheless, she’s the first to thank the key raft of consultants and advisors who collaborated closely. "I had amazing script consultants, like my mentor from my previous short, Ammari Jaur, who was also a creative producer on this film, along with Khaleed Abou Shair and Ali Kareem, who also consulted on the script. Plus my producer Alaa, of course. I also had a wonderful team of creatives, and my editor was brilliant, helping me shape the story in the editing room."

"What if we stand for what we believe in, to become leaders and not followers to what society wants to make of us? What if we already have the key to our cage in our pockets?"

Zain Duraie, filmmaker

Duraie’s reasons for making Give up the Ghost align very clearly with her creative motivations. “Filmmaking,” she believes, “begins with the heart and the gut and your voice as a filmmaker. What do you want to say? Why you? Why not someone else? Even if you are gifted, you must also know why you want to make the film and what is your intention behind it. Getting into filmmaking has always been my dream … after having some theatre background in high school, I became more aware of what I wanted to do cinema."

The fact that Give up the Ghost has done so well critically and in international circles bolishes the fact that Duraie is a Jordanian-based filmmaker on a limited budget. We ask her about her concerns with technology. How did she ensure she met the standards necessary to take the movie to the global film circuit? For example, what cameras did she use?

“This film didn’t have any special technology. A lot of work was done at post-production, for which we had collaboration and sponsorships. And all the people involved worked for a very low fee. We also got support for renting the Amira Alexa camera, which is a cinema camera that shoots 4K. Of course, the film business is very expensive, but I’m grateful to have been supported by a wonderful big crew, which includes friends from previous productions. They helped me pursue this film with their hard work, strong work ethic and professionalism."

“I also need to thank the many professionals who bet on the film and joined as co-producers – like Yenal Kassas, who was the first assistant director on Theeb. He gave his heart to the project, like many others. Khaleed Haddad from Jordan Pioneers gave us free lighting equipment. It was such a dream having such sponsorships and this support system. I am so grateful. Even got our location for free from Paris Halseh, our location manager, who joined as a co-producer. All of this happened because they loved the script and the story and message behind the film."

Duraie’s points are particularly telling, because it’s something of a truism that low-budget movies are characterized by great stories but poor execution. So what does she believe made the film come together so remarkably? "My team. It takes a village and an army of soldiers to make a film, and I had the most professional and experienced crew from Jordan and from abroad. My cinematographer, Benoit Chamaillard, for instance, came all the way from Paris to shoot the film despite his low fee."

The price of success? "Money is always a challenge, even for relatively well-resourced filmmakers, and inevitably a huge issue for a relatively new independent filmmaker. What kind of budget was available for Give up the Ghost, and where does Duraie feel the financial cameras were cut? "I can’t say the exact number, but less than $12,000. My producer, Alaa Alasad, didn’t let me feel any cuts. He made it happen with the lowest number, and that’s what makes a real producer. I’m sure he made cuts, but he never made them around the film. I got every shot and everything I wanted for my vision. I also come from a production background, so I’m very conscious of the production fees and how much I can afford to develop my story – knowing that the KES rule we learned at film school is very important: Keep it simple, stupid."

Duraie’s production background has contributed strongly to her noted ability to multi-task. She’s rarely worked purely as director, and typically wears a number of hats – on Give up the Ghost, she was both writer and director.

"Next steps? How will Duraie build on her growing success and the beginnings of real international popularity? Are there script opportunities and features on the horizon, and is there any chance of expanding Give up the Ghost into a full-length feature?"

"No, this one was meant to be a short film. In terms of other projects, I’m currently writing my feature The Sea Needs to Heave, which just won the Swedish Institute Development Award (cash prize) at the Malmo Festival."

As Duraie’s winning ways continue, it’s likely that we’ll see more of the Middle East’s cultural and gender issues brought centre stage for an international community – and that her voice will become a critical lever for social reform. ©
Broadcast services provider and integrator Prolane, which has offices in Lebanon and Dubai, has developed a platform called Streamlane together with Open Broadcast Systems, based on the RIST protocol. In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Maroon Khalil, Managing Partner of Prolane, speaks about the choice of the protocol and how it has helped his clients get their streaming service off the ground over the public internet.

Prolane is a broadcast services provider and integrator that specialises in offering technology and services, AV and broadcast solutions, including video connectivity, contribution, distribution and ad insertion services, to MENA clients. While its HQ is in Lebanon, where it has a fleet of OB vans, SNGs, studios, stand-up positions for news, MCR and 360-degree support, its office in Dubai is more focussed on broadcast operations and support, with partners and clients ranging from satellite operators like Eutelsat, Nilesat and Arabasat to telecom partners like Etisalat and DU, and from teleport partners like Samacom and Evision to TV stations across the MENA region and the UAE.

In short, Prolane’s customers are a mix of broadcasters, telecom operators and satellite teleports from across the Middle East. In early 2019, the systems integrator found that its customers were looking to maximise efficiencies with new contribution and distribution technology. "The traditional way to transmit video and audio signals has been through either private fibre or satellite. As part of its managed service, therefore, Prolane decided to create a platform for clients to contribute and distribute content over IP."

For this, Prolane enlisted the support of Open Broadcast Systems and developed a Linux-based solution using the RIST (Reliable Internet Stream Transport) protocol. This platform, called STREAMLANE, supports the RIST protocol and includes multiplexers and ad inserters. "The RIST protocol offers a simple yet highly effective method for transporting live video signals over unmanaged networks between different vendors (interoperability), and with adaptivity. For Prolane, that means we are able to deliver video across the region even when internet signal quality varies," explains Kieran Kumbaya, founder of Open Broadcast Systems.

"RIST is a fairly new protocol to consider," adds Khalil. "It was started by a few manufacturers and can transport any video signal from point A to point B over the public internet with no packet loss, and its reliability is independent of the infrastructure. It is incredibly flexible and modular." The systems integrator adds that with RIST, the company is able to effectively navigate differing levels of internet connectivity. "With Open Broadcast System's encoders and decoders, coupled with the RIST protocol, we are able to offer our customers a way to deliver video cost-effectively without sacrificing on quality, reliability and stability." Khalil concludes.
**THE RISE OF UNIFIED CONTENT PROTECTION**

The rise in OTT platforms and IP delivery has diminished the relevance of legacy CAS technology, which was optimised for one-way broadcast networks. The future lies in solutions that secure your content across multiple platforms, says Bo Ferm.

Consumers are increasingly opting for internet-based over-the-top (OTT) video services over traditional linear TV. While there is still a large population of consumers of linear TV who have not yet cut the cord – primarily due to the lure of live events, especially sports – rapidly advancing streaming video technology is now reducing the number of linear TV consumers by making live events more accessible to OTT audiences. This provides increasing competition for traditional TV. Therefore, traditional TV broadcasters will have to embrace OTT delivery to remain competitive.

**Future-Perfect and Past-Proof**

There are two mainstream choices for content protection conditional access systems (CAS), which are used in legacy satellite and cable TV broadcasting networks, and digital rights management (DRM), which serves the OTT market. The latter continues to chip away at cable and satellite subscriber rates, and reports indicate that OTT video will surpass traditional broadcast TV by 2023, even for delivery of live events.

However, while OTT is becoming the mainstream video delivery method, traditional broadcasting infrastructure cannot be ignored. Broadcast (one-to-many) content delivery technology has become increasingly scalable, widely deployed and (so far) offers an unbeatable user experience, especially for live sports. That said, innovation in CAS technology has led to more cost-effective and efficient content protection, reducing the need for cardless client devices which help to lower acquisition, operating and upgrade costs. Legacy CAS technology was optimised for one-way broadcast networks, but is inherently too inflexible for two-way and hybrid broadcast-IP delivery.

Therefore, OTT is on the cusp of supplanting traditional CAS to protect content for all kinds of video services. Broadcasters and streaming TV providers are looking to ‘past-proof’ content protection by offering support for both broadband and broadcast devices.

As one-way broadcast companies continue to deploy OTT services to compete, they have had to manage to provide two very different content protection solutions to 符合 和 OTT video delivery. The cost inefficiency of both models will become more costly as DRM’s agility continues to expand both on-premises and in the cloud.

**Surging OTT Demand amid Legacy TV Losses**

There are certainly no signs of OTT growth slowing down. Viewership of live-linear OTT video is expected to surpass traditional broadcast TV within the next five years. Statistics show that OTT media revenue will grow from $46bn in 2017 to $588bn in 2022. Subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) now comprises 40% of the OTT market, with the majority of revenue coming from the US. By 2022, SVOD penetration will be 132% of US households, with many having more than one SVOD platform.

In comparison, the largest pay-TV providers in the US lost 405,000 video subscribers in the third quarter of 2017 alone, a precipitous decline compared to the loss of 250,000 subscribers in the same quarter of the previous year. Despite losses were across the top ten cable companies, which collectively shed 280,000 subscribers in the corresponding 2017 timeframe, compared to a loss of 90,000 subscribers in the third quarter of 2016. Some of the steepest losses came from satellite TV services, which research reveals to have doubled the number of lost subscribers in just one year, reaching 1.5m in 2017. While it is clear that OTT’s upward trajectory is unstoppable, traditional broadcast may continue to be a vibrant part of the video ecosystem if broadcasters embrace OTT delivery technology and optimise their content security infrastructure.

**Live Sports a Boon for Traditional Broadcasters**

One very important use case where broadcast is expected to continue to have an advantage over OTT for some time is live sports. Broadcasting has several inherent advantages over OTT when streaming live sporting events. Latency in live television streaming has been the most serious issue for OTT, as well as poor picture quality and buffering issues, but "While OTT is becoming the mainstream video delivery method, traditional broadcasting infrastructure cannot be ignored" Bo Ferm, Product Marketing Consultant for Media Solutions, Intertrust Technologies rapid advances in streaming technology are narrowing the gap between the broadcast and OTT user experience.

These issues can lead to subscriber attrition, as 34% of sports fans in a recent survey stated they would cancel a service hampered by these issues. Major concerns factoring into the responses include spoilers for the event, the stream not catching up to the live game, and missing key plays, while 43% stated they would feel they had wasted their money if they experienced latency issues.

Live sports video transmission continues to be a very lucrative and competitive market. For example, the large, multicultural population in the US has made it a battleground for coverage of the English Premier League, the Tour de France, rugby and motorsports. In fact, loyalty to live sports viewing in the US is one of the primary reasons customers have not cut the cord, as 81% of those who have not cut the cord, as 81% of sports fans subscribe to pay TV, while 82% would end or trim their pay-TV subscription if they no longer need it to access live sports, according to PwC.

The emerging consensus is that virtual service providers will need to find technological methods to bridge traditional broadcasting infrastructure and OTT. For content protection in particular, that means leveraging content security infrastructure. Operators are preparing for the future with content protection that spans both broadcast television and streaming services, protecting their current services while giving them the flexibility to address the rapidly approaching OTT future.

**Rise of 4K Television and UHD Content**

When considering content protection infrastructure technologies, another trend that video service operators face is the expected rise of 4K/8K Ultra HD (UHD) and high dynamic range (HDR) content. In fact, 4K UHD televisions are now one of the fastest-growing segments in the history of consumer electronics, though the availability of UHD content has been lagging. With the first three years of shipments, 4K/8K TV over shadowed 4K/8K TV by a factor of nearly four, with 16m units shipped compared to 4.2m units. Rapid penetration is occurring globally, with 30% of all US households forecast to have a 4K/8K TV by the end of 2019.

The Free TV Alliance, a collaboration of the four major European free digital satellite TV broadcasters, has adopted a new content security solution built on the open-standard Marlin DRM engine. Marlin DRM, created by a consortium led by Intertrust, Panasonic, Philips, Samsung and Sony in 2005, is widely used to protect IP-based video services around the world, especially in Japan and China. As media companies continue to struggle under immense pressure from competitors and declining subscriber rates of their traditional services, it is inevitable that they will have to continue to bridge and augment the old TV models with new OTT consumption demands, while also investing in heightened security for premium 4K/8K content.

This way, operators are preparing for the future with content protection that spans both broadcast television and streaming services, protecting their current services while giving them the flexibility to address the rapidly approaching OTT future.

Bo Ferm is a Product Marketing Consultant for Media Solutions at Intertrust Technologies.
“Watching esports and game video content is becoming as important as actually playing”

The Future of Esports: Convergence, Interactivity and Monetisation

Competitive video gaming has been around since the early days of the medium, but the industry had to wait until the 1990s for the debut and subsequent evolution of what we now recognise as esports tournaments. Based on first-person shooting and fighting games such as Street Fighter II and strategy titles like Starcraft, they started taking off with first-person shooters such as Quake and Counter-Strike, with interest accelerating through the early part of the 21st century in conjunction with increasing penetration of high-speed internet.

It is no coincidence that esports interest still maps strongly onto countries which saw the early development of sophisticated broadband infrastructure, such as South Korea. In recent years, the launch of dedicated streaming channels such as Twitch and the establishment of big money leagues by games publishers looking to grow additional revenue streams have seen interest ramp up dramatically. Consumer engagement with games has also changed dramatically over the past 10 years; watching esports and game video content is becoming as important as actually playing. Games and esports analyst Newzoo predicted that over 453m people worldwide would watch esports in 2019, a year-on-year increase of 15%, with revenues growing past $210.3m. The most engaged viewers will account for a regular audience at an estimated 75m. These viewers will account for a 3% increase of mobile gaming. Games companies are capitalising on this, with events like the Nexus Arabia 2019 League of Legends event organised by Riot Games, held in Saudi Arabia last month, which featured a prize pool of $850,000.

A common view in the esports industry is that we are yet to see the ‘true’ ‘game-changing’ game that will really launch esports into the mainstream and bring global engagement to the next level. It is plausible that esports viewership could one day match and exceed the viewership in the traditional sports market. The two markets are already changing ‘game’ that will really launch esports into the mainstream and bring global engagement to the next level. It is plausible that esports viewership could one day match and exceed the viewership in the traditional sports market. The two markets are already changing

Esports tournaments place heavy demands on networks and demand high capacity, low latency and extremely robust connectivity to function properly. As esports continues its upward trajectory, publishers, esports tournament organisers and content rights holders will all be relying heavily on broadcast and connectivity service providers to ensure guaranteed, fast and redundant access to the bandwidth they require to continue to grow audiences.

Esports tournaments provide a framework for the growth of the industry. It allows both gamers and esports competitors to reach an online global audience, while enabling viewers and fans to access live gaming content and events from anywhere in the world. Twitch Extensions provide a framework for the growth of the industry. It allows both gamers and esports competitors to reach an online global audience, while enabling viewers and fans to access live gaming content and events from anywhere in the world.

Ricardo Rodrigues is Head of Business Development – Americas at Telstra Broadcast Services.

*Image 1*
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