Sharjah Broadcasting Authority ventures into IP with region's first SMPTE 2110 installation at Al Dhaid
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The power of the world’s most advanced scheduler, GSelector, is harnessed in its go-anywhere version, Selector2GO. And our award-winning playout system is no longer confined to the studio, thanks to its features, a station’s content is automatically backed up and ready at a moment’s notice for playback.

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Let’s face it. The coronavirus outbreak has turned our world upside down. Having seen the volatility in the stock markets over the last couple of months, I shudder to think how many companies will not survive the hit. But it’s not all doom and gloom. We humans are an extremely resilient race, and I am certain – as many of you are – that this too shall pass.

In this issue, I’d like to especially pay tribute to the heroes of our industry, whose magnanimous gestures during this hour of need must be mentioned. I’m talking about companies like Facebook, which announced a $100m grant programme for small businesses impacted by the pandemic, and Netflix, which also launched a $100m relief fund for out-of-work creatives. Similarly, the Red Sea Films Festival Foundation has offered a grant to Saudi nationals affected by the outbreak. I also can’t resist a shout-out to Amazon for scrapping its subscriptions and offering Audible for free until this situation is brought under control.

On a smaller scale, we have seen the likes of Aboub Productions screen movies on Vimeo for free during this period, giving people the opportunity to watch some of its films. In the meantime, life still goes on and pandemic or not, BroadcastPro ME continues to scout the market for exclusive news to bring to readers. With outbound travel completely off the cards, I had the opportunity to go northeast to Al Dhaid, where Sharjah Broadcasting Authority had just inaugurated a brand-new IP facility for Al Wousta TV.

The last time I went to Al Dhaid was when I was probably the same age as my kids. In the last four-plus decades, the place hasn’t changed that much. In contrast with Dubai’s futuristic cityscape, Al Dhaid is a gentle and quiet reminder of the old Bedouin culture that was part of my childhood. I wish I could take a piece of that serenity back home with me.

Paradoxically, nestled in this quiet desert oasis where there is nothing else in sight is the MENA region’s first IP facility based on the SMPTE 2110 standard. I’m proud of this story, because this is the first time we have ever managed to get officials from Sharjah Broadcasting Authority to step into the limelight – and when they do, they do the region proud. That’s all for this issue. Stay safe and in good health.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
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AI will rewrite the whole content discovery experience, says Marcus Bergström
Art Format Lab has begun filming in Saudi Arabia for a brand new docu-series called Layla, commissioned by Saudi Broadcasting Authority. Layla will use a different storytelling format, with a young Saudi, Mustafa Al Aidaroos, passionate about exploitation and research, going in search of Layla (love), which he believes is embedded in the story of every city of the Kingdom.

To clarify, the name Layla has become a metaphor for a state of love. It all started with the Layla-Majnu story, which took place in Saudi Arabia as it has been immortalised by romantic poems written by Qais. In love with Layla but tragically separated from her, he became known as ‘the one besotted by Layla’ (Layla-Majnu). The poetry is still recited and referred to today.

The show focuses on the search for that state of love and all its forms, including the spiritual philosophy behind it. The show begins with Al Aidaroos travelling to the exact locations where Layla-Majnu took place, including the cave where Qais wrote his poetry and the city where Layla was born. The journey continues across all areas of Saudi Arabia, in search of the love that the people of each town, city or province have for the land.

Through 30 episodes across 30 different locations – from the Nabatean tombs of Al Ula and the mountain terraces of Jizan to the palm oases of Al Khafsah and the remote natural wonders of Tabuk and Layla City – Al Aidaroos will explore each place while also taking us on a historical journey.

“The programme takes on a very different approach to your standard documentary format because it combines reality exploration and storytelling,” Al Aidaroos told BroadcastPro ME.

“The programme covers various topics, locations and historical periods. It reveals the ancient monuments left behind by different civilisations that existed in the Kingdom and showcases a rich and diverse cultural heritage spanning an era before the birth of Christ to early modern times.

“IT is not a historical narrative, but rather a socio-cultural-spiritual conversation with viewers to explore and learn from the wisdom of ancient civilisations that developed in the Kingdom, to better understand the roots of our heritage, the origins of our identity and raise our consciousness to benefit from it in our daily lives. The objective of this docu-series is to entice viewers to embark on an adventure and visit the little-known historical sights of Saudi Arabia, connecting ancient civilisations that existed on the land of the Kingdom to present Saudi culture.”

Khulud Abu Homos, co-founder and CEO of Art Format Lab, commented that the 30-minute episodes are being readied for Ramadan. “We have a guest speaker in every episode from the historical locations we are shooting in. We have teamed up with three historians who are with us at all times as consultants. They vet every detail thoroughly to ensure that we don’t get any facts wrong. Mustafa is both the creative writer and presenter for this series.”

Firstly, when you think of Saudi Arabia, we know of Mecca and Medina … not many know that there was a sophisticated civilisation out here long before the oil era. We are trying to capture that look and connect history, poetry, Saudi civilisation and culture. We have a team of 120 people sourced both regionally and globally. Filming will continue for 50 days, so the logistics of moving from one location to the next is quite a challenge but also a lot of fun,” she said.

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Art Format Lab begins filming in Saudi Arabia for docu-series Layla
Fund launched for Saudi filmmakers financially impacted by coronavirus

The Red Sea International Film Festival Foundation has launched a fund of $53,284 in the form of emergency community relief grants to support Saudi filmmakers. The fund aims to help Saudi filmmakers who have sustained a financial loss resulting from cancelled/postponed events related to the coronavirus precautionary measures.

All Saudi nationals working in the film industry are eligible for the one-time emergency grant of up to $1,332 on a merit basis. Applications will be accepted until the fund is exhausted.

Established in 2018 and chaired by Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Farhan Al Saud, the Foundation champions the Kingdom’s cinema and cultural scene by nurturing audience engagement, supporting filmmakers and strengthening the film industry.

The inaugural Red Sea International Film Festival has been postponed due to concerns around the spread of the coronavirus. The festival was set to take place March 12-21 in Jeddah. The festival organisers said they will decide on new dates for 2020 “as soon as feasible” and renewed their commitment to their goals and plans.

Net Insight secures Aperi’s Live media virtualisation platform

Net Insight has acquired Aperi Corporation’s Live IP media virtualisation platform and software product portfolio. As part of this transaction, eight Aperi engineers will join Net Insight to continue drive development and support of the Aperi products.

With the acquisition, Net Insight hopes that Aperi’s all-IP product portfolio will complement and improve the competitiveness of its media transport portfolio.

Better performance, quicker setup, immediate payoff: Digital 6000 was developed to exceed the expectations of audio professionals and business managers alike. Our new professional wireless series delivers reliable performance in even the most challenging RF conditions. Intermodulation is completely eliminated by Digital 6000, enabling more channels to operate in less space.

Discover more: www.sennheiser.com/digital-6000
KSA’s first soap opera Al Mirath premieres on MBC1

Etilat launches OTT service for UAE residents

Etilat has launched a brand-new OTT service called SwitchTV in the UAE. The telco operator sent an SMS to its subscribers last month notifying them of the launch. The app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store, Google Play or the new Huawei App Gallery, is available to all UAE residents, irrespective of their mobile carrier or home internet service.

BroadcastPro ME has also learnt that Etilat’s subscribers accessing SwitchTV will enjoy data-free streaming on their mobile devices, though we have been unable to confirm whether this is just an introductory offer.

The new streaming service includes a significant line-up of free and premium live TV channels within the sports, entertainment and news genres. Exclusive sports channels like CricLife are also part of the platform, offering unlimited live streaming for a monthly subscription of AED 8.

The content line-up covers a comprehensive mix of Arabic, Western and subcontinent content for Indians and expatriates from Asia with more expected to be added in the future.

Dailymotion pushes aggressively with super-aggregator model in MENA region

Vivendi-owned French video-sharing technology platform Dailymotion, formerly a hotspot for users-generated content (UGC), has ditched this strategy in favour of a super-aggregator business model. Under this, the company’s platform will be built around partnerships with broadcasters and media owners for premium video across four main verticals: news, sports, music and entertainment.

Dailymotion hopes to tap into the MENA streaming market by partnering with premium media houses in the region.

“In MENA, we see that content often travels across the globe. It’s however barely monetised beyond its origin,” commented Rémi Leclancher, Head of Partnerships at Dailymotion.

“Al Mirath marks a new era for Abu Dhabi as a production hub. The launch of the region’s first soap opera marks this as a milestone moment for our industry, and we are proud to have Abu Dhabi at the forefront. We have always worked towards building a sustainable industry, and a production of this magnitude, which offers training, development and job opportunities year-round, allows us to continue to nurture and support the growing needs of the media and entertainment sector.”

Etilat’s MD, Digital & VOD at MBC Group, commented: “Etilat is proud to offer our customers a fresh viewing experience, that offers fan-friendly experiences through our new SwitchTV service. We look forward to expanding our content offer and continue to offer an unparalleled experience.”

Dailymotion aims to generate revenue by monetising the inventory while also exploring revenue-sharing with partners.

“Vivendi’s goal was to bring forward a positive story from the region and a production of this magnitude, which offers training, development and job opportunities year-round, allows us to continue to nurture and support the growing needs of the media and entertainment sector.”

Commenting on the new partnership, Johannes Larcher, MD, Digital & VOD at MBC Group, said: “We are looking forward to what this partnership brings.”
SAWA adds new channels, renews MBC partnership

Dubai-based SAWA Technologies, which distributes TV channels within the MENA hospitality industry, announced the renewal of its partnership with MBC last month. The distributor has also added six channels from Turner, including CNN, Cartoon Network and Boomerang. SAWA has also launched 10 exclusive Russian channels, 13 channels from Fox and 10 channels from Rotana, including three premium HD channels (Rotana HD, Alfam HD and M-HD), nine German channels from RTL and eight Chinese channels from CCTV. The announcement was made at an anniversary party held recently at Meydan in Dubai.

In addition, SAWA Technologies has also partnered with set-top box manufacturer Triax to offer hotels still using analogue headends an upgrade to digital IPTV headends using both Triax solutions and SAWA channels. Suheil Zurub, MD of SAWA Technologies, remarked: “We are committed to offering the most exciting entertainment options to our customers. It has been a phenomenal growth phase for SAWA and the signing of our key partnership deals reinforces our commitment to offer the widest array of entertainment for our viewers in the region.”

KSA animation Masameer: The Movie now on Netflix

Netflix has acquired Masameer: The Movie, a Saudi animation produced by Mykott, a Riyadh-based animation studio. The plot revolves around Dana, a Saudi Arabian girl with a passion for robots and artificial intelligence, who embarks on a journey to create good in the world using robotics. Directed by Malak Nojeir and produced by Abdul Aliz Almuzaini, Masameer: The Movie was a huge hit at the box office when cinemas opened in the Kingdom.

Bollywood film Bunty Aur Babli 2 wraps shooting in Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi's media hub twofour54 announced that the Abu Dhabi leg of Bollywood film Bunty Aur Babli 2 had concluded. The sequel was shot in two Abu Dhabi locations – the Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club and Emirates Palace – using several areas of the hotel. More than 350 cast and crew members were in Abu Dhabi for over 10 days for the shoot, with twofour54 providing Yash Raj Films with full production services across key areas including location assistance, travel and accommodation, and production management. Two interns from Creative Lab, twofour54's youth community, supported the cast and crew during production in Abu Dhabi.

JRTV to broadcast school lessons on sports channel

The Jordan Radio and Television Corporation (JRTV) has announced that it will broadcast lessons and educational materials on its sports channel. The move comes in response to the Jordanian government’s decision to close schools across the country as a preventive measure to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

“The schedule for the general secondary classes quota that will be broadcast via the sports channel (Jordanian TV) screen, will be on the Facebook page, and on the sports channel page on YouTube,” JRTV tweeted. JRTV is working with the Ministry of Education to broadcast educational materials on the corporation’s sports channel, Director General Mohammad Balqar told the local news agency. Balqar added that the times of the broadcast will be announced through the ministry’s e-education platform and the JRTV and the Jordan News Agency, Petra’s social media accounts.

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It’s a combination that has no comparison. We’ve taken the features of our classic ControlCenter matrix and re-imagined them into the KVM-over-IP matrix to achieve new levels of flexibility. With the ControlCenter-IP you can operate even the largest installations since it uses standard IP structures instead of dedicated cabling.

It supports all common video signals up to 4k60Hz, using our own lossless video compression for maximum compatibility. And of course the ControlCenter-IP offers the proven levels of usability, stability and reliability you would expect from G&D – the most comprehensive and complete KVM product range in the industry just stretched even further.

OSN deploys Microsoft threat protection service

OSN has adopted Microsoft Advanced Threat Protection to protect its digital assets. The pay-TV network was faced with the challenge of running multiple third-party security components that were not fully integrated into the corporate environment. After companywide deployment of Microsoft 365 E5 Security and Compliance, OSN was equipped with a single dashboard which promises to simplify operational complexity and protection against modern threats. Ronald Stewart Dsa, IT Director at OSN, said: “We needed to adopt a robust security framework which covers prevention, detection and response, endpoint protections, emails, identities and data cloud apps. Microsoft comes on board as the most trusted partner in our digital transformation journey.”

Microsoft has two UAE-based cloud data centres – one in Abu Dhabi and the other in Dubai.
Foodshala Kids and Flavours of Ramadan

In celebration of the spirit of Ramadan, Foodshala Kids and Flavours of Ramadan have collaborate to create a cooking show that will launch on Star TV this month, marking the 20th year since the company introduced the Dragon Ball anime series. Spacetoon and TOEI Animation, the studio behind Dragon Ball, have partnered with KKompany Media Solutions to bring the Dragon Ball Super to the MENA region.

Foodshala Kids is an offshoot of KKompany’s older and more successful Foodshala cooking reality show for adults. Fond of food, Tandon and Rawat, both former radio professionals, decided to combine their cooking and media expertise into a reality TV show back in 2011. Its success led to the launch of the kids’ version in 2016 and several other shows in the same genre.

What makes KKompany’s modus operandi different is that the company buys its own space and time on Indian channels, thus ensuring complete control over the programme. “We run our shows three to four times a week on various channels,” Tandon told BroadcastPro ME. “This season will run only on Star TV; we pick our slots – time and dates – and pay for airtime space to avoid interference on how we run our programmes from channels. We get sponsors involved and through creative product placement, we create for them the brand recognition they require without bombarding our viewers with advertising.”

The season will run from April 1 to four times a week on Star TV; we pick our slots – time and dates – and pay for airtime space to avoid interference on how we run our programmes from channels. We get sponsors involved and through creative product placement, we create for them the brand recognition they require without bombarding our viewers with advertising. “We have been very successful in Dubai, our home base. But the success of the show has led candidates to fly in from other parts of the GCC and also India to participate in this show.”

Filming in a studio in Al Qusais, the team is self-sufficient, with its full production unit comprising both crew and gear. “We have an in-house team of 26 people and around 65 people working on a show when we are shooting,” clarified Tandon, adding that it is filmed in high definition (HD).

With Foodshala Kids gaining immense popularity since the last couple of years, the company now hopes to take the show to the entire GCC in 2021. In the meantime, as we go to press, the team is now preparing for Flavours of Ramadan, an annual Asian Ramadan cookery show on Sony TV. “We are in the eighth season of Flavours of Ramadan - a hardcore cookery show with celebrity chefs from India doing the tailoring and the cooking. We have 15 episodes that will run from April 23 for the entire month of Ramadan,” confirmed Tandon.

Spacetoon has partnered with Japan’s TOEI Animation to bring the Dragon Ball Super series to the MENA region on TV and video streaming platform Spacetoon Go. The series was scheduled to air with Arabic dubbing last month, marking the 20th anniversary of Spacetoon. Spacetoon will also launch a range of toys that are expected to hit the shelves across the MENA region in mid-2020. They will be distributed in the Arab market by ToyPro, Dubai-based distributor of Dragon Ball Super toys.

Commenting on the development, Fawaz Al Sabbagh, President of Spacetoon, said: “We are so proud to be the company that introduced this successful franchise years ago and to bring it back again to MENA through Spacetoon.”

Bahrain TV announces audio visual lessons on Channel 2

Bahrain TV has announced an initiative to provide remote learning to students, the Information Affairs Ministry said. The initiative was taken in co-operation with the Bahraini and Mena TV studios to produce and air audiovisual lessons to students, the Information Affairs Ministry said. The initiative was taken in co-operation with the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Information Affairs has provided four TV studios to produce and record the lessons, on three different shifts per day, with more than 50 technicians and engineers participating in each shift. More than 145 lessons have been already recorded and will run from April 23 for the entire month of Ramadan, marked by the 20th year of the company.

Tandon told BroadcastPro ME: “This season will run only on Star TV; we pick our slots – time and dates – and pay for airtime space to avoid interference on how we run our programmes from channels. We get sponsors involved and through creative product placement, we create for them the brand recognition they require without bombarding our viewers with advertising.”

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StarzPlay and Discovery join forces to bring Dplay to the MENA region

StarzPlay and Discovery have inked a three-year deal that will see the MENA debut of Dplay, Discovery’s online video-on-demand (VOD) service, on StarzPlay, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. Although a launch date has not yet been confirmed, Dplay will be available in Q2 2020 through existing StarzPlay apps, including Apple TV.

According to the deal, any new or existing StarzPlay subscriber in the GCC may choose to access Dplay for an additional AED/SAR 15. Rates for other areas where StarzPlay has a footprint will vary but will follow a similar price structure to the platform’s current tiered pricing approach. Subscribers, both existing and new, will be able to trial the service for a period that may extend to one month.

Dplay will be available on StarzPlay as an individual branded add-on with a large library comprising thousands of hours of content curated under specific verticals including food, motors, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), and lifestyle and crime. While the content will be similar to the UK service, it will also include a lot of locally created content, especially from Fatafeat, an Arabic food and lifestyle channel owned by Discovery. Global franchises available on the new service include Shark Week, MythBusters, Gold Rush, Expedition Unknown, House Hunters International, Say Yes to the Dress and Fast N’ Loud.

Dplay is also the global SVOD home for some of the BBC’s landmark natural history programmes like Planet Earth, Blue Planet and Life and Dynasties, available now to MENA audiences through StarzPlay.

Francesco Perta, Director of Business Development, commented that with this partnership, Discovery is reaching out to a MENA audience that could previously see its content only in the linear space. “We have curated content around specific genres like crime, food and lifestyle, to name a few, which we call passion verticals. If you are passionate about food, we have hundreds of hours of content under food; likewise, if you love home, lifestyle, motors, STEM … you name it, we have it. All our content lies in the non-scripted space, so our offering really complements StarzPlay’s core package” but is also the beginning of the platform’s 2020 strategy to move into an “aggregation model”. “In 2020, we plan to bring other key global content services and offer them to our customers as an addition to our primary service. We see a huge opportunity with the distribution network that we have built within the region to new aggregate other services onto the platform. We are live with more than 28 telcos in the region and have partnerships with most consumer brands like Android TV, Samsung TV, Apple TV. “Adding Dplay to our service is really exciting because of the breadth of the content it has and because it’s very different from our core offering. Usually, globally, people tend to subscribe to two or three services, so we want to have the ability to have a platform where customers can buy all those services in one place. The other key to this is that we have created the most flexible payment options for the MENA audience. With one click, you can add a Dplay subscription from the app you have downloaded”

Discovery’s Perta added that this partnership is the best way to bring Dplay to the widest possible MENA audience: “StarzPlay already has a vast footprint as well as a strong and extensive distribution network across the region, so by adding our service to theirs, we will be able to benefit from their B2C and B2B partnerships.”
SPI/FilmBox and Rights&Rights have inked a distribution deal which allows the latter to distribute premium Turkish channel Timeless Drama Channel (TDC) exclusively to cable platforms in Lebanon. The deal also marks the launch of TDC on one of the biggest cable operators in the region, Cablevision. TDC features over 600 hours of critically acclaimed TV series and movies from major Turkish producers including, Karadayi, Black Money Love, 20 Minutes, Kurt Seyit and Shura, Moms and Mothers, Red Scarf, Five Brothers, The End and The 8th Day. The deal renders R&R the exclusive distributor of the channel in the region.

SDVI hires Tom Evans to support EMEA business

SDVI, a cloud-native media supply chain solutions provider, has hired Tom Evans as the company’s General Manager for the EMEA region. Evans will oversee SDVI’s growth in the region. Evans previously served in executive and advisory roles for leading media, entertainment, and telco companies, including A+E Networks, the BBC, BT, Cognizant, Disney, Sky and NBCUniversal.

Prime Focus Technologies appoints Andy Steele as VP of Operations EMEA

Prime Focus Technologies (PFT) has appointed Andy Steele as VP of Operations for the EMEA region. Based out of PFT’s London office, Steele will oversee media and online service operations for all PFT customers in the region. He will also play a pivotal role in managing PFT’s new Media Center in the UK, which will act as the hub for centralized content operations for Channel 4.

Image Nation ties with Spooky Pictures for Watcher

Image Nation Abu Dhabi has partnered with Spooky Pictures, the low-budget genre label formed by producers Roy Lee and Steven Schneider, to produce a psychological thriller Watcher. The film follows a young woman who is tormented by the feeling that she is being stalked. Award-winning writer/director Chloe Okuno will helm Watcher, an original spec by tyro screenwriter Zack Ford.

Prime Focus Technologies appoints Andy Steele as VP of Operations EMEA

Sennheiser has appointed Sarmad Riaz as its Business Development Manager for Pakistan to expand its market share in the country’s pro-audio segment. Riaz has spent over nine years serving in technical and sales roles. In 2014, Riaz joined a Dubai-based AV solutions system integrator before moving to Advanced Media as a broadcast solutions sales manager.

Ross Video welcomes Karen Walker as VP of Camera Motion Systems

Walker brings a wealth of experience in the global broadcast market, having managed several global brands, most recently for Vitec Group PLC. Jeff Moore, EVP and CMO at Ross, welcomed Walker, saying: “I know Karen will do a great job of strengthening the relationship we have with our robotics customers while also driving new product developments that help our customers create even more compelling content.”
Al Dhaid may be a far cry from the ultra-urban landscape that people associate with the UAE, especially Dubai – though it is only an hour northeast by car – but it has a charm that no money can buy. Flush with the sights, sounds and flavours of a traditional Bedouin world, Al Dhaid is an oasis of date palm plantations and fruit farms, where traditional camel races and falconry take precedence over tennis, rugby and cricket.

And it is this heritage that His Highness Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, the Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, aims to preserve with Al Wousta TV, a channel dedicated to covering the culture and traditions in the central region of Sharjah. A dedicated six-storey TV facility for the channel was inaugurated in Dhaid on February 17 by His Highness. The facility, which currently employs more than 100 staff, will serve as a learning ground for local universities and help integrate local media graduates and engineers into the TV environment. More importantly, the multi-million-dollar TV facility, designed and executed by Dubai systems integrator Tek Signals, boasts the Arab region’s first SMPTE 2110 implementation.

Al Wousta TV itself is not new. Launched in September 2016 from the Sharjah Broadcasting Authority (SBA) premises in Sharjah, the general entertainment channel focuses on promoting the culture and activities of the people of Al Dhaid, an area known for its mountains, farming and traditional games. But what has impressed the regional broadcast fraternity is the IP implementation.
“When His Highness proposed a channel for Al Dhaid back in 2016, what he wanted was authentic coverage on this part of the world created by the people who reside here and understand the various nuances of our heritage. Now, 90% of the shows on Al Wousta TV are created locally in the central zone of Sharjah. Alongside that, we wanted to build a state-of-the-art IP facility in Al Dhaid so our broadcast professionals and university students could be updated on the latest media technologies. SMPTE 2110 is the standard that all progressive and new TV stations today are adopting, so we are very proud to have achieved this with our new launch in Al Dhaid,” explains Mohammed Hassan Khalaf, General Manager of Sharjah Broadcasting Authority.

Khalaf has been with SBA since 1999, rising up the ranks from programme presenter to Head of Sharjah Radio to Manager of both Sharjah TV and Radio, before assuming his current role.

Channel Engineering Manager Khalid Al Shehhi, a dynamic young UAE national who completed his audio engineering studies in the US and returned home to initially run the audio department at SBA and later head the engineering team at Al Wousta TV, elaborates on the project.

“This is an end-to-end IP installation starting from the cameras and mixers in production to distribution. The complete backbone for this infrastructure is IP. The entire network runs on fibre, which means this facility is ready for 4K or any future formats. With IP also comes compatibility, so any new elements that need to be added to the infrastructure in the future can be integrated without any downtime – a challenge in any SDI environment.”

“The SMPTE 2110 standard is particularly gaining significance as the protocol to interconnect all the devices in a new channel. With technology moving from baseband and traditional broadcast infrastructure to an IP world, this is the technology that everyone will adopt. We are glad that we can now say that we are at the cutting edge of technology,” says Al Shehhi.

The facility is a purpose-built building which towers over the rest of the city landscape, despite being only six storeys tall. Each floor is dedicated to different segments of the TV station, with production and newsroom operations occupying the third floor; UPS and power on the fourth; technical facilities including MCR, PCR, ACR, CAR, Avid NLEs, Avid ProTools Audio Room, three Adobe Premiere rooms and a VizArtist room on the fifth; and an impressive studio on the sixth. The rest of the floors are primarily reserved for official and administrative operations.

“A big highlight of the facility is Al Wousta TV’s 840sqm studio, which can accommodate five sets. Its five Sony HDC 4300 cameras and one Sony PTZ camera are backed by a Sony switcher in the PCR and controlled by Sony LSM to capture all the action. The lighting is designed to be flexible and adjustable for different shows.”

Mohammed Hassan Khalaf, General Manager, Sharjah Broadcasting Authority.

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“This is an end-to-end IP installation starting from the cameras and mixers in production to distribution. The complete backbone for this infrastructure is IP. The entire network runs on fibre, which means this facility is ready for 4K or any future formats. With IP also comes compatibility, so any new elements that need to be added to the infrastructure in the future can be integrated without any downtime – a challenge in any SDI environment.”

“The SMPTE 2110 standard is particularly gaining significance as the protocol to interconnect all the devices in a new channel. With technology moving from baseband and traditional broadcast infrastructure to an IP world, this is the technology that everyone will adopt. We are glad that we can now say that we are at the cutting edge of technology,” says Al Shehhi.

The facility is a purpose-built building which towers over the rest of the city landscape, despite being only six storeys tall. Each floor is dedicated to different segments of the TV station, with production and newsroom operations occupying the third floor; UPS and power on the fourth; technical facilities including MCR, PCR, ACR, CAR, Avid NLEs, Avid ProTools Audio Room, three Adobe Premiere rooms and a VizArtist room on the fifth; and an impressive studio on the sixth. The rest of the floors are primarily reserved for official and administrative operations.

“A big highlight of the facility is Al Wousta TV’s 840sqm studio, which can accommodate five sets. Its five Sony HDC 4300 cameras and one Sony PTZ camera are backed by a Sony switcher in the PCR and controlled by Sony LSM to capture all the action. The lighting is designed to be flexible and adjustable for different shows.”

Mohammed Hassan Khalaf, General Manager, Sharjah Broadcasting Authority.
As a main part of the design, Al Wousta TV has also deployed a fully motorised hoist network that enables the lighting designers to work in a flexible environment. The lighting designer can also control colour and light colour temperature from a tablet inside the studio, enabling on-the-spot changes. The entire 4K-ready facility includes two playout systems. Studio playout is via Avid FastServe, while MCR playout was deployed using Imagine Communication Systems including playout automation and a BCM scheduling solution. Also included is a 4K-ready backbone system with SDVoN technology by Evertz Microsystems. Evertz controls the entire Sony system using the NMS protocol. The audio system comprises a LAWO MC36 audio mixer and audio routing is over Dante. The ETS/2110 talkback system is also completely IP-based and again, supports communication over Dante. The whole audio solution is tightly bound together via Dante and communication with the Evertz IPX router is via an audio gateway to achieve SMPTE 2110 at all levels. On the graphics side, Al Wousta TV has two engines – the Via multi-channel for MCR and the Via Content Pilot for the studio. Both communicate with Evertz on the NMOS protocol. For monitoring the video signal over IP, the channel uses the latest Tektronix PRISM, which supports NMOS discovery. Evertz’ built-in IP multiviewers are used in all areas of the facility. Additionally, Al Wousta TV also has a complete PAM and MAM system provided by AVID. It comprises iNews, Capture, Command, and Cloud UX to carry out various tasks related to playout, ingest and verification, all hosted on a complete VMware virtual structure.

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'The complete backbone for this infrastructure is IP. The entire network runs on fibre, which means this facility is ready for 4K or any future formats’

Khalid Al Shehhi, Channel Engineering Manager, Al Wousta TV
Although this is a stand-alone project, SBA plans to use SMPTE 2110 as the standard for all its future installations. “This is our benchmark project where we successfully implemented the IP-based SMPTE 2110 standard and that multiple control systems could talk to each other over different protocols. To minimise integration risks, we held multiple joint design workshops with key vendors to ensure they were all on the same page,” explains Al Shehhi. Perhaps it helped that the team chose industry-standard solutions for the whole installation. “When we chose solutions for this project, we researched the maturity of the implemented technology and how well they would potentially integrate with other third-party system components like Avid FastServes, Vizrt Graphics, the Sony cameras and Tektronix Prims, to name a few,” says Hannonough, elaborating on some of the challenges.

Ali Rashheed speaks further about the challenges and how they were addressed. “From the very first stage of designing, we had to ensure that all the vendors we chose were compliant with SMPTE 2110 standards and that multiple control systems could talk to each other over different protocols. To minimise integration risks, we held multiple joint design workshops with key vendors to ensure they were all on the same page. A second layer of expertise required an in-depth level of knowledge about each technology, with technical details, capturing, understanding and laying them out on extensive drawings.

“Our internal design and draft team prepared more than 20 drawings for this project, capturing fibre ports allocation, the type of fibre cables that would be utilised, the length calculation of each port with mitigating any loss of signals mechanism in mind. Detailed rack, power and heat dissipation calculations were also kept in mind while keeping future expansion in mind. “On the workflow side, we looked at the requirements of multiple file formats both externally and internally, and a system was conceptualised alongside integration to the SBA’s headquarters. AVID PAM & MAM over MediaCloudUX was implemented to cover the production workflow, and integration to the final MCR playout system was sorted. “The complete design on the backbone IP and network is the...
Choosing the right product while ensuring the main and back-up infrastructure is in place is a must in SMPTE 2110 facilities, and we are delighted that we succeeded in putting together the right solutions.

Rasheed adds that extensive training was provided by all the main vendors. Clearly, the Dhaid facility is no mean engineering feat, and is the result of significant collaboration between the local systems integrator and the end user.

“We have a team of six engineers in-house for Al Wousta TV that was equally involved in researching the possibility of going with an IP implementation,” explains Al Shehhi. “Initially, we were concerned about taking such a big step and wondered if we would be able to pull it off, given the challenges that most international TV channels that had undertaken similar implementations were facing. But we visited all the big shows and waited until the IP end-to-end supply chain had matured to the point where we could confidently go ahead with such an installation. It was quite daunting, but we are so glad we pulled it off and are extremely proud of this achievement.”

Work is not yet complete. A MAM implementation is still in progress and is scheduled for completion in April.

“When we chose solutions for this project, we researched the maturity of the implemented technology and how well they would potentially integrate with other third-party system components,” explains Mounaf Mohamed Hannouneh, Head of Broadcast Engineering, SBA.

servers. This arrangement was part of the agreement with Avid when the project was awarded to them.”

Likewise, Sharjah TV’s content digitisation project, which started several years ago, is now in the final stage. This part of the project was a Qvest Media undertaking. By Q2, all of SBA’s old content will have been digitised and safely archived, with all three sites – the SBA HQ, the Kalba facility and the Dhaid facility – serving as Disaster Recovery sites for the other two.

“Each site will be a mirror to the other,” explains Al Shehhi. “SBA has been digitising its legacy content for several years and all that is coming to fruition now. We will have all our existing content archived soon, and then archival will be ongoing.”

SBA has only touched the tip of the iceberg with this project, which is the start of many other pipelines, promises GM Khalaf.

“Our aim is to stay one step ahead in terms of content and technology. With our content almost fully archived now, we are turning our attention to Al Badayer, where we are building a new studio.”

IMAGINE

moving freely without losing connection

Pioneering IP solutions with support for industry standards including Dante, AES67 and SMPTE 2110.
Notable works of Chikere include Blood Sisters, Light Will Come and Stronger than Pain. The director has won many awards, including Best Director nods from Nollywood Africa, The City People and the Department of African Studies in Perimeter College at Georgia State University, and a Nollywood Movies London nomination for Best Screenplay. “Nollywood has been gaining ground and will continue to grow in the coming years. We are viable on Netflix as well as film festivals around the globe. We have a large population in Nigeria, and that audience is a huge part of our success story,” says Chikere. Filmmakers are looking more and more into their own culture for inspiration. This has been possible with the experience and the exposure the Nigerian filmmakers have brought to the industry. “As Nollywood is dressing African themes in universal clothing and vice versa, the industry is bound to thrive,” adds Chikere. Nigerian filmmaker Saheed Apana agrees. “The Nigerian cinema is here to stay with the type of productions that are being made, from comedy to drama to action films.” The director, whose latest film Jumbled was released in 2019, believes there is both passion and filmmakers who failed to apply. “Films are mostly funded via personal sources. One of them is Chikere, adding that limited money and sometimes paid on instalment.”
Saheed Apanpa, who makes art films, believes there is both passion and business in the Nigerian film industry. It is a challenge to be able to pull off the production of a full feature film with a short time frame and a small budget, says Apanpa. “Give them [other film industries] our budget and see if they deliver.” Apanpa makes art films with consideration of what the audience would like. After two decades in New York, he came back to Nigeria to make films. Living abroad helped shape his mind towards what kind of films he wanted to make, and how. Stressing the importance of a script, he says: “I worry more about directing great scripts. For me, scripts always come first. That is the key to having a great production. It's all about shooting good films.”

“For me, scripts always come first. That is the key to having a great production. It's all about shooting good films”

Saheed Apanpa, filmmaker

VHS tapes to be sold and rented cheaply, distributed via methods ranging from DVDs and theatres to downloading and streaming online. Now things are changing, says Apanpa, adding that new cinema facilities are coming up across the country. “The cinema market space is growing now. The popular cinema houses include Film House (IMAX Cinema), Silverbird Cinema, Ozone Cinema, Genesis Deluxe Cinema, etc, with three or more screens in different locations.” The market, fuelled by the eagerness of the Nigerian audience, has been evolving and welcoming new productions, supported by the latest market and technology trends which have become the backbone of Nigerian cinema. The films are more advanced now, due to the digital tools available. The bridging shot is a film technique employed by most Nollywood filmmakers these days, because films centre around developing stories, sometimes from one generation to another. Films use high and low angles to tell stories of oppression or inequality. Other techniques include dissolving, cross-cutting, crane and dolly shots, and drone shots – one of the new trends in filmmaking.

The popular mass-market genres are romantic comedies, dramas and movies of exploits, says Chikere, who mainly produces commercial films. “Our people also love the action genre, especially when there is poetic justice at the end and good triumphs over evil. We hardly tell horror stories. Times are hard and people just want to feel good. Intellectual films don’t do well, except when a filmmaker knows how to mix the right doses of comedy and romance into them.”

The style has also evolved with the growing exposure provided by the internet, says Apanpa. “You have to be ready to move with the trends. As the demands in the market changed, I changed. The tables have turned from those days tables have turned from those days when the marketers ran the industry, to now where we have plenty of avenues to sell our content. It has evolved.”

However, Apanpa says Nollywood can further grow only with government support. “The revenue that comes in from Nollywood alone is massive. We need film villages, better equipment, more training and bigger facilities. Taking such steps will help Nollywood compete with other film industries.”

Being in the same league as other film industries is important for Nollywood since it provides a platform for the people to represent themselves without any filter. The films are made by Africans, about Africans, for Africans, which fills a void. “Nollywood is different from other film industries, as we tell our stories in a unique way. We showcase our rich cultural heritage through our movies and our actors are simply amazing in their characterisation,” says Egbuchu. Performances have improved too, says Chikere. “There has been a shift from a single storyline to multiple narratives that hold the audience by offering more than one plot conflict.” However, with the rising growth of the industry and various forms of distribution, piracy in a rampant challenge. Although Nigeria has laws against piracy, it thrives due to poor implementation of copyright laws, almost no prosecution of offenders, and corruption in governance.

The World Bank estimates that for every legitimate copy sold for the big screen. They were made on

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The World Bank estimates that for every legitimate copy sold for the big screen. They were made on
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sold, nine are pirated. In 2013, “It was estimated that pirated films outnumbered legitimate ones in the market by five or ten-to-one,” according to a Jonathan Haynes’ in his book: Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres.

Piracy is increasingly recognized as a socially unacceptable practice, due to loss of revenue in the potentially billions-dollar industry, and the Nigerian Copyright Commission has taken steps to shore up copyright protection for producers.

“Over the years, piracy has been a major headache for producers. However, we are trying in our own little way to manage the situation. They submit watermarked preview copies of their films to intended buyers and exhibitors for approval first. That way, the watermarked copy can’t be used publicly. We only release the master copy once the deal is at the completion stage,” says Apanpa.

Chikere calls for unity among filmmakers to address piracy issues, and for the government to take steps to prevent the loss of revenue, as the Nigerian film industry contributes to the country’s economy.

“We are facing online piracy. The government is aware of this. The question is who should tackle it. Filmmakers need to come together to address this. The government is not a professional film authority. The responsibility falls on the practitioners to tell them what to do and how they can be needed as far as piracy and other issues go,” says Chikere.

While the struggle against piracy is just beginning, the actors and filmmakers of the Nigerian cinema industry are beginning to get the recognition they are due. though this does not apply to all producers and platforms. However, most platforms usually protect the content. They ensure proper documentation for acquisition because they know the legal implications if piracy of any sort is traced back to them,” says Egbuchu.

However, in the Nigerian film industry, piracy is mainstream rather than an exception. “We can only try the best way we can. However, there is politics involved. I just wish the government would be more organised and introduce a better structure in terms of distribution,” says Apanpa. Chikere calls for unity among filmmakers to address piracy issues, and for the government to take steps to prevent the loss of revenue, as the Nigerian film industry contributes to the country’s economy.

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Phina Egbuchu, CEO, Pue Pictures

PUE Pictures

• PUE Pictures has produced the film, Summer Sin, and a talk show titled Spicy with Phina
• The production house has yet to win any awards
• No box office movies yet, but looking forward to big projects

“My name is Phina Egbuchu, and I’m the CEO of PUE Pictures. We make films for a mass audience and the script decides the budget, says Phina Egbuchu.

PUE Pictures makes films for a mass audience and the script decides the budget, says Phina Egbuchu.

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The Future of 8K

Manufacturers are pushing 8K sets, but are we ready?

Do we have the content, infrastructure and standards to take this format forward? Thierry Fautier explores the challenges and solutions for making 8K an industry standard.

At CES 2019, 8K TVs were introduced by a handful of manufacturers, including LG, Samsung, Sony and TCL. It was one of the first times that 8K displays were shown publicly, and attendees were mesmerised by the 33m pixels that 8K TVs provide, compared with 8m for 4K TVs. At CES 2020 there was a lot of buzz, and all TV manufacturers announced 8K sets.

What we know is that volume is minuscule. Analysts do not predict 8K to be more than 1% of 2024 sales, while 4K now represents 66% of TV sales in the US. Content is not there yet, and the industry is looking at streaming possibilities. The 8K Association is pushing hard to write an end-to-end specification.

Everyone wants to know: Is the industry ready for 8K? What challenges still need to be overcome? And how will future technologies like 5G assist with bringing 8K to a mass market?

8K Progress and Envisioned Applications

While 8K TVs have made their way onto store shelves and living rooms, the market is still in its infancy. There is not a lot of 8K content available for viewing, and 8K screens are still too expensive to appeal to consumers on a mass scale. That is partially due to the screen size required. In order to fully take advantage of 8K resolution, a screen size of at least 66 inches is required. The higher the screen size, the higher the cost. At the same screen size, there is still a two- to four-fold price difference versus 4K, making it difficult to justify without compelling 8K content.

8K makes the viewing experience much more immersive, so the obvious application for 8K is live sports. But there are even richer use cases that can be explored, including high-quality 8K capture, personalised broadcasts to mobile devices (with the opportunity to pan and zoom within the 8K content), and free viewpoint (Intel TrueView or Canon technology).

The most cost-effective way to enable pan, scan and zooming is to capture 8K by using one camera for HD production and extracting the region of interest via AI. For VR applications, 8K resolution will need to be captured and the FOV delivered to an HD or a 4K display. 8K resolution improves the IQoA for VR, compared with a classical VR approach that sends the full frame and upsamples the FOV area at the player stage. Degrading the experience. For personalised broadcast, content is captured in 8K and end users can navigate the content on mobile devices.

Challenges to Overcome

A standard needs to be agreed upon for 8K. Japan has chosen ARIB UHY to broadcast 8K. Today, ARIB is the only broadcast network capable of supporting 8K. There has not yet been an announcement from ATSC or DVB in support of 8K. Both organisations are at the research stage. Beyond broadcast, a standard is needed for IP delivery of VOD and live content to any screen from any network, including 5G. Whatever standard is used will need to take into account resolution parameters like HDR, HFR and NLA. Once a standard for delivering 8K with HDR, HFR and NLA over IP networks is created, it will help to push the industry forward towards adopting 8K.

On the production side, the tools available to produce 8K live content in HDR have not been widely deployed yet, as many in the industry are in the middle of implementing 4K HDR. What’s lacking is content that exploits the properties of 8K, such as its very large field of view and high resolution. 8K production guidelines are also needed, especially for immersive applications.

NHK has announced that it will cover the Tokyo Olympics in 8K. This will be the first live 8K delivery on a big stage. A key challenge for NHK, preparing for the postponed 2020 Olympics is bandwidth. Transmitting an 8K signal using HEVC Main 10 codec requires 100Mbps, compared to 25Mbps for 4K. At InterBee 2019 in Japan, Harmonic demonstrated 8K content from the tennis French Open, delivered over IP at 20–40Mbps using CAE (content-aware encoding). In order to reduce this bitrate, MPEG is defining a new codec called VVC (versatile video codec) that will offer a 50% improvement in HEVC bandwidth by 2020.

Given these challenges, the 8K streaming market has the biggest potential. High-speed broadband networks such as fibre, DOCSIS 3.1 and 5G are most suitable to deliver 8K content, requiring less than 40Mbps to deliver premium 8K content when using CAE.

8K Trials and the Role of 5G

8K trials have begun, outside of NHK’s coverage of the Tokyo Olympics. One notable trial occurred last year when French public service broadcaster France Télévisions demonstrated the first live 8K broadcast over 5G during the French Open tennis tournament. The demo was successful thanks to the tight collaboration with Orange and more than 16 technology providers, including Harmonic.

While this was on a much smaller scale than the Olympics, it was a massive technology breakthrough in terms of validating that 5G networks can be used to deliver exceptional video quality at bitrates as low as 20Mbps for IP delivery. During the event, the demo partners were able to create and deliver live, VOD and catch-up TV content to a variety of 5G-connected devices, including TVs and smartphones, in 8K resolution.

A key lesson learned during the trial was that the infrastructure for 8K delivery over 5G can be set up rapidly. From start to finish, the entire technical system for the trial was set up in merely two months. Once scalable cloud-based servers had been installed, it only took a few days to set up Harmonic’s VOD@8K cloud-based live video delivery platform. Cloud infrastructure is what enabled such a rapid deployment time.

What’s Next for 8K?

To summarise, 8K still needs several years before widespread adoption takes place. In terms of content availability, an established business model, device availability and potentially a new codec. At Harmonic, we see 8K as more than a mirage. We think the market will take off in 2022 and be mature by 2024.

Some critical issues need to be addressed before the industry is prepared to transmit 8K. There needs to be an economical way to distribute it. A standard for broadcast is a significant missing piece. After the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, more infrastructure improvements, such as IP workflows and cloud infrastructure, will help simplify 5G delivery during the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022 and future events.

Streaming appears to be the path of least resistance for 8K. To enable 8K streaming, high-speed broadband networks are still needed. A better codec will also be required down the road. Technologies such as CAE can play a role in bringing down the bitrates to a more affordable level. However, for this to work, network infrastructure providers need to add eMBMS support for 5G. The good news is that eMBMS is currently being standardised in 3GPP. Device support will be crucial to its success.

For now, the industry will continue improving in the areas of the three 8K. As more 8K content is available and the prices of 8K TV sets drop, and a good high-speed IP infrastructure has been implemented, more consumers will be able to truly enjoy the spectacular clarity that 8K provides.
Resolve has traditionally found favour with professional editors as an advanced colour grading tool. But with version 16.2, Dubai-based post-production specialist Dan Mitre explores whether Blackmagic Design has finally found the secret recipe to making this a mainstream, must-have option for editors and if the Editor Keyboard is a tempting addition to the mix.

Blackmagic Design’s DaVinci Resolve has been a tool of choice within the NLE space for many professional colourists, editors and other post-production experts. No doubt it is discussed and criticised by many, but it is also trusted and loved by many more. So when I was asked to review not just the Resolve 16.2 but also the Editor Keyboard, which we hadn’t used before, I was curious to know if their combined use could improve our post-production efficiencies.

But first, a look at Resolve 16 because that’s where most of the changes began. One of the things I like about this software is that ever since it was acquired by Blackmagic Design in 2009, support and development have been exceptional. The company has constantly tried to improve its GUI and efficiency, and this is what one needs in post-production – a reliable tool that offers flexibility and the ability to deliver, combined with great support.

If you compare 16 with the previous versions of DaVinci, there’s not much difference in the GUI or the style of work, but there are some new additions.

The Cut Page is one. Its UI is very user-friendly, compressed and simplified, but it comes with a heap of features designed particularly for editors on the go and is almost like a software within the software. I recently attended a T3 workshop in the UK so that I could add custom training sessions for producers, DOPs, directors, colourists and other professionals alongside the raft of commercial training services we offer in Dubai.

At the workshop, I discovered the full potential of Cut Page and how it offers a combination of new editing techniques with older styles of edit, alongside new and improved features like Smart Editing.

These include elements like an amusingly self-descriptive Boring Detector, which highlights clips on the timeline that may need to be cut down in length. There is also a Jump Cut Detector, which highlights quick jarring edits. The close-up edit feature has also been updated using the AI-driven neural engine of DaVinci introduced in 16.0, automatically identifying faces in a shot and reframing them accordingly.

The Cut Page offers several smart editing functions that help you speed up your workflow. It is primarily intended to simplify and streamline the editing process for certain types of jobs where you need to edit on the spot and deliver for social media. Its page is compact, with the tools and UI designed for mobility and artists on location. With the media pool located on the...
With shot stabilisation built into every clip as part of the new Edit feature, shaky clips are a thing of the past.

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When you’re on a tight deadline, you need to be able to deliver finished programmes fast. The new Quick Export tool lets you quickly render and upload to online services such as YouTube and Vimeo.

"When you’re on a tight deadline, you need to be able to deliver finished programmes fast. The new Quick Export tool lets you quickly render and upload to online services such as YouTube and Vimeo."

Dan Mitre, Creative Producer and founder, Dan Mitre Media

The introduction of Cut Page to Resolve 16 will attract many new users. It has simplified the traditional workflow, which was maybe too visually complex for some. Some other interesting features in this new version include Media, Edit, Fusion, Colour, Fairlight and the Deliver Page. Within Media, there is improved audio track metadata support, with support for up to 24 tracks, and support for duplicated clips and timelines being placed in the source bin. Media pool clip by date added, showing synced audio file names in the media pool list view, revealing the media pool location of a clip from a smart bin, and more.

Within Edit, shot stabilisation is now built into every clip. Fusion also offers a dramatically improved performance. The planar and auto tracker have improved performance and accuracy a lot. All 3D operations are GPU-accelerated, making Fusion much more responsive when working in 3D. In addition, there are a lot of effects supported by GPU acceleration – time effects, stereo tools, 3D text and more.

The Colour feature includes new finishing tools, workflows and support for duplicated clips and timelines being placed in the source bin; media pool clips by date added, showing synced audio file names in the media pool list view, revealing the media pool location of a clip from a smart bin, and more. Within Edit, shot stabilisation is now built into every clip. Fusion also offers a dramatically improved performance. The planar and auto tracker have improved performance and accuracy a lot. All 3D operations are GPU-accelerated, making Fusion much more responsive when working in 3D. In addition, there are a lot of effects supported by GPU acceleration – time effects, stereo tools, 3D text and more.

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Dan Mitre, Creative Producer and founder, Dan Mitre Media

The new Quick Export tool lets you quickly render and upload to online services such as YouTube and Vimeo. The Quick Export menu is on all DaVinci Resolve pages, so you can now instantly render out a finished edit without using the Deliver Page. You can also create your own Quick Export presets for saving local files.

There are still people who question if DaVinci is there yet in terms of editing – I’d say it’s getting there. I’ve used Resolve for editing even from earlier versions, and it all depends on how you customise your workflow for the type of project you’re currently working on.

The Deliver Page for faster and easier delivery ensures that projects meet the required level standards for delivery. The Deliver Page is a great piece of hardware. Once you start using it, it’s hard to do without it.

Dan Mitre is Creative Producer and founder of Dan Mitre Media in Dubai.

The Media page offers improved audio track metadata support for up to 24 tracks.

Composer or Adobe Premiere, then move to DaVinci Resolve for colour and final online conforming. For more advanced VFX, we use After Effects, Nuke or Flame, and sometimes we undertake the final conforming straight in Avid or Premiere.

I personally prefer to keep most work inside Resolve, but because I tend to work with the best artists in each department, I have to customise our workflow to suit everybody’s tastes and allow creative freedom for each artist. Sometimes I even do VFX work directly in DaVinci, using a combination of the existing features on the Edit and Colour pages, and techniques that are mostly for colour isolation or treatment. But if it gives you the result you want, then great.

You have the Fusion page in DaVinci Resolve for more advanced VFX work or standalone Fusion Studio. This can sometimes appear a bit clunky, but Resolve 16.0 gives you a great deal of creative flexibility.

Colour now comes with new finishing tools, workflow improvements and significantly improved GPU-accelerated video scopes and effects.

The Auto Colour tool uses the AI from the neuroengine to assist in quickly reaching a neutral starting point. Colour tool uses the AI from the neuroengine to assist in quickly reaching a neutral starting point. Colour tool uses the AI from the neuroengine to assist in quickly reaching a neutral starting point.

The Blackmagic Design Editor Keyboard

Before you start using this keyboard, you begin to appreciate its value. It’s bigger than most editing keyboards on the market and triple the price of Resolve Studio. Cheaper keyboards are available from Logitech and the like.

The Resolve Editor Keyboard connects via a USB C type connection, including two USB ports on the back. In the box, you have a Type-C to Type-C connector included. Obviously, it should be compatible with the latest connections, so you’ll need an adapter to plug it into older USB ports, but it works just fine when you do.

It comes with a hand rest, promising to reduce fatigue. The main components – key caps, hand rest, key switches – are available as spare parts, so the keyboard can be repaired over time. The jog/shuttle wheel is on the right and the trimming buttons are on the left, making this keyboard special for video editing.

The hard buttons are super convenient for typing. Some may argue this keyboard is old school, but it looks and feels robust. Some may also note there are no lights in the keys. This depends on the work environment. Most editors work in well-lit rooms, but there may be those who do colour work and prefer lights in the keys, to see them in a darker room.

That said, the Shift key on the right is small and rather challenging to see. The position of the arrow keys is tricky, next to the small Shift key on the right. You end up pressing the wrong arrows, moving the cursor a lot, not careful. Overall, the keyboard is well mapped and the functions an editor needs are pretty much in the right place; the jog/shuttle function is great to use. The editing functions are above the in and out keys, to allow a simple movement to activate the edit you require. You can select and add transitions instantly; the buttons are on the bottom left.

Normally, you would drag and drop to place a transition, or a keyboard shortcut for only one transition type. Pressing one button can help add or remove a transition. The Cut key removes any transition on an edit point and leaves it as a simple edit between two clips. Pressing Dissolve adds a one-second dissolve between the two clips, and Roll Duration sets the desired transition length. If there is a dissolve on the edit, the key will be ignored. There’s a Smooth Cut button to allow jump cuts to be removed at a press.

Resolve users may adapt this keyboard to cover most of the functions in the whole interface. I’d say this is a subjective choice. Can it be further improved? Most definitely, yes. Not everybody using DaVinci will benefit from this keyboard. It’s mainly for editors, not colourists.

But having used it for almost a month now, from an editor’s perspective, I can confirm that the BMD Editor Keyboard is a great piece of hardware. Once you start using it, it’s hard to do without it.

There are still people who question if DaVinci is there yet in terms of editing – I’d say it’s getting there. I’ve used Resolve for editing even from earlier versions, and it all depends on how you customise your workflow for the type of project you’re currently working on.

The Deliver Page for faster and easier delivery ensures that projects meet the required level standards for delivery. The Deliver Page is a great piece of hardware. Once you start using it, it’s hard to do without it.

Dan Mitre is Creative Producer and founder of Dan Mitre Media in Dubai.

The new Quick Export tool lets you quickly render and upload to online services such as YouTube and Vimeo. The Quick Export menu is on all DaVinci Resolve pages, so you can now instantly render out a finished edit without using the Deliver Page. You can also create your own Quick Export presets for saving local files.

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The Auto Colour tool uses the AI from the neuroengine to assist in quickly reaching a neutral starting point.
The Sony PXW-FX9 XDCAM 6K full-frame camera system seems to combine the popular FX7 with some of the upgraded technology from the manufacturer’s Venice and Alpha camera lines. In this review, Dubai-based DoP Stephen Moro explores the various features of the new camera and whether it lives up to expectations.

When it comes to broadcast, Sony has been my go-to camera for the last 15 years. From humble beginnings with the DVCAM (DSR-450 and 570), to the HDCAM and the XDCAM (such as the PMW-500), and then the Super 35 sensor cameras such as the F3, F5/55 and F5, I have always found something I like from the Sony stable.

The XDCAM-500 was one of my favourite cameras, but one of the biggest game-changers was the FS7, one of the most popular cameras in recent years due to its many features and affordable price point compared to the F5/55. With a Super 35 sensor for better depth of field over 2/3-inch CCDs, the ability to shoot S-Log for greater dynamic range, Rec709 for quick turnaround, internal ND, audio controls, 10-bit 422 recordings in HD and 4K, it ticked all the boxes for local and international production companies.

So how do you improve on an already popular camera system? Well, for Sony, it was logical: retain all the principal aspects that made the FS7 so popular while beefing up its capabilities with a larger full-frame sensor, higher resolution and dynamic range, plus introducing the cinematic colour science of its flagship Sony Venice camera. This is the new Sony FX9. It feels like a full-frame evolution of the FX7, a workhorse camera the firm has come to depend on, with the welcome additions of improved low-light and autofocus performance.

Sensor
The newly developed sensor from Sony is a 6K full-frame CMOS sensor providing more than 15 stops of dynamic range that allows oversampled 10-bit 422 recording in 4K DCI, 4K UHD and HD.

But why would Sony have a 6K sensor and down sample to 4K? According to the manufacturer, around a third of the camera’s resolution is lost in the processing of the image. By having a 6K sensor and down sampling to 4K, you effectively get the characteristics of 6K resolution without any waste in data size. I believe this makes for a more efficient camera and I think we’ll see this approach integrated by other camera manufacturers in the near future.

But it isn’t just the colour science that has been carried from the Sony Venice, it’s also the Dual Base ISO technology. It can record both 800 and 4,000 Base ISOs in Cine-EI mode. This means you can shoot at a lower 800 EI for day scenes in bright sunlight conditions (saving ND), then transition to 4,000 EI for low-light scenes. The result is a cleaner image in a variety
of different lighting conditions, compared to its predecessor.

Sony has also implemented a new gamma curve for the FX9’s custom mode, called S-Cinetone. This provides virtually the same cinematic look as the Venice and produces a more accurate colour gamut and skin tones over Sony’s traditional Rec.709 gamma.

For quick turnaround work, S-Cinetone gives users the ability to shoot out-of-the-box cinematic images without post-production grading. The legacy Rec.709 gamma is still available, but I can see my clients opting for S-Cinetone once they see the results.

There’s no real change regarding codecs, with XAVC-L (100Mbps), XAVC-L (50Mbps & 50Nbits) and MPEG-HD 422 still available, but Sony has discontinued Profiles recording. 16-bit RAW will be available with the XDCA-FX9 V-lock extension unit in the near future.

Body

Sony has obviously listened to user feedback and has implemented numerous improvements to the overall design of the camera. The FX9 is similar in size to the FS7 but feels more solid and well-built. Gone is the brightness knob from the side of the viewfinder, which was easy to knock unintentionally, changing the VF brightness. The headphone volume adjustments have moved to the side of the camera body from the menu, which is an obvious benefit, and the plastic cap protecting the V-Lock extension unit pins at the rear of the camera have been replaced by a more sturdy robust cap held in place with screws.

The FS7 didn’t have a Time Code IN/OUT on the camera body for syncing multi-camera and sound. For this functionality, users needed to add Sony’s V-Lock extension unit at a cost of $2,000. It was an unnecessary additional expense and made the camera unit heavier, so it’s nice to see Sony include both TC and Genlock IN/OUT as standard for the FX9.

Looking back, the FS7 Mk1 had a limit, resulting in a camera with a cinematic look and feel that has the ability to shoot both broadcast and cinematic environments.”

Stephen Moro, Director of Photography

“Sony has pushed the capabilities of the FX9 to the limit, resulting in a camera with a cinematic look and feel that has the ability to shoot both broadcast and cinematic environments.”

Stephen Moro, Director of Photography

Shooting with the FS7 Mk1, to achieve the exact aperture I always had to add more than just three presets. The FX9 has completely done away with the traditional ND knob, replacing it with three user presets. You can select any of the three presets from 1/4 through 1/128, with the ability to switch to Variable ND if you prefer access to more exact increments/variants in between.

“The FX9 offers an improved level of detail and clarity. The FX9’s 561-point phase-detection autofocus sensor covers approximately 94% width and 96% height of the imaging area and allows consistently accurate AF tracking, even with fast-moving objects at wide or open apertures. Adjustments can now be made to transition speeds and sensitivity, while the face detection functionality intelligently recognizes and locks onto human faces. The autofocus has been designed to work with Sony’s E-mount lenses, including Sony’s new G Master series, and can also work with lenses from other manufacturers, with varied results. Personally, I’ve never taken advantage of the autofocus as I prefer to have full control. I have found autofocus very handy with the FS9, especially when shooting low angles or cradling the camera where your eye isn’t directly against the VF. I’m sure it’s a feature I will use more over time.

One of the biggest challenges I faced when using the FS7 was the loss of the Rec.709 View Finder LUT in CineEI S&Q mode, so it’s nice to see that Sony has added a new gamma curve for the FX9’s View Finder LUT in CineEI S&Q mode, so it’s nice to see that Sony has added a new level of detail and clarity.

“Autofocus

Of all of FX9’s developments, Sony is most excited about the new hybrid autofocus system, a vast improvement on its Alpha mirrorless cameras. Sony says its new 561-point phase-detection autofocus sensor covers approximately 94% width and 96% height of the imaging area and allows consistently accurate AF tracking, even with fast-moving objects at wide or open apertures. Adjustments can now be made to transition speeds and sensitivity, while the face detection functionality intelligently recognizes and locks onto human faces. The autofocus has been designed to work with Sony’s E-mount lenses, including Sony’s new G Master series, and can also work with lenses from other manufacturers, with varied results. Personally, I’ve never taken advantage of the autofocus as I prefer to have full control. I have found autofocus very handy with the FS9, especially when shooting low angles or cradling the camera where your eye isn’t directly against the VF. I’m sure it’s a feature I will use more over time.

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“Rec.709 Gamma Assist Function to the FX9 when output LUTs are disabled. The FX9 continues to use the same XDCA cards and BP-U batteries as the FS7, so existing media and battery packs don’t need to be replaced. You can also record to both XQD cards simultaneously, as well as record proxy files in 3, 6, and 9mbps. This is a huge advantage when you need to transfer files for offline or transcription. The FX9 will eventually be able to record up to 60fps in 4K UHD or DCI and 180fps in HD, though the camera’s current V1.00 firmware is limited to 30fps in UHD 4K and 120fps in FF HD mode. 4K DCI (4,096 x 2,160) recording is yet to be supported, but one thing worth noting is that the scanning area for the future S&Q mode (up to 60fps in 4K FF) will be cropped to around 88%.

Sony hasn’t provided a timeline for when the new features will be available, but I’m sure Sony is working overtime within the next few months, with 4K DCI and 4K S&Q up to 60fps being the updates I’m most looking forward to.

In my opinion, the most important element to consider when upgrading to the FX9 is the larger FF sensor. The camera uses at least twice as much power as the FS7 even with HDMI and HDMI outputs turned off, so he mindful to either stock additional BP batteries or go for larger V-Lock batteries with the XDCA-FX9 extension unit. For accessories, I recommend the Shape FX9 remote extension unit (949)

PROREVIEW
In summary, the FX9 is the first camera to come out with a sensor that has the look and feel of the Sony Venice. Sony is no doubt currently working on incorporating many of these features into the rest of its line, such as the FS5 and the eagerly awaited A7S Mk3.

Overall, the FX9 is a major step up from the FS7 with its larger sensor, greater resolution, dynamic range, low-light capabilities and incredible autofocus. Mixed with the Venice colour science and S-Cinetone for standard non-grading work, the FX9 has already proven itself to be a very popular camera in a short timeframe. At $11,000, the FX9 is affordable and sits comfortably in the mid-range between the Sony FS7Mk2 and Canon C300 Mk2 and higher-end cinema cameras such as ARRI Alexa or the Venice. Its competitors are the more cost-effective Black Magic URSA Mini Pro G2 and the more expensive Canon C500 Mk2.

Which camera is right for you really depends on your clients’ needs and your own personal workflow. Sony has pushed the capabilities of the FX9 to the limit, resulting in a camera with a cinematic look and feel that has the ability to shoot both broadcast and cinema environments. From news, sport and documentary to TVC and corporate, the FX9 is an all-round workhorse. It’s a logical decision for me to upgrade, as it will hands-down offer my clients a better image with the same post-production workflow as the FS7.

The FS7 far exceeded my expectations and those of many others. I look forward to seeing what will be achieved with the FX9.

Stephen Moro is a Dubai-based DoP with more than 15 years’ experience in the industry.

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### Cons
- 4K Slow Motion Cropped at 83% of Full Frame
- No 12-Bit Recording
- DCI and FF 40p not yet available

### Wish list
I hope all of the FX9 full firmware features will be available in 2020.

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**The verdict**

**Pros**
- 6K Full Frame
- Dual Base ISO
- S-Cine Tone
- Auto Focus

**Cons**
- 4K Slow Motion Cropped at 83% of Full Frame
- No 12-Bit Recording
- DCI and FF 40p not yet available

### At $11,000, the FX9 is affordable and sits comfortably in the mid-range between the Sony FS7Mk2 and Canon C300 Mk2 higher-end cameras like the ARRI Alexa or the Venice, says Moro.

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"By leveraging AI, algorithms can be trained to learn what matters and how changes in these fingerprint timelines are connected to the content individual viewers enjoy."

**AI will drive recommendation and personalisation**

We are in a golden era of streaming. Consumers have thousands of movies and shows at their fingertips, available anywhere at any time across media services such as Apple TV+, Netflix, StarzPlay and Wow. Yet despite high-quality content, one major complaint viewers have is that they find themselves scrolling endlessly through vast libraries, unable to find anything they want to watch. Recent research found that today’s TV audiences spend almost an hour a day just searching for content. This is because most recommendation systems are not nuanced enough for the complexity of human nature. Viewers are often served recommendations based on highly generic metadata, which is often simplistic and inaccurate. So how can operators improve the content discovery experience to maximise viewer retention? The answer lies in AI.

Traditional approaches to content discovery rely on metadata which broadly labels content based on genre, keywords and actors. Audiences are often grouped in a similarly simplistic way, but the content and viewing habits are far more nuanced than this; viewers have their own individual tastes. For example, if we look at the film *The Martian* (2015), typical metadata would list its genre as ‘sci-fi’, a label that also covers Guardians of the Galaxy and the Terminator films. Yet, The Martian is also a tale of human survival, and the long scenes and low amount of dialogue mean it actually has very little in common with either of the other films and appeals to a very different, broader audience. Metadata on its own provides inaccurate recommendations because it analyses a video file in a very abstract way. If operators want to provide viewers with hyper-personalised and relevant recommendations, they must first get a better understanding of their content library, which is only possible through deep scene-by-scene analysis using AI.

AI enables operators to completely rethink the metadata paradigm. Videos can be analysed in great detail, with patterns in colours, objects, stress levels, positive/negative emotions, audio and many more features of the content detected. The result is a unique fingerprint timeline for each video asset in an operator’s library. By leveraging AI, algorithms can be trained to learn what matters and how changes in these fingerprint timelines are connected to the content individual viewers enjoy. This data, combined with a viewer’s watch history, means the right content can be served up at the right time. It even allows users with new paths to get out of their bubble and explore different parts of the catalogue that are consistent with their unique viewing and emotional consumption patterns.

For example, after watching *The Martian*, with its very long scenes and minimal dialogue, most viewers are highly unlikely to want to follow it with something similar. They may opt for a short and easy-to-watch cartoon or comedy. By allowing a deep understanding of a viewer’s watch history, habits and various data points such as device type, time of day and the chronological consumption pattern, AI-powered content discovery is able to provide highly relevant, intelligent choices that keep the viewer watching instead of coachaging.

Eventually, we expect video streaming platforms to be able to replicate the experience found on popular music streaming services and provide viewers with hyper-personalised channels that include pathways to films and TV shows similar to what they know and love, as well as recommendations to programming outside of their usual tastes and preferences. With consumers inundated with more services every day, the challenge for operators is how to provide consumers with the right content at the right time. While it’s important to provide consumers with choice, operators also need to recognise that they need help to unearth the content that resonates with them. AI is revolutionising the way that recommendations work because it allows content to be analysed to a depth never possible before, reducing the time wasted searching for content and increasing the time spent watching and enjoying it. It holds the key to winning audience engagement.

Marcus Bergström is CEO of Vionlabs.
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