TikTok ramps up MENA strategy to attract more content creators, businesses and media houses

Digital 6000 opens up new leeway and sets new standards. The system has intermodulation-free operation with an equidistant frequency grid, allowing reliable incorporation of transmission paths even in overcrowded or very narrow frequency ranges. The legendary long-range mode guarantees unrivalled quality. The new Link Density mode doubles the number of possible channels.

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We were one of the first publications in the industry to explore online video interviews within broadcast as far back as 2011. Our annual coffee table book, the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards, our roundtables and the list have gone from strength to strength. This year, we had intended to strengthen our events division with two additional conferences. The pandemic, however, created an opportunity for us to strengthen our digital platform instead.

That effort has been so successful that our website page impressions have quadrupled since last year, with a dramatic spike in the last six months. We also have another important development in the making, and we hope to make an announcement in the coming months. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, we deliberately decided to focus on an app that represents a new generation of content creators and entertainment consumers for our anniversary issue. TikTok represents a new model, a new thinking, and a new form of entertainment. It has shown content creators that good ideas and great content do not necessarily require a lot of marketing muscle and money to back them up. Content has remained king through this age. It is also testament to BroadcastPro’s own success as a brand. Delivery modes may have evolved but good stories and breaking news never lose their value. Let’s keep those stories coming.
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Spacetoon partners with The Moshaya Family to take brand beyond YouTube

Spacetoon has signed a strategic deal with The Moshaya Family, a Saudi-based family-friendly YouTube channel that currently has around 17.5m subscribers. Run by Muhammed Moshaya, who creates videos that include his family and their trips and entertainment in Saudi Arabia, The Moshaya Family channel on YouTube has caught the attention of several brands that have wanted to target Saudi viewers.

This new agreement will see Spacetoon create a franchise for the channel and take it beyond its YouTube space to a variety of consumer products including toys, animation series, video games and FMCG specially targeted at entertaining kids and families. Creating the license of The Moshaya Family franchise will grant Spacetoon an opportunity to introduce the franchise to the toy industry. This announcement follows the creation of a new brand identity for The Moshaya Family. Following this announcement, Spacetoon has already partnered with Toy Pro, a Dubai-based company specialised in the distribution and licensing of toys, to launch a toys lineup for The Moshaya Family brand in the market.

MBC Academy to upskill and manage Saudi talent in media and production

MBC has launched MBC Academy, which will be headed by Jana Yamani, Executive Director of Talent. The training platform aims to support the media production industry in Saudi Arabia by training and upskilling Saudi talent across various media sectors. The Academy welcomes applications from Saudi nationals in TV, film, radio, theatre, production, digital content, photography, music, lighting, or comedy. Successful applicants will receive intensive media and production training. The programme will welcome its first cohort of applicants later this year, with training scheduled on set at MBC locations – pending global conditions – from October. This will be followed by e-learning courses in various disciplines, such as filmmaking and screenwriting. The final phase will see top candidates offered job opportunities within the organisation. At a later stage, the Academy aims to introduce initiatives, such as online courses, non-degree programmes and work experience opportunities in Hollywood. Waleed Al-Ibrahim, Chairman of MBC Group is spearheading this initiative.

MBC Studios appoints new COO

MBC Group has appointed George Ghosra as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of MBC Studios. Ghosra will oversee all operational and financial functions of MBC Studios. He will report directly to MBC Studios’ MD Peter Smith who is part of the executive team that reports to MBC Group CEO Marc Antoine d’Halluin.

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Ethiopian broadcaster chooses Lawo

Ethiopia’s public broadcaster Oromia Broadcasting Network (OBN) has chosen Lawo mixing consoles and 1/0 devices as the core of its digital satellite news gathering (DSNG) units that are designed with a 4K workflow. For the technical basis of their OB units, both set to 4K standard, OBN chose self-contained Lawo mc²36 mixing consoles, complemented with Compact I/O units for expanded connectivity and use as remote stage box solutions. The concept, design and installation for the vehicles was carried out by Italian systems integrator ARET Video and Audio Engineering, a longtime Lawo partner. OBN’s first DSNG to be delivered is a versatile 12-camera unit of about 12 metres in length with a full 12G workflow, promising a variety of live broadcast situations. This unit, with its 49-fader mc²36 console and Compact I/O, features a layout that looks to maximize internal space while enabling interoperability among the different production areas: technical rooms, production and graphics rooms, and audio room. Another DSNG vehicle, suitable for smaller productions and TV reportage, carries four cameras and a 16-fader mc²36. The van features an acoustically insulated audio room.

Netflix names Ted Sarandos as co-CEO

Netflix has appointed its Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos as co-CEO along with Reed Hastings. It has also released a catalogue of 44 Arabic contemporary films, including the works of Youssef Chahine and Nadine Labaki. Furthermore, Netflix has partnered with Nigerian producer Mo Abudu to create two Original series and multiple films.

KAISA bans beIN Sports in the Kingdom

Saudi Arabia has permanently terminated beIN Sports license and imposed a fine of $2.6m for violating its competition law. beIN has not been allowed to broadcast in the Kingdom since mid-2017 owing to a diplomatic dispute. Saudi residents can no longer legally watch most of the football tournaments including the Premier League to which beIN Sports has the exclusive MENA broadcast rights until the end of the 2021/2022 season. The Saudi General Authority for Competition alleged that beIN Sports has abused its dominant position through monopolistic practices with respect to potential subscribers to beIN’s sports broadcast bundle of the 2016 UEFA European Championship matches”. beIN called the ruling “nonsensical”, adding that the “decision is not only contrary to international law but also the most basic principles of competition law”.

Johannes Larcher leaves HBO Max

Johannes Larcher, who served as MD of MBC’s OTT platform, Shahid, has moved to WarnerMedia as Head of HBO Max International from August 2020. He will report to Gerhard Zeiler, Chief Revenue Officer of WarnerMedia. Under the new role, Larcher will be responsible for the international rollout and management of WarnerMedia’s HBO Max.

Adeeb Abed steps down as GM of INC Dubai

Kuwait-headquartered media technology solutions provider INC System Integrations, which has operations across the Middle East, has appointed Mohammed Al Zaim as Executive GM for its Dubai office, effective July 1, 2020. Al Zaim succeeds Adeeb Abed who resigned from his position as GM last month to pursue other opportunities.

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New content agency launches in Dubai

A new content production and distribution agency, SynProNize, co-founded by two former Zee executives, Nitin Michael and Hasnaa Descuns, has launched in Dubai. The agency has already partnered with digital platforms and linear broadcasters in APAC, Africa and the Middle East to produce new content as well as deliver premium drama and lifestyle programming. SynProNize began its operations with a slate of new premium content from South Asia and the Middle East and their deep partnerships with producers in this region hopes to see their catalogue soon expand to 1000+ hours of lifestyle and drama content.

The company has also announced that former senior executive from Disney APAC, Raja Venkataraman will join the company as a board advisor. Venkataraman worked at The Walt Disney Company for 16 years in senior roles such as Vice-President, pay-TV distribution for the Asia Pacific region, CVP & Head of Strategy for all lines of business for South-East Asia, and General Manager, Disney Consumer Products for South-East Asia. Prior to working at Disney, Raja spent over 13 years in various commercial leadership roles in a variety of industries.

In a press statement, the co-founders said: “We have been ramping up this launch since early in the year and are very pleased with our opening programme portfolio and are very honoured to have the incredibly experienced and talented Raja Venkataraman join our company as a senior advisor. His inputs are invaluable. Additionally, we are excited to be in development to produce some great new drama and movies.”

Nautel appoints Kyle Dibbin as Sales Manager for MEA

Nautel has promoted Kyle Dibbin to Regional Sales Manager for the MEA market. Dibbin, who started at Nautel in 2012, in a test and repair capacity, was most recently Business Development Manager, VS Sales at the company.

Sawa Rights Management snags ME deal to distribute US channels

UAE-based Sawa Rights Management has signed a distribution agreement with US-based Herring Networks’ TV channels, AWE and QAN to show the channels on Du’s TV platform. SRM has also brokered a deal with Byron Allen’s Allen Media Group division Entertainment Studios to launch seven of its networks on Du. The deal is part of an overall arrangement that will soon extend to other MENA countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

Ovest Media Group acquires digital agency dimensional GmbH

Ovest Media has acquired its digital agency dimensional GmbH. With this acquisition, Kyle Dibbin will lead the dimensional MEA team to distribute dimensional’s portfolio of US channels to audiences in the Middle East. The deal with Ovest Media and dimensional’s conversion of several of the assets created for the AR, said: “We had previously thought it would be cool to do something similar in a broadcast environment.”

Ross Video’s Voyager helps enhance The Voice show in Lebanon with AR

The Voice (Lebanon), the Arabic version of the Dutch format, used Augmented Reality (AR) with support from Ross Video’s Voyager, the company announced last month. Local company Visuwalls was contracted to provide the set design, props, LED walls and motion graphics for the show. The 3D artists took several of the assets created for the motion graphics software and converted them for Voyager, Ross Video’s graphics rendering solution based on the Unreal engine by Epic Games. Voyager enables content creators to create hyper-realistic graphics.

PBT EU and Linxstream Media tie to offer localisation services in Middle East

Systems integrator PBT EU has announced a strategic partnership with post-production, localisation, and entertainment company, Linxstream Media. The alliance authorises Linxstream Media to resell products and services from PBT EU and Proz Digital in the Middle East. The partnership launches with the creation of Linxstream Media’s PixelSub, a cloud-based platform for managing localisation, dubbing and timed-text services. PBT EU provided the underlying technology to power PixelSub by integrating business management software LAPIS from Profuz Digital with timed-text application SubtitleNEXT. The resulting hybrid platform called NEXT-IT can be highly customised to produce precisely targeted management and localisation workflows.

Pulse 95 Radio launches YouTube channel

Pulse 95 Radio, an affiliate of Sharjah Broadcasting Authority, has launched a new YouTube channel to livestream its popular programmes in a bid to strengthen its online presence. The broadcaster will livestream digital video versions of five of its most popular radio shows on its newly launched YouTube channel, Pulse 95 Radio.

WarnerMedia hires Priya Dogra as Entertainment head across EMEA and APAC

Priya Dogra has been appointed President of WarnerMedia Entertainment Networks for EMEA and APAC. Dogra will report to Gerhard Zeiler, Chief Revenue Officer, WarnerMedia and President, WarnerMedia International Networks. She replaces Sierin Sin who stepped down at the end of June.

Amongst other assets, the team at Visuwalls worked with the famous Voice hand logo so the production team could make this appear on the physical set and then animate it as the camera flew past. Nicolas Malhas, Visuwalls’ Head of Media Servers & AR, said: “We had previously won Voice for esports, with the camera flying around virtual renders of the team players, and we thought it would be cool to do something similar in a broadcast environment.”

JP Delport as MD

Broadcast Solutions UK appoints JP Delport as MD

Broadcast Solutions UK, a subsidiary of Broadcast Solutions, has appointed JP Delport as MD. JP Delport brings more than 15 years’ experience, having held leadership roles at many companies including DTC, Prestige Broadcast Hire and Visilink.
OSN announces casting call for Arabic version of Come Dine With Me

OSN, which signed with ITV Studios for the exclusive rights and production of the Arabic version of the British reality TV show Come Dine With Me, has also announced a casting call for residents to apply for participation in the show. The 45-episode original production will be filmed in the UAE this year and run exclusively on OSN. The TV series will follow the same format as the UK, and will run weekly from Sunday to Thursday with a new group of contestants every week. OSN expects a diverse mix of contestants from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Europe, Asia and the West, to reflect the residential population of the country.

Bella Karimi, Interim Chief Content Officer at OSN, said: “We believe that Come Dine With Me will be as huge a success in the Middle East as it is in the UK and we are very excited for what’s to come in the pipeline in terms of original productions.”

Red Sea Film Festival Director Mahmoud Sabbagh steps down

The Red Sea Film Festival director Mahmoud Sabbagh resigned from his role last month. At present, Sabbagh intends to focus on directing and producing his third feature film, which will take him to Hong Kong for the movie’s filming. Sabbagh was involved in launching the Foundation and putting together the inaugural film festival.

RFC Jordan and VentureX launch creative accelerator

The Cultural and Creative Accelerator, established by VentureX and the Jordanian Ministry of Culture, is being built to help artists and creative businesses overcome the challenges associated with a startup. Film-related projects, starting from an idea to revamping existing projects, can submit for support as of July. Selected projects will benefit from three-phase support: advisory, mentorship and funding. The partnership was signed by Mohannad Al Bakri, MD of RFC and Youssef M Hamidaddin, Managing Partner of VentureX.

ZEE Entertainment launches ‘Zindagi’

Zindagi, launched on ZEE5, will have fresh new shows with a bold multicultural narrative apart from a vast library of original content. Zindagi will offer a myriad mix of shows, ranging from family dramas to romance including Shehr-E-Zaat, Aunn Zara and Badi Aapa.

StarzPlay partners with Omantel

StarzPlay is now available on Omantel’s internet plan, effective July 15. Omantel subscribers with an average monthly subscription of more than $67 will get free access to StarzPlay for six months, while those subscribed to lower packages will receive a 50% discount on StarzPlay.

Egyptian actor Asser Yassin to star in Arabic version of Suits

Asser Yassin has been signed on to play the role of ‘Harvey Specter’ in the Arabic version of TV series Suits. The series will be written by Mohamed Amien Rady and directed by Khaled Marie. There will be 44 episodes with one episode aired every week on Egyptian TV channels.

WWE names Bandar Al Mashhadi as VP and GM for MENA

WWE has appointed Bandar Al Mashhadi as VP and GM for the MENA region. Al Mashhadi takes over from Carlo Nitrini, who served for more than six years. Al Mashhadi, who previously worked with OSN, will lead WWE’s strategic business initiatives and operations in the MENA region and work with partners across all of WWE’s lines of business, including TV, live events, marketing, sponsorship, advanced media, licensing and merchandising.

Media Online GmbH now trades as Broadcast Solutions

Frankfurt-based Media Online GmbH is now trading as Broadcast Solutions Produkte und Service GmbH. Following the takeover of Media Online GmbH by Broadcast Solutions GmbH in 2017, the name change is the next step to expanding the company’s competencies. Broadcast Solutions Produkte und Service GmbH will continue to support customers in the DACH sector from its offices in Frankfurt (Main) and Stuttgart. Stefan Broeder, CEO of the Broadcast Solutions Group said: “The goal of Broadcast Solutions Produkte und Service GmbH is to focus on product sales, including a system approach and providing a strong service for our customers, from live-production to post-production.”

Al Arabiya manages online video workflows with Mimir

Al Arabiya has chosen Mimir from Medjool, a software solutions provider associated with Norwegian company, Fonn Group. Al Arabiya wanted to move its online published video to the cloud to improve logging and reuse its video content for multiple platforms. Mimir allows Al Arabiya to automate its speech-to-text transcriptions and translations. Mimir enables the introduction of AI into Al Arabiya’s editorial workflow, to extract metadata from media assets. Logging is automated and enables editors to retrieve the video material they need with a metadata-based search system. They can then repurpose this for multiple platforms.

“To adopt such an amazing service on a wide scale, with our content, is a big challenge,” said Perd Raddi, Director of Creative at Al Arabiya Group. “After testing of competitive solutions, we found that Mimir gave the best results for media management, search, and for our speech-to-text analysis and translations, especially for the Arabic language,” he added.
HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai launched an academy for new media last month. Through digital masterclasses, the academy will provide a broad range of career-oriented educational programmes to nurture social media content creators for digital marketing and social media.

Last month, the academy also announced the Youth YouTube Program in partnership with Nas Academy, part of the Nas Daily Group. The summer programme aims to provide students with a better understanding of content creation, from filming and editing videos, to distributing them across social networks.

The two-week programme features five identical cohorts (two in Arabic and three in English) and is open to youth. Each cohort will feature 20 students only so that each student receives enough personal attention from instructors. All cohorts will be virtual, and the first cohort already started on July 26.

The programme covers topics including learning, scripting, storytelling and basic shots, mastering on-camera presence and advanced scriptwriting as well as beating the “Algorithm” and reaching the core audience. The academy is an Emirati initiative focussed on the shaping Arab youth in the region and training them on the latest digital media trends.

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7 Production to roll out 4K OB truck with Grass Valley solutions

UAE-based 7 Production has chosen an end-to-end Grass Valley workflow for its 4K UHD outside broadcast (OB) truck. The sale was managed in conjunction with Grass Valley’s regional channel partner BSS.

7 Production’s 120 4K UHD OB unit will be packed with Grass Valley’s 4K UHD workflow elements – including cameras, production switcher, routing and monitoring – allowing production teams to acquire and process quality feeds to the final output.

First Egyptian film trailer released since lockdown

New Century, Misr International Films and Synergy Films have released the trailer for El Ghassala (Arabic for washing machine), marking the first trailer since the Covid-19 lockdown. The new film is written by Adel Salib and directed by Essam Abdel Hamid.

New Century, Misr International Films and Synergy Films have released the trailer for El Ghassala (Arabic for washing machine), marking the first trailer in Egyptian cinema since the Covid-19 lockdown. The new film is written by Adel Salib and directed by Essam Abdel Hamid.

Bollywood producer flies in 140 crew to shoot two web series in the UAE

Bollywood producer Gaurang Doshi, who rose to fame with Aankhen and Deewaar, is bringing in around 140 crew members on chartered flights from India to the UAE to film two Hindi-language web-series 7th Sense and Line of Fire. Shooting is scheduled to take place in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The series are being produced under the patronage of Emirati businessman Suhail Mohd Al Zarooni. The Dubai Film and TV Commission, which began issuing permits again this month, will help facilitate the shoot. Both web series are scheduled for completion in February 2021 and will be released on an OTT platform.
With more than 2bn downloads and a growing user base, Tiktok is rapidly elbowing competition out of the way to become a global superpower in the world of online entertainment. In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, TikTok’s Head of Video and Creative Rami Zeidan discusses how the app is attracting content creators, audiences and businesses to its platform.

The last quarter has seen an unprecedented surge in the popularity of online entertainment platforms, and the fastest growing of these worldwide appears to be TikTok, which is now available in over 150 countries. With an estimated 800m users, according to Datareportal’s recent study – although this may have dipped significantly with the app’s ban in India – 2020 appears to be TikTok’s year to shine.

TikTok set up its Middle East base in Dubai around 18 months ago, but the app has already attracted a large audience, owing to its special affinity with a younger demographic. In Q1 of 2020, TikTok is said to have had 315m downloads worldwide with users spending an average of 52 minutes per day on the platform and opening the app at least eight times a day. Today, media houses and brands are promoting their content on the app while TikTok itself is focussed on growing its regional user base.

“TikTok has evolved tremendously in the last 18 months, specifically here in the MENA market, which has embraced the platform and the content,” says Rami Zeidan, Head of Video & Creative, TikTok MENA. Zeidan, who joined TikTok in November 2019, was previously Vice President, Partnerships & Special Projects at Anghami, a popular regional music streaming service.

Zeidan attributes the success of TikTok to the evolution of its content ecosystem, which has progressed significantly since its initial mandate of creative expressions over music. Since then, different genres have been introduced within the app from food, fashion, music, sports and learning.

“Initially, people danced to songs they loved but as we gradually started introducing new categories, we saw people accepting that and it encouraged us to add more elements,” he explains.

“In October last year, we started FoodTok, where chefs and food lovers came to the platform to showcase their recipes or reviews of food and that has diversified further into other

Rami Zeidan, Head of Video and Creative at TikTok MENA, attributes the success of the app to its evolving content strategy.
“With our Creators’ Academy, where we have mentored over 600 students, we are pushing the bar and activating the community, and helping our creators lift their narratives.”

Rami Zeidan, Head of Video & Creative, TikTok MENA

language or motivational speakers giving advice, or traditional fitness and life hacks,” Zeidan elaborates. Likewise, the company has also seen a big adoption in music, claims Zeidan, adding that celebrities like Yara Seif Nahil, Bahjews and Ahmed Helmy “have come to this platform to blend in with what the TikTokers are doing.” Although he declined to divulge any numbers for the Middle East, Zeidan claims that “the growth plan of TikTok is quite balanced and spread across the region.” “We see very high penetrations whether it is in the GCC, Lebanon, Morocco or Egypt, and this is a reflection of the growing internet penetrations, the high mobile phone usage and the increasing availability of good broadband in these areas, and that is evident not just in the number of users but the repeated time spent on the app. There is an ongoing consumption at different times of the day and that is exciting.” For TikTok, the consumer community has always been hugely important, and it has succeeded so far in engaging storytellers within this sector. Anyone with a story has the opportunity to join the platform with their video.

“We are not a social media platform. TikTok is a short-form video platform, which means people come here for creative expression,” clarifies Zeidan.

And where consumers are, businesses follow. As a result, the app has also attracted a lot of brands, who want to talk to its user base.

“Today, TikTok is set up for the full marketing funnel of an organisation from building awareness to tactical promotions and performance campaigns to driving conversions. Clients can create their own campaigns or they can reach out to our team, who can help them design campaigns and give them solutions on how to engage with creators and create campaigns that are amplified for reach and advanced targeting. One amazing campaign we did was with KitKat. A creator from our music community created a song for them. Around 25 people came on board to create stories for them on that music and the challenge brought in around 1m views from the region,” explains Zeidan.

With many consumers on board, media houses have also started to see the value of TikTok as a platform that allows them to reach new audiences. In fact, Ramadan provided the greatest opportunity for media houses to promote their programmes through TikTok, says Zeidan. MBC Group perhaps has had the biggest traction on the app with around 5m followers between its various channels: MBC, MBC Egypt and MBC Iraq. Other media houses like Synergy have had success with 1.2m followers, while the ORS and Rotana accounts have a much smaller number of followers.

“Ramadan is like the Super Bowl of media in this region. So we received a lot of feedback from our partners during this time,” MBC and every single station that presented a Ramadan series was flooding their pages with TikTok-type snippets of the series they were doing. “We have had a challenge on TikTok with 100s of video views for instance.”

In fact, TikTok has also become a platform for broadcasters to discover new talent, explains Zeidan. For instance, Rotana picked a Saudi national Mohammed Ahmed Abbas, a creator from TikTok to become the face of its Fawazeer Ramadan programme, an age-old tradition during the Holy Month of translating riddles.

“Abbas has been on the platform for more than a year and started off as a lip-syncer with more than 1.5m followers at the time of going to press. His dream was to become an actor. This was his biggest break to date, where he was to create 30 episodes of the programme for Rotana. He became the face of Fawazeer Ramadan on TikTok.” Another creator, who does a lot of voice overs, was cast in a web series.

“We are hoping that in the building of this ecosystem, we start working more closely with the broadcasters to really empower them while also taking the creators’ ambitions and passions to a different level”

Rami Zeidan, Head of Video & Creative, TikTok MENA

FoodTok, which was launched last year and has a big fan following, enables chefs and food lovers to showcase their recipes and reviews.
of this ecosystem, we start working more closely with the broadcasters to really empower them while also taking the creators’ ambitions and passions to a different level. A lot of people who are on social media are creating videos out of passion,” explains Zeidan.

This spurred the launch of the TikTok Creators’ Academy, where the platform gets in touch with some of its most active creators to help them produce content that goes beyond just posting on the platform and helps amplify their creativity. “When we are working with creators, we are set up and structured to work with the top-tier people, who are creating a specific type of content. Top-tier creators typically have a dedicated comedy account, or a dedicated sports account and they have performance metrics. When we monitor that and see that some of them are exceptional, we ask them if they want to be part of the creators’ programme. This is presently by invitation only and not open to the public and so far, we have worked with around 600 creators. We help them enhance their content, run workshops for them and when we see shining stars, we develop projects with partners and them. Abbas is the most recent example of that with Rotana,” explains Zeidan.

TikTok’s short-form videos are presently capped at 60 seconds and Zeidan says this time frame enables partners to chop their videos and post more often on the app, encouraging audiences to return regularly to the platform for more stories. “What we tell our partners is that they live in a sphere where there is more content than time. People are always tempted to go beyond that to tell a full story. But when someone goes on and on, the audience will move on. So, short videos are better. You can always chop your story into highlight messages. That allows you to post twice or thrice a day and be more active and constantly remind the audience of your presence.”

But the platform has explored longer duration videos as part of TikTok Live in partnership with some of its clients. “With TikTok Live, we encourage creators to go live for an hour at least and stay online for up to three

“We are not a social media platform. TikTok is a short-form video platform, which means people come here for creative expression”

Rami Zeidan, Head of Video & Creative, TikTok MENA

The Makeup Trends section has seen influencers begin their session sans makeup and transform themselves using the app’s tools.

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hours if they can. We are working with publishers and top creators to develop programmes that allow them to create one-hour sessions as part of a structured format. Live is our long form format but published video is 60 seconds. This has also seen a lot of success so far,” claims Zeidan.

In the meantime, with no monetisation model in place for the region at present, TikTok is encouraging everyone to come on board with the aim of first increasing its user base.

“At this stage, for the content partners, creators, broadcasters, and business partners, no official monetisation model has been rolled out in this market,” confirms Zeidan. “Our current aim is to focus on user growth numbers, build the platform and create the right ecosystem to talk business.”

“Globally, we have several different monetisation models, but we are fairly new in this market and are still growing the team and setting up the infrastructure. We are a two-year-old company in a 10-year-old industry, and we are pacing very fast in terms of users. That is an opportunity for everyone to come and grow their content and build their account. We are working on a roadmap to build monetisation in, but that’s somewhere in the future.”

In the meantime, TikTok continues to grow its Middle East team. Although Zeidan declined to comment on how many members the team had in Dubai, he said the company “is committed to bringing as much headcount and talent as is necessary for us to keep pace in serving the market”.

Zeidan also clarifies that although the app is owned by Chinese technology company, ByteDance, the platform’s core teams are based only in LA, London and Dubai, and they are responsible for the technologies that drive the platform.

“For instance, TikTok already employs AI and other newer technologies to enhance its capabilities and drive more users to the platform. The TikTok global team is spearheading innovation and content recommendations,” says Zeidan.

“TikTok popular is the simplification of content creation and the simplification of discovery. If you look at the two elements of how a user can discover creative content that they love in an easy way, which is via a recommendation engine, and how they can create content easily with the app, this together delivers the TikTok experience,” explains Zeidan.

TikTok has several features that make it instantly attractive to a new generation of cord cutters.

Zeidan elaborates: “This includes editing tools, a speed teacher that allows the user to slow down the audio that they are recording over to do a fast time-lapse or speed up the audio to create a slow-mo effect or a timer that prompts TikTok on when to start recording and when to stop. This is particularly useful to ensure that a person can keep their phone on a tripod and do transitions or employ other features without support from another person. A voice-over feature gives users the flexibility to record a video and add a voice over, and then play around with the audio volume. A user has the option to tinker with multiple volumes and audio sources, be they the video, the song or the voice over.”

He adds that TikTok has a large music library that is licensed with key partners, allowing users to take songs freely for their creative expressions.

“There are a lot of effects on TikTok driven by gesture recognition. Some AR projects have also been done and we have also explored projects with green screen technology.”

In short, TikTok creators have a raft of tools at their disposal to create video shows and, edit them and sync them with music, voice over and the like. This has helped bring in the numbers that the platform is aiming to grow at the moment.

“As TikTok, our current focus is to continue our journey through the diversification of content. To that effect, we recently launched gaming and LearnTok and we see more people more attracted to the new format. With our Creators’ Academy, where we have mentored over 600 students, we are pushing the bar and activating the community, and helping our creators lift their narratives. And more importantly, we have been careful to maintain and nurture a safe environment for our users,” explains Zeidan.

Even as we go to press, TikTok has had some significant challenges with the recent ban in India and other countries threatening to take the same route. However, the platform continues to generate interest in a younger audience that has found a creative outlet to tell their stories easily and cost effectively.

“We realised that when you have a high affinity to a young audience, we have the responsibility to start balancing between value and play, and this is where teaching became important,” says Zeidan.
Gordon Brooks  
Executive Chairman  
and CEO, Zixi

Over the past few years, we’ve seen the broadcast industry shift from expensive, inflexible hardware-defined contribution and distribution solutions to more flexible and dynamic software-defined solutions that rely on IP distribution for live and live linear video. This migration towards IP and specifically hybrid IP networks is due to a number of factors: the rise of consumer cord cutting, affecting how and when content is consumed, the need to provide a faster time to market, the shift towards cloud virtualisation, the increased desire to move from a CapEx to OpEx business model, relentless pressure to cut costs, and the impending localisation of 5G and its impact on how much C-band will be available for broadcast in the future. Covid-19 has been a catalyst for even more change to build out remote capabilities.

As the industry shifts towards transport over IP, we have witnessed the need for a software-defined video platform to provide a comprehensive range of interoperable solutions needed to manage and enable distribution of broadcast-quality content at scale. Despite the prevalence of this “IP adoption” trend, we still see an opportunity to convince some industry hold outs that unmanaged IP networks can be as, or even more reliable than satellite and fibre when architected correctly, and that a software-defined video platform provides the essential tools needed to future proof their virtualisation strategies. The current climate has spurred a movement towards virtualisation and remote monitoring and operations. Zixi’s software-defined video platform can help media companies navigate that transition expertly without sacrificing continuity of broadcast operations.

Our customers in the Middle East include leading broadcasters, content owners and service providers who use Zixi for contribution, monitoring and distribution of live linear video to studios, satellites, OTT platforms and more. I made a trip to Turkey in early March this year to visit our customers and was delighted to see...
that the major broadcasters, TV stations, OTT providers and satellite companies are customers of Zixi.

Phillip Myers
CTO and Chair of the Advisory Board, Lawo

At Lawo, we have taken the view that the industry adoption and transition of IP-based technologies into the live production segment of the broadcast ecosystem should be seen as a product in itself. Lessons learned have shown us that a boxed product approach and not a solution-based approach to delivering multi-vendor, interoperable IP systems at scale provides unnecessary complications and delays for customers within their time critical projects.

In recognition of this market shift, we recently restructured our product portfolio within a new business unit known as Media Infrastructure, as we felt that the definition of “broadcast” is clearly becoming a restrictive term, especially as we see an increased convergence of both real time, non-real time essence and control data on what we call intelligent infrastructure.

In addition, over the last 18 months, we’ve seen that there’s a clear need to converge both real time, non-real time essence and control data on what we call intelligent infrastructure. The IP migration gives us the opportunity to “refresh” our customers’ workflows by merging two worlds: audiovisual/media and IT. While this convergence offers endless opportunity to create new workflows and provide better audience experiences, it also introduces complexities across the media workflow. The main challenge for us and other solution providers is to increase support and services while supplying tools that simplify operations.

“The world’s first transferable LED engine

The IABM estimates that 30% of companies have migrated less than 40% of their technology infrastructure to IP, so vendors still have plenty of opportunity in this space. The industry is north of $50bn a year with single-digit growth numbers, and we’ll see a modest increase as novel content (e.g., gaming, second-tier markets, customised viewing, betting with

Rafael Fonseca
VP Product Management, Artel Video Systems

Broadcasters are adopting IP to take advantage of four key benefits, namely, cost-effective scaling in terms of space, power, cooling, and equipment; flexibility in managing all media flows; the potential for creating new and improved live broadcasting; and the ability to use one network for all media flows.

Controllable software-centric solutions will be at the forefront of the IP transformation. Our mantra is “deploy one and change functions as needed,” and the software-defined Artel SMART Media Delivery Platform allows broadcasters and service providers to do just that.

“We believe demand will only further accelerate over the next 12–18 months as we see major live sporting events and new studio facilities continue to be hosted and built in the region.”

THE WORLD’S FIRST TRANSFERABLE LED ENGINE

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real-time content viewing) continues to become mainstream. New entrants will create their own niches and markets, but eventually become elements of a consolidated market.

We've had success in the Middle East market with our FiberLink product line and expect to see increased interest in our Quarra and DigiLink/InfinityLink product lines by service providers that support broadcast applications. IP use cases for the region include remote production applications, media flow consolidation via IP for all cases and audio-over-IP transformations of studios, TV and radio stations, and performing arts theatres.

Chuck Meyer
CTO, Grass Valley

IP technology is being adopted as a mainstream replacement for traditional SDI in an effort towards developing more flexible, formal-agnostic facilities. IP helps broadcasters build a facility that can easily accommodate new, rapidly evolving software tools and applications. It enables access to a wide range of delivery platforms – from online to social media – and easily combines with user interface products, such as cameras and switcher control surfaces. In a different aspect, customers are seriously planning their cloud futures. The goal of these designs tends to be cost optimisation, globally distributed systems and scalability without compromising resilience or security.

IP in the building is presently most in demand – it gives customers the future-ready capability and agility they need to be successful in a dynamic market. We are also seeing a rising demand for cloud-based solutions that allow broadcasters and content producers to leverage public cloud, private, on-premises data centers or hybrid environments, initially enabling master control and remote production applications.

The Middle East is a very dynamic and diverse market. IDATE predicts that the region’s TV sector will see a growth of 30% between 2016 and 2021. We see tremendous opportunity for growth as the industry embarks on the next phase of technology transitions – whether migrating to new formats, adopting agile, future-proof infrastructures, or embracing remote/distributed production.

More specifically, Middle East broadcasters and service providers are faced with the challenge of meeting the demand for more multi-format production (4K / UHD / HDR) and multi-platform delivery and having to produce content more efficiently. They need to leverage flexible, scalable and agile infrastructures that can support higher resolutions and unlock new business opportunities. IP answers these challenges.

Last year, we secured a project with ATV in Turkey, incorporating both IP routing and 12G SDI infrastructure and we are currently engaged in several IP-related initiatives and proof-of-concepts (POCs) across the region.

“IP in the building is presently most in demand – it gives customers the future-ready capability and agility they need to be successful in a dynamic market.”

Allen Broome
CTO, MediaKind

IP has touched almost every aspect of the creation, processing and delivery of rich media content. IP-based media processing workflows will facilitate enormous transformation for the media industry, particularly in terms of flexibility, agility, compatibility and scalability, as well as enabling production and content delivery providers to reduce time-to-market for highly valuable content and services.

Fully software-defined media workflows within the broadcast world start at the production level from studio cameras, to editing suites and progresses through content processing and distribution.

As consumer demand for live content will increase towards the second half of the year, broadcasters and operators will again be faced with the challenge of growing bandwidth costs and keeping pace with launching a multitude of live services.

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The reasons for migrating to an all-IP future are compelling and have gone beyond applications such as OTT or real-time internet video delivery and are now permeating across use cases at industry start-ups and major international broadcasters. These include enabling remote production workflows and facilitating higher quality content such as 4K UHD and HDR. Through the adoption of IP cloud infrastructure, and standards such as SMPTE ST 2110 throughout the broadcast chain, broadcasters can provide the necessary agility to develop new, faster go-to-market services, while retaining video quality and high levels of availability.

The Middle East is a hugely important segment for growth; the emergence of new OTT and pay-TV providers puts broadcasters under pressure to deliver services across multiple platforms, giving consumers more content on any screen. By 2024, SVOD revenues in the MENA market will reach $2.13bn, according to forecasts from ResearchAndMarkets, with SVOD subscriptions rising to 526.5m.

Beach Systems

In our experience, the single largest driver in the big IP projects we have seen to date is the move to new premises. These customers have MENU region. Major Middle East broadcasters and operators are diversifying their offerings to cater for a wider audience of audiences on multi-platforms, such as OTT, on-demand and live streaming options.

Samir Isbaiz
VP-Sales, Middle East and APAC, Pebble

Beach Systems

In our experience, the single largest driver in the big IP projects we have seen to date is the move to new premises. These customers have...
The Middle East is a key market for us and has been for many years. With a large installed user base, our solutions control more than 400 channels across 17 countries at around 79 sites in the region. A recent example is with Jordan Media City, which upgraded their entire portfolio of 18 channels to our Marina control automation tool. We also supplied Intigral with our Marina control automation entire portfolio of 18 channels to Media City, which upgraded their

A recent example is with Jordan at around 70 sites in the region. 400 channels across 17 countries for us and has been for many years. Andy Warman of Harmonic. The Middle East is a key market improvements and therefore rack limited cable lengths of 12G, density improvements and therefore rack density, HVAC and other savings for the networking core, SMPTE ST 2022-7 redundancy and the convenience of independent video, audio and data flows that can be managed by each receiver for processing. Many of the implementations we have done are with greenfield sites and complete replacement systems. Our customers are replacing entire SDI-based systems and going all IP. We are also seeing a great deal of future protection taking place, where our customers do not need SMPTE ST 2110 now, but expect to need it in the future. Just like the SD to HD migration, they want to buy equipment that is future proof so they can make a transition when they are ready without reinvesting.

The rate of change in performance of SDI is far slower than with IP. IP not only offers us huge improvements in bandwidth capacity from a smaller footprint than SDI, but it also enables more COTS-based compute and storage to be used. An added benefit is that it fits within corporate IT policies and budgeting. The growth in popularity of the cloud — whether on-premises datacenters or in the public cloud — implies you have an IP solution. This is a key catalyst that will drive the adoption of IP.

The main challenge is the learning curve involved with implementing and maintaining network-based systems for real-time videos. Along with the training aspects, the approach to monitoring and maintenance is very different compared with SDI. IP technology has become a key requirement in any new (greenfield) or refresh project in the Middle East, and we are noticing an uptake in traction for IP technology to be implemented.

**“There has been a 500% increase in the use of remote workflows since the beginning of the global coronavirus pandemic”**

**Andy Warman**
Director of Playout Solutions, Harmonic

**IP gives you greater freedom in several ways that are meaningful for live IP workflows. These include greatly reduced cabling, particularly within a facility or for OB applications, easy support for UHD HDR without needing 4x3G SDI or limited cable lengths of 12G, density improvements and therefore rack density, HVAC and other savings for the networking core, SMPTE ST 2022-7 redundancy and the convenience of independent video, audio and data flows that can be managed by each receiver for processing.**

**Michael Lätzsch**
Broadcast & Professional Video Division Manager, Ikegami Electronics (Europe) GmbH

The key driver throughout the broadcast market is the need for greater production efficiency. IP technology delivers in that respect by increasing the range of choices available in the way live content can be televised from a traditional studio environment or from an off-site location. A key opportunity for IP is also in

**“The current challenge is to find standards that the entire broadcast industry can agree on so that TV broadcasters and production companies can have confidence in their future investments”**

**Mario Diaz Becar**
Director of International Sales, Primestream

There are a lot of challenges, as well as benefits, facing broadcasters making the transition to IP. Customers are looking to transition by taking innovative paths and IP-based workflows give them the flexibility they need to face today’s technical challenges and opportunities, such as remote editing. At the same time, IP-based signal ingest and playout can add efficiency layers to an expensive, legacy SDI infrastructure. For example, we find that customers are looking for solutions that allow the broadcaster to ingest any IP stream and output the content via SDI in real-time or play out via the IP NDI protocol or HLS for the live streaming through CDNs. Media companies are dealing with an ever-increasing number of input sources and an ever-increasing number of output channels. This is a huge opportunity to increase revenues, but at the same time, it’s a challenge to manage the flow of media assets and reduce the operational cost.
Video is exploding as a means of communicating with audiences. Whether it’s produced by a news organisation, a corporate or government entity, a broadcaster or a production facility. The challenge is to support the vastly increasing number of codecs being used in the same ecosystem without the need for a third-party transcoder.

Many organisations today are looking to manage media and distribute content to one or multiple destinations for internal purposes or external communication. Nowadays people make smart decisions based on information, research, and the experiences of others. More than any other time in history, your digital footprint needs to be perfectly managed.

Broadcast productions are making use of the increasing internet bandwidth available in the Middle East to deploy IP-based signal capture and playout workflows with fast turnaround. Higher-bandwidth connectivity in remote locations makes it possible to produce fast-turnaround news shows for the first time, and production and connectivity tools on a media asset management layer are being deployed to enable maximum leverage of content.

“Video is exploding as a means of communicating with audiences. The challenge is to support the vastly increasing number of codecs being used in the same ecosystem without the need for a third-party transcoder”

Michael Pfitzner
VP Newsroom Solutions, CGI

IP adoption is primarily driven by changing viewer habits, the demand for more content, and the need to be less reliant on old hardware and tech, and the move to more flexible web-based, remote solutions.

In light of the recent shifts in the industry due to the ongoing health epidemic, continuing to tell the story is key. Solutions that support the remote production and facilitation of the newsroom and assist in remote radio production are vital in enabling journalists to research, structure and plan their deliveries in advance. These platforms will continue to draw on the importance of storytelling, allowing journalists to share topics and contributions across TV, radio and online to achieve a more cohesive end result.

If the recent, rapid changes in broadcast workflows are anything to go by, adoption to the cloud in the coming months and years is inevitable and will surely become the universal norm. Under the circumstances of a global crisis, broadcasters are under immense pressure to deliver efficiently and effectively and must have the ability to work remotely. Broadcasters who hadn’t already instilled some sort of remote capability likely ran into significant challenges and obstacles when lockdown measures went into place, and the adoption of more flexible, remote workflows can future proof and streamline those vital methods of delivery.

The ZEISS Supreme Prime lenses are designed for cinematic large-format sensor coverage, making them the ideal choice for current and future camera systems. With most lenses at T1.5, the ZEISS Supreme Primes demonstrate their unsurpassed craftsmanship in tricky low-light environments.
Acting in the line of duty as a chief in the Caribbean, Depp's character, Jack Sparrow, is a beloved rogue who embodies the spirit of adventure and rebellion.

Take 1: Stealing content

There are two main ways for pirates to create their own copies of content from legitimate sources. DMG bypass – Video protected by DMG is encrypted. By compromising or bypassing the DMG system, pirates can distribute content on file sharing sites soon after release. They can distribute exact replicas of original content without their knowledge and sell them either on the dark web and endless trials, or working out the encryption key, a hacker can easily compromise or bypass the DRM system, pirates can access content directly from the CDN. They can distribute content on file sharing sites soon after release. They can distribute exact replicas of original content either for free or for a small fee. The pirate service costs as little as $2.50.

Take 2: Stealing the service

But many pirates have their sights set on much bigger treasure than individual pieces of content – they want to gain access to a streaming providers’ full service. By impersonating a legitimate user or device, or using fake apps that mimic the real app but cleverly circumvent the authentication and authorisation mechanisms, OTT pirates can trick the DRM system into decrypting and displaying content. The threats include credentials’ abuse, which takes several forms. For instance, casual account sharings, where passwords are shared between friends or family members, swapping or pooling, where users with different service subscriptions swap their credentials so they each have access to the other services while only paying for one; phishing and credential stuffing, where pirates obtain the credentials of legitimate users without their knowledge and sell them either on the dark web and endless trials, or working out the encryption key, a hacker can easily compromise or bypass the DRM system, pirates can access content directly from the CDN. They can distribute content on file sharing sites soon after release. They can distribute exact replicas of original content either for free or for a small fee. The pirate service costs as little as $2.50.

Take 3: Hosting a rival service

Pirates make their service attractive to users by creating copycat services, complete with smooth user interfaces, apps, STBs, and even customer service departments to aggregate all the content they have stolen. Sometimes, the experience is so good that consumers don’t even know it’s illegal; in other cases, consumers choose the pirate service because they have access to a wide range of content in a single place. This is particularly true for live sports, with millions of people using competing pirate services to access live streaming services.

And action: Outwitting the pirates

Piracy requires a multi-layered approach to security and solutions that go beyond content protection to demotivate pirates at every point along the video supply chain and orchestrate anti-piracy activities and legal and technical take-downs, and lastly, working together to fight back. Everyone, including CDN and cloud service providers, ISPs, payment providers, chip manufacturers, anti-piracy tool vendors, integrators, rights owners, streaming providers and legislators must cooperate to combat and rout out pirate plunders.

As a last resort, pirates attract hordes of fans, content is much too valuable booty for pirates to ignore, and they will not give up without a fight. But by keeping a close watch on the techniques of established pirate players and building insurance and new counter piracy strategies and methods emerging in the video landscape, we can keep the OTT ship sailing in trouble-free waters.
Yassmina Karajah is an up-and-coming Jordanian filmmaker who has made her mark in regional cinema with films that often challenge traditional social narratives. In a chat with Shifa Naseer, Karajah discusses her passion for filmmaking, as well as the stories and people that inspire her to make films.

Earlier this year, the third edition of the Tales of the Silk Road took place in London where filmmaker Yassmina Karajah’s short film Rupture was screened. Presented by the Bagri Foundation and Shorts on Tap since 2019, Tales of the Silk Road presents a programme of short films and documentaries exploring and depicting Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

This road led us to Yassmina Karajah. Born and raised in Amman to a Palestinian-Jordanian family, Karajah has had a close connection with both countries. Although armed with a degree in law from the University of Bristol, UK, she moved to Canada in 2012 to study film with the intention of pursuing a career in filmmaking. “I decided to go into filmmaking after realizing that I was interested in the stories behind the law and not necessarily in applying it. I’d write short stories inspired by the cases I read in criminal law, or situations I became aware of when it comes to children or human rights’ laws,” she says.

To that end, Karajah has been inspired to create character-driven films that challenge dominant social narratives by exploring intimate stories. Karajah’s short film Rupture (2017) is a case in point, where she chose to depict the process of determining one’s identity in the midst of social and political displacement. The 18-minute short film follows the journey of four Arab teens whose trauma resurfaces while on a quest to find a local public pool in their new Canadian city.

Explaining her motive to make such a film, Karajah says: “I initially wanted to create a film about accent reduction training, which is a form of training newcomers to countries may go through to get rid of their accents and speak more ‘passable English’. While doing my research, I met Aasad Al Arid (one of the actors in Rupture) at a settlement agency in Vancouver. Aasad is from Syria. He told me he wanted to be an actor and shared with me a story about how, on his first day in Vancouver, he roamed around downtown looking for a public pool with his brother. I loved that. It was inspiring. After that, I started working on the script in collaboration with the cast.”

Rupture, premiered at Toronto International Film Festival, was part of Montreal New Directors/ New Films and won the Grand Jury prize at Slamdance, where Karajah was the first recipient of the Russo Brothers’ Fellowship Award in 2018. As a result, she’s developing her first feature film, which is set in Jordan. “Rupture screened at multiple festivals, and I got to travel with the film for a while. I’m grateful to be able to experience that with a short

“I felt like there were so many films about refugees and speaking on their behalf, I wanted to create a space for them to offer a story that didn’t sensationalise their traumas”

Yassmina Karajah, filmmaker

film. MAD Solutions was in charge of marketing the film when Rupture was taken to the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) in 2017,” says Karajah.

For her films, Karajah works through a process of co-authorship, inspired by Brazilian director Augusto Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’. She invites actors to channel their personal experiences into fictional narratives in their search for emotional truths. “I wanted to create a space for them to do that for themselves, to offer a story that didn’t sensationalise their traumas,” she says.

With an aim to give the story agency and normalcy, Karajah worked with co-producer and casting agency and normalcy, Karajah worked with co-producer and casting...
director Leen Issa to establish trust with the actors and their families. “We spent so much time in Surrey BC meeting people and talking to them about their new reality. Leen, a Syrian-Palestinian director and writer herself, helped in reaching out to people and was there for all the acting workshops and pre-production. Blake Davey, the director of photography, would also join us with his camera and film the workshops as a way to make the actors comfortable with the camera and with him, as he was going to be at close proximity with them on set. The film was also produced by David Findlay and co-produced by Virginie Nolin. Colour correction for the film was done at Technicolor in Vancouver by colourist Sam Gilling.

“Another challenge was balancing fiction with reality. As Edward Said wrote in *Invention, Memory, and Place*, *Critical Inquiry* 26: ‘Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality.’ There is a need for survival and a fundamental part of the demand to be recognised, both individually and collectively. ‘As the film is based on the actors’ real-life experiences, it visits some traumatic emotions regarding their past. It was important for me to be sensitive to that, and to make sure we held a space to be able to infuse some emotional experiences into this fictional narrative that we created together. When working with first-time actors, it’s really important to be able to discuss that with them early on and build a shared vision about why we’re making this film. They each had their reasons and when things got tough on set or when we were faced with an emotional scene, we would circle back and discuss our vision again. This happened multiple times on set.’ Coordinating such scenes was a task, remarks Karajah. It took the team three months to finalise *Rupture* in post-production. It is all about making a connection: “I create films to connect and to create a space for collective shared experiences. Social messages are born out of specific personal situations for me, and not the other way around.”

Yassmina Karajah, filmmaker

Karajah has been inspired to create character-driven films that challenge dominant social narratives.

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Yassmina Karajah has often explored socially relevant topics but says she is not hesitant to expand that horizon in future projects. “It was done with a lot of passion, and trial and error, but there’s something charming about how first films are made. You don’t really have any experience to fall back on. Still, there’s something alluring about that novelty.”

The filmmaker prefers social realism but is not hesitant to expand that horizon in her upcoming projects. Karajah is known for making films with plots that depict how people develop coping mechanisms in difficult situations. A proof-of-concept piece developed at the Canadian Film Centre, Pittsburgh (2017), is an example. The film is about wanting to explore the anticipation of grief. “When we are around someone we know is dying, there is a grey area of not fully letting go and not fully holding on to the person because we ultimately know they are leaving. I wanted to explore the last night between a father and daughter before he passes away and attempt to capture what that feels like,” she says.

Karajah is now working on a feature film. “For a while, I was travelling between Toronto and Amman. We shot Rupture by this place. I’ve been working on developing my feature film, which is set in Jordan, while also prepping for another short film.”

The filmmaker arranges equipment for her films from local production companies. “In Jordan, we rent the equipment from the production houses and do the same in case we are filming in Canada.” All her projects were shot on the ARRI Alexa.

Karajah relies on film grants to fund her projects. Rupture received a grant from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), a grant from Breakthroughs Film Festival as well as the Red Square motion post production grant.

But Karajah has also faced a lot of challenges as a female filmmaker. She says she feels stifled if her work is constantly being evaluated through this restrictive lens.

“Rather than imposing categories, we’ll celebrate being female filmmakers with varied experiences...” Karajah references director Andrea Arnold, Agnes Varda, and Claire Denis as a few of the female filmmakers who inspire her.

Speaking about her role models, Karajah says she has been inspired by people who collaborated with her on her films. “Usually, these are individuals that I’ve met and who have shared their most intimate stories with me. I admire them—their ability to open up, to share how they endure and how they celebrate.”

Karajah aims to make films for both regional and global audiences, the influence of which is reflected in her work. “I remember watching Egyptian films and Syrian TV shows as a child. I was also inspired by the writing of Amal Madouf and Hanna Musa. A Jordanian artist who has inspired me tremendously is Ali Jabri, his work, his life and his legacy. Watching Persona by Bergman was a truly life-changing experience. I was also obsessed with Iranian cinema for a good while and Wong Kar Wai’s films are some of my favourites.”

All of this is to say, foreign films are the reason I wanted to become a filmmaker, to bring stories from the Middle East to centre stage.”
“While everyone gets into firefighting mode when problems arise, as a regional industry, we have collectively failed to learn any lessons from past instances”

Failing to prepare: Preparing to fail. Again?

Nine years ago, I wrote an article in BroadcastPro ME on “Failing to Prepare: Preparing to Fail”, where I expressed alarm at the lack of Disaster Recovery (DR) and Business Continuity (BC) measures at regional broadcast facilities should a crisis hit. Nine year later, tragically, many regional broadcasters are still struggling with pretty much the same issues and the truth is they could have been better prepared this time.

No more than a handful of broadcasters in the whole MENA region had any BC plans in place for a time such as this and even in those cases, they were limited to certain aspects of their operations. They are typically for backup channels playout, keeping some evergreen material running off a remote server with a basic logo bug until they figure out a solution to their problem. While some risk scenarios can easily be anticipated, choices were made not to address them. There will be technical failures of broadcast equipment and power supplies, cyber or physical attacks on broadcasting facilities, telecom and satellite network outages, or natural disasters such as floods or lightning. We have been recently involved in a number broadcast projects where we discovered that even when the implemented facilities’ designs had sufficient resilience, redundancy, and backup features, no documented procedures were available for operations and engineers to activate backup and DR scenarios. Although such documentation and procedures were well developed at the time new systems were prepared and installed, they are never reviewed, updated, refreshed, or rehearsed. In some cases, we discovered that new staff did not even know that such documents and procedures existed.

One could argue that current disruptions and challenges could never have been anticipated, but this is not true. If a broadcaster had BC plans to mitigate risks caused by not being able to access their facilities because of a natural disaster or a strike, then such plans could be activated and adapted to operate within the restrictions caused by the pandemic to comply with authorities’ or self-imposed requirements of reduced on-premises staff. Today’s challenge offers yet another opportunity for broadcasters to prepare themselves for multiple scenarios. They should look at best practices within DR and BC and see how they can be potentially adapted to different situations. DR and BC plans should be on our top priorities’ list, and we should vociferously advocate with the decision makers to ensure that this is part of the 2021 budget. Otherwise we are preparing to fail yet again. 

Hasan R. Sayed Hasan is Managing Director of Master Media, and Chairman of the Arab HDTV and Beyond Group.
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  We are one of the Middle East & North Africa’s largest distributor of Professional Photo & Video equipments.

- **AWARDS**
  
  Advanced Media won 5 times winner of “Distributor of the Year” and few other recognitions

- **ABOUT 200 BRANDS**
  
  Advanced Media has around 200 well-known brands in professional video, photo & broadcast

- **3 SHOWROOM LOCATIONS**
  
  Advanced Media - Bur Dubai, UAE
  
  Advanced Media - Al Quoz, UAE
  
  Advanced Media - Riyadh, KSA

- **SERVICE CENTER**
  
  We have 2 Service Centers located at Service Center - Al Khaleej, Bur Dubai
  
  Service Center - Riyadh, KSA

- **AL QUOZ SHOWROOM**
  
  8th Street, Al Quoz Industrial 1
  
  Al Quoz Dubai, UAE

- **AUG 2020**

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