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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 transmission mode and proprietary audio codec. Digital 6000 utilizes groundbreaking technology from our flagship Digital 9000. Dependability is guaranteed by our renowned Long Range strategy and business acumen. There are some other exciting content deals in the market, but I have been sworn to secrecy for now. The mantra for success is primarily good content – but what can really motivate that whole value chain is secrecy for now. The mantra for success is primarily good content – but what can really motivate that whole value chain is

Digital 6000 utilizes groundbreaking technology from our flagship Digital 9000. Dependability is guaranteed by our renowned Long Range transmission mode and proprietary audio codec. Digital integration is seamless with AES3 and optional Dante output. Monitoring and control of the two-channel receiver is at your fingertips, with an elegant, intuitive user interface.

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March 2020

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Abu Dhabi production house opts for GB Labs’ FastNAS intelligent storage

Abu Dhabi media production house M for Media has chosen GB Labs’ FastNAS shared storage system to manage its media assets. GB Labs’ FastNAS F-16 Nitro system, installed by local distributor MediaCast, can be accessed by up to 10 users of Avid Media Composer, simultaneously if required. GB Labs recently introduced even more acceleration for FastNAS storage systems with new 25GbE connectivity.

Post Production IT Manager at M for Media, Andre Aouad, said he first heard about GB Labs from the creator of MIMIQ for Avid systems. “He forwarded some information that he thought would interest me. It did, particularly because at the time we had no existing storage and it was rapidly becoming a problem because of the volume of work we were taking in. You can’t keep running back and forth with arms full of hard disks. It’s unproductive, and it was beginning to show. However, GB Labs soon came up with the ideal solution.”

GB Labs CEO-CTO Dominic Harland added: “The engine of the 25GbE-enabled FastNAS is our powerful CORE.4 OS, an ultra-high-performance operating system that serves media files with intelligence layers that deliver high stability and unparalleled quality of service. We are delighted to have been referred to M for Media by acknowledged experts, which is evidence of our growing reputation for excellence.”

Nart Bouran appointed CEO of Abu Dhabi firm

Nart Bouran, known for heading Sky News Arabia in Abu Dhabi before joining MBN in the US, has returned to Abu Dhabi as CEO of International Media Investment (IMI) Holding, a privately-owned investment company. Bouran was the Launch Director of Sky News Arabia in Abu Dhabi and then became CEO and Head of News, where he helped establish the channel as a credible news source. Other roles held by Bouran include Director of Television for Reuters, Director General of the Jordan Radio and TV Corporation, and Director of News Centres for Abu Dhabi TV.

Twitter and SNA tie for live Arabic news show

Sky News Arabia [SNA] and Twitter have joined forces to launch #OnStream, the first-ever live Arabic news show on Twitter. The five-minute weekly show covering general interest news will air via SkyNewsArabia. Produced and directed by SNA and hosted by news anchors Carolina Nassar and Chantal Saliba, the show will feature guest experts and cover trending topics. Relevant tweets will be presented for real-time feedback from viewers who will be invited to join the conversation. Tweet topics will be determined on the day of the shoot as they evolve and will be live streamed and accessible globally to logged-in and logged-out Twitter users.

Abdou Gadallah, Deputy Head of News at SNA said: “#OnStream provides a great opportunity for our viewers to discuss the latest trends from across the globe.”

Kinda Ibrahim, Director of Media Partnerships, Twitter MENA added: “We’re excited to partner with Sky News Arabia around a show that’s built for Twitter in terms of content, format and hosts.”

Batelco partners with Vianeos for OTT

French multi-screen video platform Vianeos partnered with Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco) last month to launch new OTT services. Under the partnership, the new Batelco TV app, UX design and UI – shaped by Vianeos – will be available on ADSP set-top boxes.
GV to have independent booth at NAB following Black Dragon acquisition

Black Dragon Capital, founded by former Avid CEO Louis Hernandez, Jr, has completed an agreement with Belden Inc to acquire Grass Valley. The deal, which will be finalised this quarter, will transfer full control of all Grass Valley assets to Black Dragon, which plans to leverage GV’s intellectual property to lead the industry’s migration to a software-based future. There are no immediate changes planned to Grass Valley’s operational management structure, and Tim Shoulders will continue as President. He will see Belden receive $140m up front for the deal, which will be finalised at least half-a-decade and Black Dragon is really focussed on creating value for the business in the long term. Grass Valley has led the market in the transition from SDI to IP and has been diligently proving our project lines to cloud-based and SaaS solutions. Black Dragon brings the expertise and vision that will allow us to accelerate this transition to the benefit of our customers who are looking for more robust and flexible models for content production and delivery. We’re excited to bring our customers along with us on this journey. At NAB, Grass Valley will have an independent booth, where Belden will be allocated space.

Twofour54 appoints Michael Garin CEO

Michael Garin, the former CEO of Image Nation Abu Dhabi, has been appointed CEO of twofour54.

Introducing the World’s Fastest Editor

DaVinci Resolve 16s new cut page and editor keyboard let you work faster than ever!

The new cut page in DaVinci Resolve 16 is the first major innovation in professional video editing in over 20 years! Designed for short quick turn-around projects, the cut page is all about speed. Featuring a streamlined interface with intelligent new “smart” tools, the cut page and DaVinci Resolve Editor Keyboard are designed to save you hours of time on each job.

Work Faster with Dual Timelines

The cut page features dual timelines so you never have to zoom in or out again. The upper timeline shows the entire program while the lower timeline shows the area in which you’re working. With the dual timelines you’ll always know where you are because you always have a zoomed in timeline that’s ideal for trimming and fine tuning your edits using the contextual tools.

Use Source Tape to Quickly Find Shots

Finding the right clip in a bin with hundreds of files is slow. With source tape you no longer have to waste time hunting through bins to find the clip you need. Source tape makes all of the clips in your bin appear in the viewer as a single long “tape.” This makes it easy to scrub through all of your shots, find the parts you want, and quickly edit them to the timeline!

Instantly Edit Between Angles with Sync Bin

The sync bin completely revolutionizes multi-camera editing! It displays all of the shots from different cameras that are in sync with the current shot in the timeline. You’ll see the angles stacked into timeline strips in the bin, along with a multi-view display in the viewer so you can instantly choose a different angle and make perfectly synced cuts away.

DaVinci Resolve Editor Keyboard

The DaVinci Resolve Editor Keyboard lets you edit with both hands, dramatically speeding up your workflow! It’s a professional keyboard with transport controls on the right side and edit functions on the left side. You can use the search dial and source tape buttons with your right hand to locate shots, while simultaneously marking in and out points, performing edits and fine trimming with your left hand.

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae

*$IP excludes duties, shipping and sales tax.
MBC signs deal to build new headquarters in Saudi Arabia

The agreement was signed by Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al Saud, Chairman of Riyadh’s Media City project, and MBC Group Chairman Sheikh Waleed Al-Khateeb. The MoU incorporates all Arabic nationality groups in Q4 2019. The listenership impact on the reach of radio in the UAE is by nationality is by Emiratis, who listen to radio with 99% weekly radio reach.

Syrian Documentary For Sama wins BAFTA

Syrian Documentary For Sama won the Best Documentary award at the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTAs) last month. For Sama is a first-person account of a 26-year-old female Syrian filmmaker, Waad Al-Kateab. Directed by Al-Kateab and Edward Watts, the film documents her life over five years of the uprising in rebel-held Aleppo. It shows Al-Kateab falling in love, getting married to one of the last practicing doctors in the city, giving birth to Sama and saying goodbye to her home, all on camera. The film, which had four nominations at the BAFTAs, was the most nominated documentary in the award’s history.

First original from WATCH IT

OSN launches food channel

OSN Mezze is the network’s first dedicated food channel, launched in celebration of lifestyle channel OSN Living’s second anniversary. The new channel will feature Australian cooking show My Kitchen Rules: Australia, Jamie’s Super Food Family Classics, season ten of Martha Bakes, John and Lisa’s Weekend Kitchen, and Sunday Health Spree, among others.

Emad Morcos, Chief Content Officer at OSN, said: “We are proud to be launching OSN Mezze, it gives us great pleasure to be showing popular food programmes on the channel, including content from Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver, Martha Stewart and May Yacoubi.”
Genomedia accelerates UHD capabilities with Avid

Dubai-based Genomedia revealed last month that the production company deployed an end-to-end Avid post-production workflow with MediaCentral | Editorial Management to accelerate its UHD production capabilities for its first-ever drama series, Kingdoms of Fire.

An end-to-end workflow consisting of MediaCentre | Editorial Management, interoperating with Media Composer, Pro Tools and three tiers of Avid NEXIS storage gave Genomedia’s on-site editors and off-site storage the ability to work on the particularly UHD content.

The technology allowed Genomedia to work on the best shots collected from different levels of all seven islands and content could be stored, searched and exchanged without a drop in performance.

Sanjay Raina joins Abu Dhabi Media

Sanjay Raina has joined Abu Dhabi Media Company as Executive Director of the Commercial Department. Raina’s remit includes overseeing all commercial operations and ensuring that ADM will optimise its commercial responsibility and proposition in the market.

Mohammad Rasoulof to feature at Berlin Film Festival with There is No Evil

The 70th Berlin International Film Festival will see Iranian filmaker Mohammad Rasoulof’s There is No Evil, co-produced by Kaveh Farnam, CEO of Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media, take part in the main competition. This year’s International Jury will be headed by prominent British actor Jeremy Irons. The festival will take place between February 20 and March 1 in the German capital, with Rasoulof and his jury judging the festival’s competition line-up.

Sanjay Raina says: “There is No Evil is a new animated series entitled Lantern Tales, which will be released later this year. The series, slated to air on TV in Ramadan, tells stories rooted in tales of Arabian heritage and wisdom during different eras, in an enthralling dramatic context. It will provide an insight into the development of core Arab values such as generosity, sincerity, trust and courage while focusing on the importance of being keen and implementing proper management. Lantern Tales aims to instigate a sense of Arab identity and the extent of this identity’s influence on Western cultures. It also hopes to affirm the dignity and morality which Arabs are known for from the days that predate Islam, and after its emergence.

Mohammad Rasoulof, the Iranian filmaker, is building an innovative entertainment brand, and Lantern Tales is at the forefront of new technologies, research and practice for us and we’ve helped carry out a number of important projects there. We’re proud to have Murat Küçüksarac heading up Cinegy Medya AŞ as Chief Operating Officer, who is building an innovative and experienced team.”

Cinegy heads to Turkey

Cinegy GmbH has opened a new office in Istanbul. Cinegy Medya AS will service customers in the region.

The company’s office base in Turkey includes media groups, training institutions and corporate customers. Cinegy MD Daniella Wegner said: “Turkey has always been at the forefront of new technologies, research and practice for us and we’ve helped carry out a number of important projects there. We’re proud to have Murat Küçüksarac heading up Cinegy Medya AŞ as Chief Operating Officer, who is building an innovative and experienced team.”

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Painting with Light (PWL) undertook the lighting for the opening ceremony (OC) of the first Qatari e-sports WEGA Global Games, held at the Khalifa Stadium in Doha last month. The ceremony will be followed by the WEGA Champions in March 2020 and the QATAR Esports WEGA Global Games and Global Games Great Final in December 2020.

PWL’s Creative Director Luc Peumans was part of an all-Belgium technical design and Imaginering team including OC technical director Luc Vandevelde from ‘Trimes for the project. ‘Peumans’ design was based around seven 16-metre-high towers, three upstage and four downstage to the sides to provide a sense of depth and a basic structural framework around the 80-metre-wide oval-shaped performance space. These towers also served as useful lighting positions. Upstage had a 1000-plus-square-metre, 12-metre-high back video wall. The stage surface was mapped for projections and the holographic images were beamed onto massive special holo-scims. Pendrums chose 100 Robe MegaPointes as his main effects lighting fixtures. These were distributed on different levels of all seven towers, as well as along the top edge of the video wall as the back and scattered on the stage deck to work with the combination of ‘Y’ and ‘C’.

In addition, there were 60 Robe Spider LED wash boxes, 36 Cyro LED washes, 50 Claypaky Mythos and 42 CP Scenius Unicos which helped highlight cast positions from the sides and illuminate specific parts of the projection areas. Claypaky Storm LED strobes plus beam lights and a variety of other available fixtures all added up to over 500 light sources.

Luc said: “Luc and I have worked together for over 25 years, and this synergy was a huge asset on this project due to the very short notice.”

Peumans remarked: “Having all these resources to hand plus everyone’s talent, experience, vision and passion onboard helped enormously in pulling a complex and high profile show together under a lot of pressure.”

PWL lights WEGA Global Games in Doha

Khalifa Stadium, Doha.”

Baby Clay announces animated series Lantern Tales for Ramadan this year

Baby Clay has announced a new animated series entitled Lantern Tales, which will be released later this year. The series, slated to air on TV in Ramadan, tells stories rooted in tales of Arabian heritage and wisdom during different eras, in an enthralling dramatic context. It will provide an insight into the development of core Arab values such as generosity, sincerity, trust and courage while focusing on the importance of being keen and implementing proper management. Lantern Tales aims to instigate a sense of Arab identity and the extent of this identity’s influence on Western cultures. It also hopes to affirm the dignity and morality which Arabs are known for from the days that predate Islam, and after its emergence.
Sennheiser and Bose collaborate

Sennheiser and Bose Professional have announced the Bose ES1 Ceiling Audio Solution, an in-ceiling conferencing solution for unified communication platforms. The bundle consists of the Sennheiser TeamConnect Ceiling 2 microphone and three Bose products: the ControlSpace EX-440C conferencing digital signal processor, the EdgeMax EM180 in-ceiling loudspeaker and the PowerSpace P260A amplifier. The solution ensures a transparent and reliable experience with no audio devices on the walls or tabletops. "We are proud to deliver a conferencing solution together with Bose Professional that has been designed to provide a perfect conferencing experience," said Charlie Jones, Global Business Development Manager for Sennheiser’s Business Communication segment.

Netflix acquires six Saudi short films

Netflix has acquired rights to six short films from Saudi Arabian start-up Telfaz11 Studios for a worldwide release on the streaming platform. The collection of films was made available to watch in 190 countries from February 27. The shorts are compiled under the title Six Windows in the Desert and look into several social issues from Saudi directors’ points of view. The films include 27th of Shaban, Wasati, Is Sumyati Going to Hell?, Predicament in Sight, The Rat and Curtain. The movies shine a light on topics that are universal in nature. Telfaz11 has offices in Saudi Arabia and the UAE specialising in locally-relevant entertainment content from the Middle East. Commenting on the acquisition, Nuha ElTayeb, Director of Content Acquisition at Netflix, said: "It is our strong belief that a great story can come from anywhere and be loved everywhere. With the vast number of local talents and creators all over the world, the potential for diverse and interesting stories is endless." Alaa Fadan, Chief Executive Officer at Telfaz11 Studios, remarked: "It gives us immense pride to have six of our short films brought onto Netflix. We are excited to bring the work of local Saudi talents to 167m subscribers around the world."
Red Sea International Film Festival
reveals details, partners with MBC

The first Red Sea International Film Festival will take place from March 12-21 at the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Aqaba. The festival will shed light on local talent as well as being a diverse selection of films to Saudi Arabia.

A new partnership with MBC Group will also support the festival’s opening ceremony broadcast on MBC TV on March 12. MBC will also support a Shorts Pitch Competition, where ten short film projects will be selected from RSA and the MENA, with filmmakers being given a one-day workshop to prepare for a pitching session. Italian director and producer Stefano Teddi will train the candidates to strengthen their skills and give tips for better pitches before they present them at the Red Sea. Upon conclusion of the competition, MBC will award up to four projects.

The festival will open with the premiere of Saudi feature film Shams al-Ma’aur from the Godas brothers. Directed by Faris Godus, and produced by and starring his brother Subah, the film captures the spirit of a generation whose lives were transformed by the internet. The Red Sea Film Festival Foundation supported the film through a $500,000 production grant via the Tamheed Fund. The festival selection will include 16 films in competition, seven out-of-competition titles, 15 Retrospectives and Classic works, three Generation titles, five Immersive/VR experiences, 11 pictures in New Saudi/New Cinema, 13 titles in the shorts competition, 23 Best of the Year films and 17 Tajirot titles—a collection of experimental films. Countries participating in this year’s competition include Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mongolia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the US.

There will also be a master class series called Transmissions, which will be led by Arab and international cinema icons such as Spike Lee, William Friedkin, Abel Ferrara, Khairy Beshara and Yossif Nasrahla. A New Saudi/New Cinema programme will introduce new filmmakers and artists. The selection showcases the new voices shaping the Saudi cinema scene. In addition, there will be a United Omani Feature anthology, directed by five female Omani filmmakers. The Immersive Cinema programme featuring site-specific installations on the Red Sea will include holographic experiences and two-channel experiments. A special master class on virtual reality and immersive technologies, On Mind, will be led by Vishal Dar, Jean Ross, Nic Koller and Weston Ro. Morgan. The festival will also host a special screening on March 13 of Spike Lee’s Malcolm X, which has scenes shot in Mecca.

“After this, one of Yousuf Chahine’s iconic films, The Choice, has been selected from the Saudi Film Foundation. This will also be screened at the festival. Besides the screenings, a series of industry panels titled Perspectives will bring together filmmakers for discussions on the animation industry, the Saudi independent film scene and Arab international cinema, exploring European/Saudi co-productions and the future of Arab film production.”

Calrec appoints new Middle East business head

Abu Dhabi Media has appointed Graham Murray as the new Middle East business head for its broadcast and technology arm, Calrec. Murray, who has previously worked for Calrec in the UK and globally, will lead the firm’s sales effort to expand with its broadcast, studio and automation solutions in the MENA region. Murray will also relaunch the firm’s Arabian Gulf business and support the growth of Calrec’s traditional broadcast and technology solutions.

Abu Dhabi Media (ADM) has unveiled a range of new programmes and shows across its platforms, as part of its strategy to focus on audience-centric content and user-friendly digital distribution. The state-owned media network has also relaunched three of its applications—ADTV, AD Sports and AD Radio.

The strategy is based on the results of a series of qualitative and quantitative research and field studies conducted by Abu Dhabi Media, including all segments of society in the UAE and the Arab world. On this occasion, Sultan bin Ahmad Al Jaber, Minister of State and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Abu Dhabi Media, said: “The new strategy revolves around an ambitious vision to develop all Abu Dhabi Media platforms, with a primary focus on focusing on the aspirations of our leadership and the public in the production of content. Renewing the company’s brands aims to keep pace with the constant change in the global media landscape, enhance its digital platforms and content offering and ensure that it is equipped to cater to the company’s pan-Arab audience.”

As part of this transformation, Abu Dhabi Media has updated the websites of all its channels, launched corresponding digital platforms and Apple TV-enabled applications that incorporate the latest technologies, offering live broadcasts and catch-ups, as well as the integration of iOS and Android-enabled ‘Alexa’ and ‘Press Reader’. The Abu Dhabi TV Channels Network, that includes ADTV, Emirates TV and AD Drama, and the AD Sports Channel have updated all of its websites; and launched the ‘ADTV’ App and the AD Sports App, respectively, available through the platforms Android TV, Apple TV, Apple Store and Google Play.

Studer, with a focus on MEA.

Calrec appoints new Middle East business head

Graham Murray has been appointed Middle East Business Development Manager for Calrec, which has further developed Calrec’s MEA footprint. Murray will lead the sales effort to expand with its broadcast, studio and automation solutions in the MENA region. Murray will also relaunch the firm’s Arabian Gulf business and support the growth of Calrec’s traditional broadcast and technology solutions.

Abu Dhabi Media launches 60 new programmes across platforms

Abu Dhabi Media’s (ADM) Gatehouse and Gatehouse Media have announced the launch of 60 new programmes and shows across its platforms. The expanded slate, which is the result of a strategic shift towards audience-centric content, was unveiled during a virtual event on March 12.

The new shows will be released across all of ADM’s platforms, including ADTV, AD Radio and AD Drama, and the Abu Dhabi TV Channels Network, that includes ADTV, Emirates TV and AD Drama, and the AD Sports Channel have updated all of its websites; and launched the “ADTV” App and the AD Sports App, respectively, available through the platforms Android TV, Apple TV, Apple Store and Google Play.

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The world of filmmaking has undergone dramatic change thanks to the evolution of the drone. With a camera on top, these little flying machines have extended the horizon for filmmakers and cinematographers. Dubai-based drone experts Rashad Al Safar of SkyVision, Epic Drone’s Shafi Saidu and Egyptian filmmaker Amr Ghandour speak to Shifa Naseer about the rising influence of drones on the region’s film scene.

“Drones and filmmaking go hand in hand nowadays,” says Rashad Al Safar, a drone enthusiast and CEO of Dubai-based SkyVision. “Every establishing shot is filmed using a drone, where you see the location before you get a close-up so that the audience feels that they are part of the narrative. It sucks them into the story: Drones are useful in creating that effect.”

Today, filmmakers rely more and more on such devices to compose shots that would otherwise be impossible or prohibitive to produce. SkyVision is known for producing aerial videography and photography content in this market. Al Safar says his passion for filmmaking led him to found SkyVision around five years ago. “In 2014, drones were not so common as the technology was just starting. My brother and I worked on a film together back then and had to build our own drone to shoot certain scenes,” he says, adding that his love for drones stems from their flexibility and affordability. “You cannot do that with a drone. There are so many instances when you require an aerial shot. In such cases, when we want a single-uncut shot, somebody grabs the drone as it’s coming down, carries it through into the house, for instance, or follows the subject. That’s when drones get creative,” says Al Safar.

Aerial perspective – the bird’s eye view – is always a “wow factor” when it comes to a visual experience, according to Shafi Saidu, Head of Drone Operations at Epic Drone. “While aerial shots ensure audience appreciation, helicopters are huge, expensive and cannot offer the angles that drones can.”

Based in Dubai, Epic Drone’s clients include Dubai Tourism, Abu Dhabi Tourism, DEWA and Emaar. The company also has drone operations in India and Georgia, mostly for feature films. “Initially, we started using small drones which can carry the GoPro with a modified lens system. There were no heavy lifters available back then, so we ended up building drones with engineers to fly professional cameras for unique shots. But now easy-to-operate drones are readily available, which has contributed to their popularity among filmmakers,” reveals Saidu.

Drones sales are expected to top $12bn in 2021, according to BI Intelligence. A big chunk of that figure is predicted to come from the sale of drones used for filmmaking, recording, photography and gaming by everyday tech-savvy enthusiasts. In the UAE alone, around 300 to 500 consumer drones are sold monthly for aerial imaging including photography and videography, according to Pejman Ghorbani, Senior Product Manager at Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media. “For high-end filmmaking, I can say the number stands between 10 to 20 per month.”

What can be done with drones is limited only...
“Drones are now replacing the high-jib crane for aerial perspectives. It’s not a trend anymore; it’s essential.”

Shaif Saidu, Head of Drone Operations, Epic Drone

close, from various perspectives.”

Pilmmakers use drones for a variety of shots, including close-ups that track out to film the entire scene without a cut. “It has led to an improved cinematic experience where a shot spans out like a full narrative. The fact that we can achieve that now has increased the scope for young filmmakers to experiment with their work,” Ghandour adds.

With the endless possibilities that drones afford, Saidu notes that “DoPs and film directors increasingly began considering an aerial perspective for their films... Drones are now replacing the high-jib crane. It’s not a trend anymore; it’s essential.”

Depending on the nature of the production, a filmmaker can easily find a drone that suits their budget and needs. “We usually provide drone services for regional film production companies. Once the production house approaches us with specific requirements, we then chart out a plan and select our drone category based on the filming requirement and the budget,” says Saidu.

There is no shortage of drones on the market: some are small and cheap, while others are advanced but expensive.

According to Advanced Media’s Ghorbani, the DJI Inspire 2 with DJI XT camera (16mm, 6K, exchangeable lens) is the most popular drone among resident filmmakers. “For projects that require a heavy lifter drone to support a RED Digital camera or the ARRI Alexa Mini, the DJI Matrice 600 Pro or the Freefly ALTA along with a DJI Ronin MX or the Freefly MoVI Pro Gimbal are used,” explains Ghorbani.

Epic Drone uses DJI Inspire 2, M600Pro and custom-built heavy lifter drones, and Saidu agrees with Ghorbani that the Inspire 2-drone is probably the hot favourite of most filmmakers.

SkyVision mainly uses DJI drones, but smaller drones like the Phantom 4 are also in demand. “It’s a matter of budget and the required scope,” adds Al Safar.

“You need a licensed company to do indoor shoots with the DJI Inspire 2 drone. We’ve done shoots indoors for Ferrari World theme park. Such shoots require smaller drones, so we use something like a Phantom or a Mavic,” remarks Al Safar.

However, mastering these devices to create the desired sequences in potentially changing environments requires a significant amount of time and practice. One cannot just buy a drone and start filming, especially in the UAE, given the strict safety regulations set by the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA).

The Epic Drone team sets up the DJI M600 Pro drone with a camera for filming in the desert in Dubai.
“It is because of the gimbal and the endless possibilities that drones offer in cinematography that the technology is emerging as a favourite with filmmakers”

Amr Ghandour, filmmaker

Drones have given scope for young filmmakers to experiment with their work, says Ghandour.

“It is because of the gimbal and the endless possibilities that drones offer in cinematography that the technology is emerging as a favourite with filmmakers,” says Ghandour. Drones have given scope for young filmmakers to experiment with their work, says Ghandour.

“Do aerial cinematography. Unless you have a licence, you cannot charge for your services,” says Al Safar, who secured his licence from the SANAD Academy in the UAE. The academy tests trainees on high-wind manoeuvrability, drone stabilising, landing on points and making loops.

“Once you go through rigorous training and are certified by SANAD, you can go in three directions: You could either be a hobbyist, a professional or use the skill set commercially, which means you’re licenced to provide full commercial operations with the drone,” Al Safar explains.

This is not as easy as it looks. There are a number of permissions to acquire before starting filming in the UAE. Al Safar takes us through the process.

“You need liability insurance. There is an elaborate application process as well. First, we apply to the Dubai TV and Film Commission for every shoot. From there, the application will go over to the Ministry of Defence. Once the ministry approves it, it is then passed on to the DCAA. Here, they approve the height that you’re flying, what drone you’re using; you will be fitted with a tracker to monitor the height and location.”

All these steps are in place for safety as, at the end of the day, people need to be responsible, notes Ghandour. “Flying a drone
There is a lot involved when it comes to flying drones commercially, but the UAE is supportive of those going through the legal process, says Al Safar.

The only factor to weigh in is how good you are at using them to the best of your ability. Despite their contribution to quality and commercial filmmaking, drones have their limits.

“Usually, within a film, a drone is just another tool in a production. There’d be ground cameras, tripods, dollies and jibs. And they’d bring in a drone just for some shots, which can be anything from a half-day shoot to 10-day shoots. It’s getting tougher as there are many companies and freelancers in the market now. It’s expensive to do it correctly and commercially,” says Al Safar.

Another limiting factor is the battery life, one of the things drone makers could focus on, notes Saidu. “We once had to live broadcast an endurance race where horses run for 100km a day in the desert. It had to go live on TV. It was a nearly 10-hour shot every day with drones. It would have been convenient to have a battery that could live up to the challenge.”

Weather also limits drone usability. Filmmakers agree that drones could do with improved heavy wind capacity. None of them likes using drones in the rain, as it obstructs the quality of the video being shot and endangers the drones. Crashing a drone worth hundreds of dollars is a sore spot, says Al Safar. “We’ve crashed drones while filming. Sometimes, we were not insured for liability and accident. We have technicians on board to provide support on film sets. We have been maintaining the international standards of safety and conducting preflight checks. We also perform calibration and test flights periodically,” says Saidu.

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MAKING THE CASE FOR BAGHDAD CENTRAL

It is 2003. Saddam has fallen and an American-led coalition has taken over Iraq. For millennials resident in the Arab world during the noughties, Baghdad Central recreates an old scenario with incredible familiarity. In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, Executive Producer Kate Harwood talks about how the team brought this crime drama to life.

When homegrown streaming service StarzPlay announced its first original series, Baghdad Central, we expected the traditional route of investment in a locally scripted and filmed production, as has been the wont of most regional and international platforms. But StarzPlay has adopted an alternative strategy, buying into a commissioned drama – though, with others inked with regional entities like Image Nation, it will have more involvement in the storyline.

Baghdad Central is a new series that has premiered on the platform as part of its recent partnership with Fremantle. A crime drama set in American-occupied Baghdad in 2003, it has all the ingredients to appeal to both an Arab and a global audience. What elevates it further is that it is produced by a stellar crew of Hollywood calibre and features a remarkably good Arab and international cast.

StarzPlay doesn’t disappoint either. By making the six-part mini-series available as a box set for binge viewing, it is keeping viewers up all night – but it is worth the pain.

Based on Elliott Colla’s novel, Baghdad Central is a big-budget drama set in chaos-gripped Iraq. With Saddam captured and Western forces in control of the country, Iraqis can’t distinguish between friend and foe. Palestinian-American actor Waleed Zuaiter plays the protagonist Muhsin Al Khafaji, an Iraqi ex-policeman who must collaborate with American forces to receive medical aid for his daughter Mrooj. He must also search for his missing older daughter Sawsan. This leads him to discover a parallel world and to rediscover himself.

Executive Producer Kate Harwood was in Dubai for the premiere of the series at Roxy Cinemas, City Walk, along with some of the main cast. She discusses the tasks she oversaw, from identifying the right screenwriter to locations, budgeting, scheduling, casting and crewing, although she quips that in Morocco, “The team usually just wanted me to take them out to lunch or dinner when I was there.” When Harwood read Colla’s book, she was convinced this story was meant for her. She met the publisher and instantly knew who her screenwriter would be.

When Harwood read Colla’s book, she was convinced this story was meant for her. She met the publisher and instantly knew who her screenwriter would be. “We bought the rights very quickly and I took it to Stephen Butchard because he had already done a lot of research on Iraq and Saddam. I ran the department that made House of Saddam, which looks at the rise and fall of Saddam in the style of the Borgias. It was a darkly comic and brutal piece, and Stephen had done an extraordinary job on that. So when I told him I have this novel, he said you have me at Green Zone.”

“Stephen is also a remarkable writer and can take really complex worlds and make it really accessible. He doesn’t get bogged down, because he sees everything through character. It is amazing how much information you absorb about Iraq in 2003 in Baghdad Central, for instance, without ever feeling that someone is pushing it down your throat.”

“The story was initially sold to Channel 4 who commissioned it almost immediately … We then took a very long time to do the script because it was quite difficult to get it right,” she recalls.

Harwood has always been inspired by crime stories and Baghdad Central fit right in, she says.
“Baghdad Central is a fantastic arena for a crime drama. It is not as much about war, because we deal with the war only over the credit sequences. It’s all the other elements – jeopardy, for instance. You can’t step out the front door without the jeopardy. Present jeopardy is especially a big thing. You can do it in a novel, but in a drama, you have a crime and you have the detective trying to solve it, and you have to keep the jeopardy coming – and that wasn’t so difficult within the Iraqi context.

“And then there are the other elements that make crime so interesting – the secrets, the long hand of history, the dark path. I’d do it again in a heartbeat because there is so much you can explore in this series.”

With Butchard hired to write, Harwood was certain that there would be a greater in-depth exploration of characters. The plot rests heavily on Al Khafaji.

“He lives in a world where all alliances have been broken and nobody quite knows who the enemy really is. Here is a man who also has to dig into his past as he tries to find his missing daughter and look after his younger daughter, and if it means he will have to work with the Americans to solve their crime, then that’s what he will do,” says Harwood, lauding Butchard’s extraordinary ability to bring out character through the script. Crime drama lends itself to a lot of different fun elements, she says.

“The great thing about crime is that you can go anywhere with it. It gives you permission to kick in the door on people’s lives and find the stories within them. You can do big ideas in crime, and you can do very strong characters. Many of the best crime dramas have strong character writing at the heart of them. You can be uplifting. You can be hard-hitting. You can be political and thrilling. There is so much you can do because it is such an elastic genre.”

Another important aspect is the location. While the obvious choices for Iraq are Jordan, South Africa and Spain, the team opted for Morocco.

“We needed the city of Baghdad in this instance – not so much desert or war. So delivering a city was the primary thing, and from what I know, none of the Jordanian cities looks like Baghdad. And although Johannesburg has been used as Baghdad before, it didn’t work for me. I preferred Morocco, which also has a really experienced film industry.

“We cracked a lot of rubble around. We changed the buildings in Morocco from pink to the Baghdad brown. We took out the trees and the Atlas Mountains and put in a river. There was a lot of work in post.”
Perhaps the biggest challenge was the Republican Palace, "partly because it is so well documented."

"We could have tried the big blingy hotels in Tunisia, but we had an international cast and some of them were nervous about travelling there. We eventually managed to find a place in Morocco that worked. Proof of that is when somebody who had worked at the Republican Palace said she was reminded of the place, although she did point out that the toilets in the film were a lot cleaner," laughs Harwood.

Another significant aspect was identifying good Arab talent. The team cast its net wide for this series. "We looked all over the Arab diaspora. It was important to have British Arab actors in it because we have an industry at home we need to look after and it was important to me that we find the right people. Most of the Americans were played by British actors and they did a great job, but there isn't a big community of Iraqi actors available internationally. So we only had around five Iraqi actors altogether in the series."

"If we were a small indie movie, we would probably have done an open call in Iraq. Our actors, therefore, come from different parts of the Arab world. July Namir has an Egyptian background and Youssef Kerkour bails from Morocco, and there's Thaer Al-Shayei."

"And many of them live in different countries. Nora El-Koussour lives in Holland, for instance, while Loom Lubany, who plays Sawsan Al Khafaji, lives in Munich. We also had leading actors in their home territory like Tawfek Barhom and Maia Abd Elhadi, who play small roles in this drama but provide the intimacy that it required."

The series also gave Palestinian-American actor Waleed Zuaiter a much-needed break from the small TV roles he was playing. Tired of usually being cast as a terrorist, he shines in Baghdad Central. The team had a London-based Iraqi consultant and an Iraqi dialect coach with them from day one to ensure the actors had the right Iraqi accent.

"Both were on set all the time, and the cast took that incredibly seriously and worked at it. I obviously can't tell the difference, but I saw a tweet saying how lovely it was to hear the Iraqi dialect, and that was rewarding."

Such an elaborate series doesn't come without challenges, and the biggest of them was running such a big production so far from home base, says Harwood.

"It took three months to shoot this and they were all in Morocco. It was quite a juggling act bringing actors from all over the world, and Morocco can be quite tough on its visas. We would look at each week's schedule and see what worked, and in the end, it all came together."

This series is considered a high-end drama by British standards, says Harwood, and that means "productions of this scale are in the $2m (approx. $2.5m) per hour mark. This is pretty standard for high-end British drama, although it is considered low-budget for American programmes. We had the British tax break and the Moroccan tax break as well."

Baghdad Central seems to have followed a slightly unusual business model, with three different entities buying into the production at various stages of commissioning. It is a StarPlay Original in the MENA, where the streaming service operates. Similar arrangements have been made with Hulu and Channel 4 in their territories of operation.

With first windows on two different streaming services, we asked if the production team needed to take different angles or shoot differently."

"We always imagined that people would watch everything on a big cinema screen or bring the theatre to the home, didn't we? We never imagined back then that people would be watching more entertainment on their phones, but these opportunities for scale have also brought a new kind of intimacy with the screen."

Harwood says that has been superbly captured by director Alice Troughton and cinematographer Christophe Nuyens.

"Alice is a superb director, she pitched a vision for this show and delivered it. Knowing immediately that this was not a big Hollywood movie, she said that even if we can't do the great big screen, we can do a point of view of Khafaji's world. It doesn't need massive cityscapes; it just needs Al Khafaji to be on the wrong side of the door and keep the focus on him. And Christophe ensures that we never feel hemmed in by the cinematography; the viewer always wants to remain with Al Khafaji. We maintain that intimacy, creating an epic intimacy if you want."

Baghdad Central is a fascinating drama series, and just as significantly, it underscores a new strategy that StarPlay has explored for funding its productions. As a small but ambitious and aggressive player maintaining its lead position in the market, it knows it will have to continually innovate and strategise to stay ahead of Netflix and Shahid, both with more money behind them. This strategy of pooling into a high-end production and buying into an original production only for the region it operates in may well be a business model that other players will also explore in the future, as it mitigates risk and reduces investment while also helping to achieve the main objective of offering an exclusive to viewers."
CRAFTING A FILM CAREER

Over the last decade, Faisal Hashmi has built a repertoire of short films and shown a penchant for the horror genre. At the premiere of his newest short film Amber in Dubai last month, BroadcastPro ME caught up with him to explore his journey as a filmmaker, his proclivity for horror and what inspires him on a challenging journey often bereft of funding and support.

Amber was screened at the Paramount Hotel in Dubai last month with more than 180 people in attendance.

You’ve been making short films for so long now. What have you learned, and how have you evolved as a filmmaker since your first short?

Since I never went to film school, every short film I’ve made has been a learning experience. The most important lesson has been to trust your gut instinct and make the film that you would want to watch if someone else had made it, and never make a certain type of film just for the sake of it. Instead, surround yourself with talented crew members so you can delegate jobs to them and focus on finding a unique setting and a unique situation to put a character into, and the rest just builds from there.

How many shorts have you made in the last decade? And what is your usual role on set?

Looking at what I count as my official short films, I have done around ten. I don’t count some of my narrative experimental things, brand-sponsored documentaries and others as part of that ten. In all ten of those, I have been the writer, director and editor. These are three roles I’m extremely comfortable with playing and give me creative authority over my films that I would rarely credit to why many of them have been successful. Many times – especially my first few films – I was the cinematographer, sound recordist and sometimes even an actor if needed. But now I have a great crew I can trust with those jobs, although I still do them from time to time should the need arise.

Where do you draw your inspiration from? Specifically on your most recent film, Amber.

A lot of my ideas come from ‘what if’ scenarios of taking an ordinary person and putting them in extraordinary circumstances and seeing what transpires from there. A man accidentally cuts himself at night realises time is skipping forward every time he sneezes; a young woman gets sent a picture of a blood fairy; a cocky radio host gets a mysterious caller who challenges his world view; a guy stuck at the office late at night realises he’s being haunted by something called the ‘fake radio host’ scenario. It’s my signature style I’ve built for myself.

Amber, you’ve been making short films for so long now. What have you learned, and how have you evolved as a filmmaker since your first short?

I’ve also learned that it’s better not to try and do everything yourself. Instead, surround yourself with talented crew members so you can delegate jobs to them and focus on just directing actors because that’s what the job is in essence. Every short film has made me more confident as a filmmaker and pushed me to experiment more in the next one.

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Give us a behind-the-scenes look at the filming of Amber – the biggest film in scope yet but retains the signature style I’ve built for myself.

Amber takes a similar approach and follows a barber who opens his remote highway salon early in the morning and finds himself in a terrifying situation when he realizes his first customer of the day isn’t who he seems. It’s a ten-minute thriller without a single line of dialogue and inspired by the films of Alfred Hitchcock in how I can crank up suspense in such a setting. It’s my biggest film in scope yet but retains the signature style I’ve built for myself.

More than 15 professionals and crew were involved in the making of Amber.

The larger budget is all thanks to my friends and collaborators on this film who pitched in their money with me to make the film a reality – I love Gracias (who was also production manager on the film), Kurt Barretto (also assistant director), Kane Rodrigues (who did sound recording and design) and Jullz Bek. We shot the film over two days at a real salon on the outskirts of Sharjah. This was a challenge because of the small space we had to work with.

It was shot on an Alexa Mini by Dubai-based cinematographer Elias Trad. It was my first time collaborating with him and working with that camera, and the film looks incredible because of it. We had a great cast and crew of over 15 professionals on set, including our two main actors Joaquim Gonsalves and Rik Aby. This is probably the most preparation I have done for a film before the shoot. We had two days of rehearsal for some of the more physically demanding scenes in the film, and I even

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shot those rehearsals like I would shoot the movie just to take notes and tweak things accordingly.

We did multiple days of scouting at the location to figure out the logistics of shooting. We had to cater to the highway since the shots also involved exteriors. Speaking of exteriors, lighting was definitely the biggest challenge this time around, as we required a huge HMI light that would serve as our artificial sunlight for the whole shoot, as well as other rigging lights. All these powerful lights required a beefy generator truck parked outside too. We did multiple days of scouting at the location to figure out the context of that location because of what’s now at stake. Not to spoil the film, but a barbershop might seem like an innocent place at the beginning but it’s also a room full of weapons. The film deals with that, and I wanted to make a realistic thriller that really puts you at the edge of your seat but also surprises you with how it unfolds.

**What led you to make Amber?**

Amber was about taking up the challenge of making a wordless thriller in ten minutes set in one location, and completely changing the context of that location because what’s now at stake. Not to spoil the film, but a barbershop might seem like an innocent place at the beginning but it’s also a room full of weapons. The film deals with that, and I wanted to make a realistic thriller that really puts you at the edge of your seat but also surprises you with how it unfolds.

You seem to focus on making horror films. What's the fascination with horror?

Horror is the most resilient genre in film. It transcends cultures and language barriers, because fear is universal.

Faisal Hashmi, filmmaker

I generally try to make short films that are self-contained rather than films with obvious sequel endings, but my last horror short film, Wicken, was something I developed with a larger feature film in mind because that plot lends itself easily towards a horror movie similar to The Ring. So that’s something I’m actively exploring, and the film just crossed more than 100,000 views on YouTube in under three months, so there’s definitely interest in exploring that. With Amber, we’ll see, because a lot of people feel like there’s more to this story, but it’s too early to tell.

Amber won Best Film at the Al Ain Film Festival. Where else have you entered it? Winning at Al Ain Film Festival was a delight. It was actually the first film festival we submitted to and I was fortunate enough to attend for the three days it was on. What was fascinating was that I was the only non-Arab director in the entire festival line-up, so I really wasn’t expecting an award. But when I won Best Film, it was truly gratifying, and the award ceremony was such a prestigious affair too.

There are a couple of other local film festivals the film will be either competing in or have a special screening at, including the Emirates Short Film Festival in March and the White Oryx International Film Festival in April. We are also looking to begin our international festival run soon, so it’s a long road ahead.

What is the story behind Amber?

The story behind Amber is about a man who wakes up in a barbershop, with only a pair of scissors to assist him. He’s not sure where he is, how he got there, or what he’s supposed to be doing. As he begins to figure things out, he realizes that he’s caught in a twisted game of survival, where every move he makes could mean the difference between life and death.

**What kind of challenges did you face with this short?**

One of the biggest challenges we faced was the lighting. We required a huge HMI light that would serve as our artificial sunlight for the whole shoot, as well as other rigging lights. All these powerful lights required a beefy generator truck parked outside too.

**How did you finance the project?**

We did multiple days of scouting at the location to figure out the context of that location because what’s now at stake. Not to spoil the film, but a barbershop might seem like an innocent place at the beginning but it’s also a room full of weapons. The film deals with that, and I wanted to make a realistic thriller that really puts you at the edge of your seat but also surprises you with how it unfolds.

**What was the response to your short film premiere screenings last month?**

A big crowd attended your premiere screenings last month. We did multiple days of scouting at the location to figure out the context of that location because what’s now at stake. Not to spoil the film, but a barbershop might seem like an innocent place at the beginning but it’s also a room full of weapons. The film deals with that, and I wanted to make a realistic thriller that really puts you at the edge of your seat but also surprises you with how it unfolds.

**How has your audience reacted so far?**

Our audience has been very receptive so far. We’ve been able to build a following through social media and our screenings at local film festivals. We’re excited to see how the international audience will react once we start submitting to more festivals.

**What advice do you have for aspiring filmmakers?**

My advice for aspiring filmmakers is to never give up. Making films can be a long and difficult process, but the satisfaction you feel from creating something that you’re proud of is worth it. Keep working hard, keep learning, and never stop experimenting. And most importantly, always believe in yourself and your vision.

**What is your next project?**

I’m currently working on a new short film that I hope to complete later this year. It will be a horror film with a sci-fi twist, and I’m really excited about the direction it’s taking.

**What do you think makes a good horror film?**

A good horror film should be able to unsettle its audience, but not in a way that’s too predictable. It should be able to surprise you with how it unfolds, and leave you with a sense of unease long after the credits have rolled.

**How do you want your audience to feel after watching your film?**

I want my audience to feel haunted, even after they’ve left the theatre. I want them to be thinking about the film long after it’s over, and wondering about the many unanswered questions it leaves.

**What was the biggest challenge you faced during production?**

The biggest challenge we faced during production was the lighting. We required a huge HMI light that would serve as our artificial sunlight for the whole shoot, as well as other rigging lights. All these powerful lights required a beefy generator truck parked outside too.

**How do you think horror films have evolved over the years?**

Horror films have come a long way since the beginning of cinema. Good horror films today don’t just entertain audiences but also include biting social commentary within the lens of a fun film that everyone can enjoy. I like the idea of scaring people at their knees but also making them think about evils not just outside but within them.
a freelancer in this region has a host of challenges of its own, but I'm happy to take the downsides for the freedom of being able to make films.

What are some of the challenges you've faced in your career as a filmmaker?

When I started out in 2009, there was no film industry to speak of and neither was there access to actors and crew members to reach out to for films. So that's always been a challenge in this region, but things have changed and there's a host of talented actors here and crew members too. Finding funding for films has always been a challenge, as well as seeing the shuttering of the Gulf Film Festival, the Abu Dhabi Film Festival and the Dubai International Film Festival towards the latter half of these ten years. This has been incredibly discouraging because you cannot have a film industry without a film festival to showcase films.

But I'm an optimist at heart and my entire career has been taking those limitations and embracing them by finding a way forward anyway, which is the only reason I've been able to consistently make films for the last ten years while so many other filmmakers have dropped out or moved on to other things.

What's the status of your first feature film?

I'm currently working on two feature film ideas at the same time. One is a horror anthology with five interconnected horror stories that take place over one night in Dubai. This one would be relatively easier and cheaper to shoot because I can shoot them as five individual short films and connect them in the edit with an overarching theme, so I'm inclined towards this one. The other is a sci-fi thriller called Fractal set in one location with three characters. This is a wild, high-concept idea I'm very excited about, but it's also a film I will need some money to be able to do the way I imagine it. Both of them have their scripts written and are currently in revisions, so you will hopefully hear about progress on one of them very soon, based on how the financing goes.

“Lighting was definitely the biggest challenge this time around, as we required a huge HMI light that would serve as our artificial sunlight for the whole shoot, as well as other rigged lights”

Faisal Hashmi, filmmaker

Amber will participate in the Emirates Short Film Festival in March and the White Oryx International Film Festival in April.
In the last few years, we’ve seen augmented reality (AR) being adopted into mainstream markets through smartphones. Snapchat filters and interactive gaming (kickstarted by Pokémon Go) immediately became popular because they introduced interactivity never seen before. When you consider that this technology was introduced and available without anyone needing to go out and buy new devices – just use the phones they already owned – it’s unsurprising that AR gained popularity so quickly.

Brands were quick to follow, seeing AR as both a great monetisation opportunity and a way of delivering attention-grabbing content to their audiences. Brands like IKEA and L’Oréal adopted the technology to bring their products into people’s homes. Additionally, broadcasters started seeing the benefits of using AR to tap into second-screen culture.

According to a report by CitrixScience, nearly half of TV viewers browse online while they watch their favourite content. Broadcasters saw the advantages of enhancing the viewing experience by providing users with second-screen content related to the programme. This has proved particularly suitable for sports rights providers, due to the increasing competition within sports content delivery.

Can sports use AR?
Keeping sports fans engaged is hugely important in building fan loyalty. They love their teams and often want to know as much as possible behind-the-scenes info and stats. With a huge amount of data already at the fingertips of sports providers, it makes sense to deliver it to the audience. However, delivering swathes of information in an engaging way has its difficulties. It needs to be digestible and it mustn’t detract from the main screen. If people are spending too long searching for a particular stat, they’re not actually concentrating on the game and are quite likely to close the app and not open it again. Broadcasters can see that using AR and delivering information organically into the audience’s surroundings gains the most interaction.

With revenue from AR-generated ads estimated to hit $15bn by 2022, media houses are looking to leverage 5G-connected wearable technologies to secure a piece of the pie, especially within sports, says Niklas Björkén.
that people will actually want to use. Getting this right raises challenges. For AR to be truly interactive, the device needs to be connected. Up until now, this has been limiting. WiFi has been the only connectivity offering the high-quality bandwidth required. However, with the introduction of 5G, surely this is about to change?

When you think of 5G-connected wearable AR tech in the sports arena, the opportunities are endless. An in-stadium mode could give spectators access to live updates and statistics from their season-ticket seats. It could also be used to transform the fan viewing experience at home, with half-time punditry and interviews with coaches displayed in someone’s own home. AR could deliver their favourite player to their kitchen table.

Alongside improving the viewing experience and promoting fan loyalty, AR also provides sports entities and broadcasters with monetisation opportunities. Advertisers suddenly have access to a highly interactive mode of displaying their ads within people’s own environments; according to Poplar, the projected revenue generated by AR ads by 2022 is $15bn.

“If people are spending too long searching for a particular stat, they’re not actually concentrating on the game and are quite likely to close the app and not open it again. Broadcasters can see that using AR and delivering information organically into the audience’s surroundings gains the most interaction”

Niklas Björkén, Director Innovations, Accedo

However, with time, wearable AR tech will deliver a hugely immersive way of enhancing the live viewing experience. AR is transforming the services that sports entities provide by allowing fans to have the best viewing experience while nurturing fan loyalty in an increasingly competitive space.

Why AR delivers within sports
AR is really making an impact. People love the interactivity it brings and are happy to embrace it via their smartphones. Sports entities are starting to benefit from AR, through both improved viewing experience and improved monetisation opportunities. Fans are going to have vast amounts of background information available, delivered in a user-friendly AR package. We’re a little way off embracing wearable AR, but significant investment is going into developing devices which can be worn that will blend into the background. Additionally, 5G is delivering opportunities which are now being explored in relation to wearable tech. This is going to deliver countless opportunities for sports providers; they will be able to offer fans a huge amount of interactivity from within the stadium. For now, this connectivity can be used through second-screen AR.
In which halls will CABSAT be held this year, and how many attendees do you hope to attract?

CABSAT will take place in Dubai World Trade Centre, Halls 3-8, with around 450 exhibiting brands and approximately 14,000 visitors. We are expecting over 1,500 delegates to attend the CABSAT exhibitors through our mat-making programme and believe it will be very successful. Last year we facilitated 1,178 meetings between exhibitors and new potential buyers.

Could you name some of your new exhibitors this year, and some who have asked for more space?

New exhibitors this year include Druka (Germany), Spectee (Japan), Chaloes General Trading (Iraq), Elecdare (Russia), Spacebridge (USA), Decibel Systems (USA), NSNL Global (UK), Satnamone (USA) and Novasat (Saudi Arabia), to name a few. Exhibitors who have decided to increase their participation include Dubai Studio City, Senna, GSL Professional, Vialite and Pixel Power, just to name a few. We are also pleased to have five international country pavilions at CABSAT 2020.

Tell us more about the 5G conference and the key companies that will be part of this exercise.

The 5G-focussed conference designed to bring converging verticals like broadcasters, maritime, aviation together, says Löffler. Thomas Löffler, CABSAT Show Manager, CABSAT 2020 – WHAT’S NEW AND WHY YOU SHOULD ATTEND!

In which halls will CABSAT be held this year, and how many attendees do you hope to attract? CABSAT 2020 will unite the industry’s creative experts and suppliers, and unveil the latest trends and technologies based on market needs. Thomas Löffler, Assistant VP, Exhibitions and CABSAT Show Manager at DWTC, takes BroadcastPro ME through some of the new features at the show this year.

CABSAT 2020 will be held in cooperation with the ContentScape Media and will take place in the 5G-focussed conference designed to bring converging verticals like broadcasters, maritime, aviation together, says Löffler. Thomas Löffler, Assistant VP, Exhibitions and CABSAT Show Manager at DWTC, takes BroadcastPro ME through some of the new features at the show this year.

In 2019, we witnessed an increase in total visitor numbers, with more delegates from Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq, Oman, Kuwait, Nigeria, Bahrain, Sudan, Turkey, Algeria and Kenya. We believe international participation from buyers will increase further in 2020.

CABSAT continues to attract industry professionals, including three-time, Primetime Emmy-winning digital series creator, writer, director and producer Bernie Su, will present more than 100 hours of content.

Thomas Löffler, Assistant VP, Exhibitions and CABSAT Show Manager at DWTC, takes BroadcastPro ME through some of the new features at the show this year.
Middle East Esports Association and led by Saeed Sharaf, CEO of the Esports Middle East ESMEE, Regional Manager of the World Cyber Arena, and Board Member of the World eSports Consortium.

Esport event organizers and teams from Nasr Esports, Yalla Esports and FATE Esports, together with publishers from Tencent Games – who have recently launched in the region – will be involved, as well as immersive game experience experts from EVS. Investors and consultants will discuss how the industry is looking to monetize regional esports, while we will also hear industry perspectives from endemic and non-endemic brands.

I hear international broadcasting organisations are making another bid to come back to the UAE; with Saudi Arabia having held Prodex last month, how is CABSAT looking to strengthen its presence in the regional market to maintain its leading position?

Last year, CABSAT launched various new content in order to attract professional international buyers to the event, including Photoscape (now Imagescape), ContentScape, Esports and Digital Hub. In 2020, we are adding 5G and Beyond, a 5G-focussed conference day that will show broadcasters and media professionals the implications of 5G on our industry.

After its huge success in 2019, we are working with our partners mena.tv to organise an even larger gathering of content sellers and buyers and more screenings in 2020. We are expecting buyers including Abu Dhabi Media, DISH Network, Rotana Media, Sharjah Media Corporation, Quest Arabiya, Sony Pictures Television, Turner Broadcasting Arabia and many more to source the latest content.

In 2020, we have even more ambitious goals. We will organise a focus day regarding content creation and production in Africa this year, and have invited buyer delegations from Sudan, Nigeria and Kenya, while we will continue to focus on African markets and Saudi Arabia to make sure we bring relevant buyers to CABSAT to source the latest technologies from our valued exhibitors.

Competitive events will always be there. We appreciate competition, as it will increase the quality of events and that is good for the industry. With our new show content, I believe we will attract more buyers from the UAE as well as from abroad, and we look forward to welcoming them to Dubai at CABSAT 2020.
Interra Systems will demo video quality with advanced QC, monitoring and analysis at CABSAT

At CABSAT 2020, Interra Systems will demonstrate its content quality control, monitoring, analysis and classification solutions in delivering a superior quality of experience on every screen. Stand highlights will include the Orion suite of solutions, Baton, Winnow and the Vega Media Analyzer.

The Orion-OTT monitoring solution boosts a rich feature set that offers support for the latest standards in closed captions, ad insertion monitoring, ABR manifest file validation, audio-video checks and real-time alerts, among others. For IP-based delivery infrastructures, Interra Systems offers the ORION real-time content monitoring solution, which provides video analysis of linear channels. ORION complements the company’s OTT offering, looking at all aspects of video streams including closed captions, ad insertion verification, quality of service (QoS) and quality of experience (QoE).

Also demonstrated will be the revamped Orion Central Manager (OCM), which provides an aggregated view of linear and OTT services. OCM includes near-real-time status of all channels across the network, channel performance trends, support for Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP)-based authorization, executive reports, email notifications, alert aggregation and more. OCM helps digital network operations centers to deliver content with the highest QoE and meet viewer expectations. The entire Orion suite is supported on Linux.

A new Baton automated tool for lip-sync detection and verification of audio with captions will be shown, as well as photo-sensitive detection in programmable video. In addition, BATON includes support for the VAST format, HDR quality checks and set-up in Amazon cloud and on-premises, as well as improved audio language and caption detection capabilities. Integrating BATON with Winnow, the company’s solution for content classification and identification, allows video service providers to prepare content for different target markets and geographies.

Interra Systems will also feature a new updated version of the company’s Baton Media Player on display. This includes new features such as support to overlay timecode information on video, performance enhancements in J2K playback, the option to export a video clip without re-encoding, improvements in real-time playback, support for playback of grouping Material eXchange Format (MXF) files, and many more.

BTS brings ad-sales module for integrated linear and digital ad campaigns to show

Broadcast Traffic Systems (BTS) has launched an advertising module that enables integrated linear and digital ad scheduling from one platform.

The Digital Ad-Sales module allows advertising executives to fully integrate digital advertising on the major platforms into their linear campaigns. Broadcasters are able to manage advertising campaigns covering all media types. The module integrates both with broadcast automation solutions and with any ad platform serving, to ensure broadcasters can deliver and monitor the entire linear and digital campaign. The solution also makes it easy for broadcasters to deliver addressable ads across multiple platforms, targeted at different demographics depending on the platform and needs of the advertiser.

Craig Buckland, Technical Director, Broadcast Traffic Systems, commented: “Advertisers are increasingly looking to book an integrated ad campaign covering all media types. This represents a great opportunity for broadcasters to maximise monetisation options; however, the very complex nature of digital campaigns, coupled with the lack of integration to existing workflows, is causing them a challenge.

With this solution, we are aiming to make it simple for broadcasters to deliver and monitor an integrated ad campaign for their customers.” BTS will be demonstrating its Digital Ad-Sales module at CABSAT from 31 March to 2 April, where it will be exhibiting in the British Pavilion (033-203) as well as the Quest Media booth.

Stand F3-23

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March 2020
Argosy promises 360-degree support to MENA customers

Argosy, a regular exhibitor at CABSAT, continues to provide support for the MENA media market, offering a one-stop-shop for systems engineers and designers. Argosy specialises in every aspect of media infrastructure, from cables and connectors to active hardware devices such as network switches, fibre transport and KVM switches. At CABSAT, it will showcase a range of its offerings, including its own manufactured patching and termination panels, equipment racks, and tactical fibre and SMPTE camera cables. The company will also showcase products from BES, Canare, Cliff Connectors, Ghelamco and Neutrik. Experts from Austrian vendor kvm-tec will also be available on the Argosy stand, explaining how the latest generation of high-bandwidth, IP-connected KVM (keyboard, video and mouse) solutions can deliver secure connectivity with low latency while linking multiple secure workstations to multiple monitors and allowing only one input to multiple outputs.

The company will also showcase its latest offer, explaining how the latest generation of high-bandwidth, IP-connected KVM (keyboard, video and mouse) solutions can deliver secure connectivity with low latency while linking multiple secure workstations to multiple monitors and allowing only one input to multiple outputs. Such solutions reduce clutter in operational areas by requiring only one set of keyboard, mouse and monitor while instantly accessing multiple services. This also helps to reduce cost by eliminating multiple monitors, which contributes significantly to an improvement in environmental performance.

“With the media world changing so rapidly, demanding more outputs and higher resolutions, we know our customers need to be able to rely on suppliers to ensure they have the right infrastructure hardware, now and for the future,” commented Chris Smeeton, CEO of Argosy. “We have a strong and long-standing presence in the Middle East, and our many customers know that we are much more than just cable stockists – we can help finalise the details of installations, ensuring that the system works first time and stays working.”

“CABSAT is a great opportunity for us to talk to our client base in the region,” Smeeton added. “They know us as problem-solvers, and we enjoy finding solutions for them that are reliable, practical and, in an atmosphere of increasing environmental concerns, as green as we can make them.”

Stand F3-21

LiveU focusses on IP at CABSAT

LiveU will demonstrate its live IP bonding technology at CABSAT, to show how it takes advantage of the faster speeds and guaranteed high bandwidth offered by 5G networks. The upcoming Tokyo Olympics and Euro 2020 offer opportunities for leveraging 5G bonding technology for round-the-clock coverage of the teams, athletes and fans.

There will be daily demonstrations of LiveU’s next-generation IP content management and distribution solution, LiveU Matrix. LiveU Matrix has been adopted by news organisations, including CBC, CNN, Cee Media Group, Meredith Corporation, Quincy Media and Sinclair Broadcast Group. It is ideal for sports and event producers looking to live stream events to multiple platforms. Other solutions will include a portfolio of HD/1080p60 and 4K HEVC video solutions, including its flagship LU600 4K HEVC portable transmission solution that reportedly delivers flawless video with extreme bandwidth efficiency; its compact, robust LU300 HEVC unit for live streaming; and the LU60 HEVC multi-camera, LU61 4K HEVC for vehicles and fixed locations will be demonstrated.

The LU600’s HEVC (4K-SDI) edition offers 4Kp50/60 streaming for high-quality production, supporting VR and 360 applications. The compact, robust LU300 HEVC unit for live streaming is tailored to customers requiring a smaller field unit for high-quality video-on-the-go. Highly flexible, the LU300 can also serve as a stand-alone video encoder or be used as a LiveU Bridge mobile hotspot for general connectivity in the field. The LU300 at HEVC for vehicles and fixed locations is a powerful encoder based on LiveU’s LU300 4K HEVC technology, and offers a hybrid solution for SNG trucks, point-to-point and point-to-multipoint distribution. LiveU will demonstrate its wireless at-home production solution, which allows multi-camera live events to be covered with simplified logistics. The latest applications, such as Daily Light, enabling live reporters to know instantly when they’re live on air and LiveU Connect, enabling simple remote control of LiveU units via smartphones, will be showcased.

Stand E3-21

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the journey of content
Why the pay-TV data revolution must be born in the executive boardroom

Data is a core component of every business on the planet; it enables small retailers to efficiently manage their inventory and multinational financial institutions to understand global market changes. While many industries have taken great strides to harness the power of data, the pay-TV industry has historically lagged behind.

This is in part due to old business practices. Automation, improving customer service operations, reducing churn, delivering more targeted advertising, personalising content recommendations, and helping to optimise the full value and cost of their content portfolio—these actions are all crucial for modern pay-TV operators. And yet many are failing to accelerate this kind of change, simply because they do not fully understand the magnitude of what is at stake, especially when the biggest industry competitors are Facebook and Fortnite.

The transformational impact of data on a pay-TV operator could be likened to when Peugeot decided to go from pepper grinders to bicycles to cars; while the core technology remained the same, everything about the business shifted around it. This kind of business transformation must be harnessed and controlled by the executive board. The arbitration on role, responsibilities and monitoring has to be born in the executive boardroom. Some pay-TV operators are literally dying from old organisational practices. When it comes to fighting for survival, the ability to let information flow and to have experts from all relevant fields working together on the same projects, without politics, is a clear competitive advantage.

Not only can the executive team, through clear decision-making, enforce this attitude. It can also equip the teams with specific platforms aimed at collaboration and sharing business and data projects.

Force results to be tangible
Mark Twain said, “To the man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” This applies to data. While BI people are happy with scientifically pleasant predictive models, IT folks love large data lakes and businesspeople want the ability to play with all the data in real time. While all this is fun and rewarding, it doesn’t make a dime for the company.

The role of the executive team is to remind all teams that only tangible outcomes on the key KPI defined beforehand are worth it. Sometimes, the simplest and least sophisticated solutions are the most efficient, and the only thing that matters is what is the next best action toward this subscriber, this piece of content, this customer service operation, reducing churn, delivering more targeted advertising, personalising content, etc.

Define which key performance indicators need to be boosted
First, you need to look at what problem needs to be solved. The answer could be increasing revenues, reducing churn, reduce costs or even increase Ebitda, especially when debt is high. This gets more complicated when some compromises or combinations need to be made: “Do we want to increase revenues AND reduce churn” can be a good example. Being clear on the real objectives we want to tackle will be a big service to the teams below. This will also be a good reference when needing arbitrage along the way.

Break silos in the organisation
As it is transversal by nature, both for collection and usage, data is a good excuse for breaking the silos in the organisation. Some pay-TV operators are literally dying from old organisational practices. When it comes to fighting for survival, the executive team, under the boardroom, can make the difference.

Jacques-Edouard Guillemot is Senior VP Executive Affairs of the Kudelski Group.

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RELIABILITY MATTERS

RED cameras have operated in outer-space, atop the Himalayas and 6 miles under the sea in the Mariana Trench.