ISSUE 122 | SEPTEMBER 2020

MBC’s tech team strengthens video delivery with private CDN as Shahid subscriptions soar
No intermodulation.

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.

Discover more
www.sennheiser.com/digital-6000

The range’s own transmitters are designed for any application on stages or in the field of broadcasting. There is a choice of the bodypack SK 6000, the mini-bodypack SK 6212 and the handheld transmitter SKM 6000. Over and above this, the series is compatible with the Digital 6000 series and the camera receiver EK 6042.

DIGITAL 6000

It is always a matter of great pride to see a homegrown brand succeed in a field, where international players with more money and power are also part of the game. That success is often the result of great leadership, a smart strategy and a strong tech team to back that grand vision.

Shahid is a fine example of that. No doubt, its parent company MBC Group has always been a strong player in the traditional broadcast space, but this year belongs to Shahid.

The streaming service has picked up incredible speed following a major revamp earlier this year. The OTT platform has served as the launch pad for several original productions and more recently, feature films as well. But all of us know by now that good content alone does not guarantee a fantastic consumer experience by keeping latency and buffering down to a minimum, and ensuring a user can pick up a programme from where they left it off last all contribute to reducing churn. On that front again, Shahid has scored several brownie points with its viewers.

The addition of a new private CDN will further strengthen that bond between the streaming service and the consumer.

Our cover story this month is a big testimony to what can be achieved on home ground by local players if they have the ambition, the capital and the right resources.

Undaunted by Netflix and Amazon Prime, Shahid has forged ahead in the MENA market, building on its key USP — Arabic-language programming. In parallel, it has also enhanced its entertainment experience thanks to an incredibly gifted technology team that has ensured a service that is on a par with other market players.

On another note, we are equally in awe of the UAE for successfully launching the Hope probe into space last month to collect scientific data about Mars. We bring you details about the coverage of the event.

We hope these regional stories serve as an inspiration during these challenging times. Until next month …
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ITV Studios Middle East commissioned to produce Come Dine With Me for OSN

OSN has commissioned ITV Studios Middle East to produce the Arabic version of the British reality TV show Come Dine With Me, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. The first season will have 45 daily episodes with the first week already shot at a home in Dubai at the end of July. Production will continue until the second week of September 2020.

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, ITV Studios Middle East CEO Ziad Kebbi said: “This localised version of Come Dine With Me will definitely reflect Arab culture through the variety of cuisines that exist across the Arab world. We have worked closely with the commissioning and programme teams at OSN to set the parameters on which the production is based including the cast, look and feel and tone of voice.”

With the pandemic, the number of people on location was minimised and technical solutions were found to address the challenge, says Kebbi.

“We invested in a remote production system that was licensed from Lonoco. This combination of hardware and software using the latest technological tools enables us to monitor and control the production process in real time from Lebanon. Our Head of Production, Jenane Mandour, and Head of Creative and Content, Hikmat Ghazal, both stationed in Beirut, supervised the Dubai shoot. We have the ability to receive feeds of all cameras and audio channels as we film the contributors. We can directly interact with the cameramen and the production team on the ground.”

The team consists of an executive producer, a content producer, story producers and production manager in addition to the usual roles that everyone is familiar with.

Although production resumed, the team had to progressively come up with new solutions when the lockdown period was extended.

“It is a challenge that we had never faced. We have adopted several measures on the ground to guarantee the safety of our teams, crews and contributors with PCR tests, face masks, social distancing, constant sanitisation of spaces and ensuring a limited number of people on site,” added Kebbi.

A new 4K-UHD OB van for the Qatar Cultural and Heritage Events Center has several Ross Video solutions as part of its workflow. The signals workflow was engineered to realise the maximum potential of the OB unit. ARET engineers chose Ross Video solutions for UHD in 12G-SDI. The Acuity production switcher, the Xpression Studio character generator and the Akiles Trio+ replay server are part of this workflow.

At the core of the system is the Ultima 12G routing/AV processing platform and the Ross openGear platform. The Dashboard control interface enables the whole system to be configured and controlled via a mix of prebuilt and user-designed touchscreen control panels. The Ultritouch monitoring and control solution here operates as a normal router panel and also as a standalone Dashboard interface, giving operators control to configure whatever is in the Dashboard workflow.

“This is one of the first fully 12G UHD OB units in the Gulf, and is proof that you can build a cost efficient 4K-UHD facility using 12G-SDI, with no compromises in the quality or workflow. This was thanks to Ross,” Umberto Asti, VP of ARET said.
SNA enables remote editing with Blackbird

Sky News Arabia has chosen the Blackbird cloud video editing platform to enable remote cloud video editing and publishing of its digital news content.

Blackbird will drive major video production efficiencies across key workflows at the Abu Dhabi-based network. Sky News Arabia’s multi-site production teams in Abu Dhabi and other locations will be able to remotely edit and publish news content live to its social media platforms.

Production staff will utilise Blackbird’s video editing tools such as multi-video and audio tracks, graphic effects, colour correction, transitions and voice over to enrich the broadcaster’s content. Editorial approval will be a key feature of the workflow, ensuring content quality and accuracy. Blackbird will also be used by Sky News Arabia to repurpose the network’s output through the editing and publishing of file-based video content.

Sky News Arabia Director of Technology, Suresh Kumar, said: “Sky News Arabia operates one of the most progressive newsrooms in the Middle East and Blackbird will empower our multi-site production teams to work collaboratively in the cloud with a suite of video editing and publishing tools. The adoption of this platform supports our drive to use technology to enhance our screens and digital platforms.”

Blackbird’s CEO Ian McDonough said: “The power and sophistication of the Blackbird editing suite combined with the simple and elegant scalability of our architecture means Sky News Arabia has a world-class solution that can also be expanded quickly and cost effectively when required.”

Stream broadcast quality live events instantly over the internet with ATEM Television Studio HD and Blackmagic Web Presenter!

Now with ATEM Television Studio HD and Blackmagic Web Presenter you can create professional, broadcast quality television programs from any live event plus instantly stream live out to the internet!

ATEM Television Studio HD is a true professional live production switcher with 4 SDI and 4 HDMI inputs. Simply connect cameras, gaming consoles and computers, then start cutting your show live and in real-time using transitions such as dissolves, dips, wipes, custom graphics, logos and more. You even get a built-in DVE so you can create exciting picture in picture effects for use with interviews and live commentators!

The output of the switcher can then be connected to Blackmagic Web Presenter, which has a built in broadcast quality down converter for easy encodes of the video for streaming. The video is sent to your computer via USB, just like a webcam, so it works with any software. Stream live using services such as YouTube and Facebook Live using software such as Open Broadcaster or XSplit Broadcaster. It even works with Skype for professional remote presentations. Web Presenter is the easiest and most affordable way to broadcast live video on the web!

ViacomCBS and OSN team up to bring Paramount+ exclusively to MENA

ViacomCBS Networks International and OSN have launched Paramount+ a premium streaming service that features content from ViacomCBS brands, including Paramount Channel, Comedy Central, MTV and ViacomCBS International Studios and third parties. Paramount+ will be available in the Middle East from September 1 exclusively on OSN Streaming, which costs $9.5/month. Paramount Channel, which was available on OSN channel 34 in the Middle East, has also been dropped.

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SRM launches Russian kids’ channels in UAE

The two premium Russian channels, Tiji Russia and Gulli Girl, will be part of SRM offerings on du’s TV platform. Tiji Russia is a pre-school channel which includes shows like Maya the Bee, Tall Tales, and Bob the Builder. Gulli Girl caters to children aged between four and 17.

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae

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*SRP excludes duties, shipping and sales tax. Prices subject to change.
Finyal Media to launch region’s first original podcast drama

Cinematic mystery thriller to launch first original podcast drama, titled The Basement. The fictional series, looking for a way to reclaim his fame and success, using a box of long lost tapes he stumbles upon in a basement. The Basement will launch this month on all podcasting platforms, including Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Anghami, Deezer, and Spotify. The series will feature dynamic voice acting, realistic sound mixing, and cinematic music scoring. Leila Hamadeh, CEO of Finyal Media, said: “We’re excited to launch the MENA region’s first original scripted drama series for the podcast medium this month. The dramatic podcast format, which plays out like a movie or a TV series is really growing in popularity, and it lends itself well to engaging storytelling that makes this genre of podcasts so captivating. Our new show is a first for the region and we’re excited to be leading the charge with the launch of this series created for Arab youth in the Middle East.”

Finyal Media has announced the region’s first original scripted Arabic podcast drama series, titled The Basement. The fictional mystery thriller centres around Fadi Younan, a washed-up YouTube star who stumbles upon in a basement. He’s looking for a way to reclaim his fame and success, using a box of long lost tapes he stumbles upon in a basement. The Basement will launch this month on all podcasting platforms, including Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Anghami, Deezer, and Spotify. The series will feature dynamic voice acting, realistic sound mixing, and cinematic music scoring. Leila Hamadeh, CEO of Finyal Media, said: “We’re excited to launch the MENA region’s first original scripted drama series for the podcast medium this month. The dramatic podcast format, which plays out like a movie or a TV series is really growing in popularity, and it lends itself well to engaging storytelling that makes this genre of podcasts so captivating. Our new show is a first for the region and we’re excited to be leading the charge with the launch of this series created for Arab youth in the Middle East.”

UK’s Safar Film Festival to take place virtually in September

The Arab British Centre will be holding the Safar Film Festival, dedicated to pan-Arab cinema, virtually from September 13 to 20. The Safar From Home programme will offer five online screenings for audiences. The programme will be accessible globally; film festival director Alonaizy with CEO Leila Hamadeh Alanani and Chief People Officer Majid Al Qassimi. From left: Finyal Media co-founder Mshari Al-Aly with CEO Leila Hamadeh Al-Aly and Chief People Officer Majid Al Qassimi.

Luxor African Film Festival to take place in March

Luxor African Film Festival [LAFF] President Sayed Fouad has announced that the tenth edition of the film festival will take place from March 12 to 18, 2021. Fouad underlined that the great Egyptian actor, Mahmoud Hamida, agreed to continue acting as the honorary president of the festival for its tenth edition, for the third year in a row. The festival will also pay tribute to actress Hend Sabri and director Ali Abdel Khalek.

Sharjah International film festival postponed to 2021

The Sharjah International Film Festival for Children and Youth (SIFF) has been postponed until next year, to protect public safety during the coronavirus pandemic. SIFF’s rise to prominence and success is due to the dedication of its founder, Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Abdullah Al Qasimi, Director of the Sharjah Film Laboratory, and to the strong support of theSharjah government.

AVITENG deploys hybrid baseband/IP architecture at ATV with AJA solutions

ATV, a part of Turkuvaz Media Group, worked with systems integrator AVITENG to deploy a new hybrid architecture to future-proof its broadcast workflows. The upgrade coincides with ATV’s move to a new consolidated facility. The hybrid systems features AJA solutions including Corvid and KONA I/O cards and AIA openGear-compatible converters used throughout its broadcast footprint and SMpte ST 2110-30 IP workflows. The Corvid and KONA cards provide interconnectivity between production servers, workstations as well as broadcast production and automation equipment. ATV’s news, ingest, playout and MAM automation are built on Chyego production workflow software, with flexible video and audio I/O powered by Corvid and KONA. For live broadcast graphics, Corvid and KONA are used as the hardware I/O solutions in conjunction with Ross XPression real-time graphics software. Corvid 441 LED BNC features four bidirectional 12G-SDI BNC connections for single-cable input and output of high-bandwidth content, including HFR, HDR and high raster video up to 8K. KONA I/O offers SMPTE ST 2110 I/O support up to 4K/UltraHD as ATv transitions to adoption of IP pipelines. ATV uses 15 OG-1080 HDMI region of interest scale converters and five OG-HA5-4K-HDMI 2.0 to 3G-SDI converters to transfer up to 4K/UltraHD incoming content from HDMI to 3G-SDI.

During the development of ATV’s new broadcast system, we provided AJA products because of versatility and seamless interoperability with software and hardware from other manufacturers. As broadcast standards evolve, AJA is also committed to upgrading its solutions to support the latest formats,” said Hanak Devecel, Managing Partner of AVITENG.

PRODUCTIONS IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

The Unified Venue Control System and the Observer Kit Source Solution bring the entire production for both the venue and the broadcast into a single, centralized environment.

Observation Room
- Control the entire game coverage, including graphics and replays, with a custom Dashboard Control panel
- Overlay real-time stats and information pulled directly from the game API using XPression Datracs

Primary Control Room
- Send player signals from the observer room to the primary control room to compose everything for the unified production
- Drive low-latency video and real-time, data-driven 3D graphics on every LED screen in venue as well as to the broadcast.
BKP KSA launches platform offering voice-over services in the Kingdom

BKP KSA has launched Saudi Voices, a first-of-its-kind platform in Saudi Arabia that offers voice-over services using the local accent for audio and video production. Saudi Voices offers a suite of voice-over services ranging from narration for TV, radio, and online marketing content to dubbing for international movies.

BKP KSA is a joint venture between communications consultancy network TRACCS and BKP Group, an audio, video, music and content production companies in the Middle East. BKP’s production facilities in Dubai and Riyadh offer a full range of digitally-focussed solutions for the audio-visual markets. Sarah Al Ayed, Chief Strategy Officer, TRACCS, said: “For over two decades, TRACCS has been committed to nurturing local talent, and the launch of Saudi Voices is a continuation of this legacy. Saudi Voices aims to discover and nurture the homegrown voice-over talent of all ages. The platform will connect artists directly with brands that seek to communicate with the Saudi audience using locally-focused content, enabling them to reach their target audience quickly and effectively.”

Al Ayed added: “Saudi Voices will also contribute to the growth of the creative economy by providing opportunities for local artists and advancing the voice-over industry in the Kingdom.”

Barry Kirsch, Chairman of BKP Group, remarked: “Saudi Voices will boost innovative economic sectors by creating opportunities for voice-over artists and enabling brands to connect to the Saudi audience in a deeper, more meaningful manner through locally relevant content. We look forward to bringing our integrated voice-over solutions to the Kingdom’s audio-visual and new media production markets.”

AMC Cinemas opens third KSA theatre at Saudi mall

AMC Cinemas has opened its third theatre in Saudi Arabia at Al Makan Mall in Hafr Al Batain city. The facility has eight screens and a total capacity of 850 seats. Every auditorium is fully equipped with a large screen, a 4K Barco laser projector, immersive sound with Luxe Recliner and Plush Rocker seating throughout. AMC Cinemas will also offer the Dolby Cinema experience in Saudi Arabia by the end of 2020. Dolby Cinema offers the ultra-wid picture of Dolby Vision and the immersive sound of Dolby Atmos.

James Murdoch exits News Corp board

James Murdoch, son of media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, who was openly critical of the coverage of various media outlets owned by News Corp, has resigned from the company. Murdoch cited ‘disagreements over certain editorial content’ for his resignation, although the exact nature of the disagreements was not revealed.

Egyptian horror feature Ammar now in post production

Egyptian horror-thriller film Ammar is now being edited for a 2020 theatrical release after a brief pause owing to the pandemic. Ammar revolves around a family that moves to the Gharibs’ castle as their new home. Their excitement soon wears off when the house swallows them one after the other, taking them to a horrifying world of past crimes that took place between its walls. Directed by Mahmoud Kamel, and co-written by Ahmed Al-Dahan and Haitham Al-Dahan, Ammar is produced by Nilewood and distributed in the Arab world by MAD Solutions.

James Murdoch exits News Corp board
Turkey’s Turkuvaz Media Group has invested in TSL Products’ audio monitoring, advanced broadcast control and technical display solutions to build a new media centre in Istanbul. Built with systems integrator Teratek, this project consolidates TMG’s distributed studios into one location to future-proof its capabilities for 4K broadcasting and create a scalable system for growth.

TSL’s TallyMan advanced control system offers a protocol library, allowing TMG to control many different devices without additional cost. The TallyMan is deployed in each of the 10 studios to control routing of Riedel MediorNet and Grass Valley Sirius, as well as controlling logo generator, keyer and bypass switch equipment. The system also manages and distributes tally across the entire TMG facility.

Using Dante, MADI, AES, analogue, SDI and ST-2110 audio formats in different applications, TMG requires audio monitoring solutions that guarantee content quality. TSL’s audio monitoring range provides support for multichannel audio level meter displays, audio loudness measurement and audio metadata monitoring. TMG has also invested in TSL’s FlashBoard technical display system, as well as PAM-IP and MPA1 Solo audio monitors, which integrate with the TallyMan system to display more detailed device information. TMG’s FlashBoard is used to distribute studio planning information and employee-related information.

The new project is built with systems integrator Teratek and consolidates TMG’s distribution studios into one location. The units will monitor audio quality and loudness of on-air feeds. Additionally, TSL’s MPA1 Solo audio monitors are designed for use where fast audio QC is needed. TMG will use the SDI and Dante variants across the studio control rooms to monitor audio mixer outputs and technical monitoring of the feeds.

“For studio applications, such as at TMG, requirements for operators and engineers can vary from show to show,” commented Daniel Shihata, Regional Sales manager for Europe at TSL Products. “With the need to monitor audio from a diverse range of devices, broadcasters require tools that offer quick and easy-to-use controls. At TSL, we remain focussed on delivering a level of technical excellence that will help make our customer’s workflows more efficient for years to come.”

Nearly all consumers tune into some form of video on their phones daily, with 87% of consumers watching more video on their smartphone than a year ago, according to a new study commissioned by Snap Inc. Premium mobile video now creates TV-like moments, powered by the intimacy of a smartphone, with 99% of consumers saying full length TV or video series are too much of a time commitment for their busy lives. 96% of those surveyed say video that fills the screen vertically feels more personal and 94% say it feels more immersive. Outpacing other markets, Saudi consumers are spending four hours and five minutes on their mobile phones for entertainment, compared to the average two hours spent watching TV per day. Hussein Freijeh, MENA Regional Director of Snap said: “We have seen a drastic shift in how people choose to communicate and consume media and mobile video has become at the forefront of storytelling. From brand communications to entertainment, digitally native populations turn to mobile content to connect with their favourite brands and to stay abreast of what’s happening in the world around them.”
PROMARS

THE POWER OF HOPE

The UAE created history on July 20 when the nation initiated the first Arab space mission to Mars with the launch of the Hope probe.

A few entities were involved in covering the mission from various aspects. Dubai-based Media971’s Managing Partner and co-founder Paul Mongey recounts his experience covering the event with the BBC.

Paul Mongey, a reputed DoP has used his Sony F55 kit on previous BBC shoots in the UAE, but decided it was time to try his new Sony PXW-FX9 with a recently purchased Wooden Camera v-lock adaptor, and his Dynacore 220W battery to ensure the camera would run all day.

“We shot an interview with Omran Sharaf, the EMM Project Director about the upcoming mission. We also filmed around the MBRSC site, the master control centre and the cleanroom where the Hope spacecraft was assembled. We had a great camera to cover this story. Following the first shoot at the Space Centre, we edited remotely at the Media971 edit suite with the correspondent filling his voice track from the BBC’s office in Dubai Media City.”

Rough edits were shared over Whatsapp and email before finalising the version for broadcast on BBC World.

Leading up to the live launch coverage, Mongey says one of his big tech choices was the LiveU encoder.

“In all, we probably did ten hits and a 15-minute feed playing the Mission Control and press conference footage captured earlier directly from the FX9 via the LIVEU 600 encoder into the BBC servers”

Paul Mongey, Managing Partner and co-founder, Media971

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In the meantime, with adverse weather conditions in Japan delaying the launch of the Hope probe from July 14th to the 20th from Tanegashima island, the team had to rebroadcast the Live U1,600 unit.

Dusan Sharaf, EMM Project Director talks about the mission.

“I decided to get to MBRSC a couple of hours early to set up a good live position; in other words, one with a good back drop and close to both mains power and an audio out feed in the press centre. I knew we were in for the long haul, with the launch planned for just before 2am UAE time. And I decided to also bring some additional large 230watt v-lock batteries for the Lite Panel ‘Astro 6x’ lights, just in case.

“Due to social distancing, only 79 journalists could attend the launch coverage at the press centre. We were told each of the newswatching teams were allowed only two people. So, the BBC’s Dubai-based correspondent and I attended.

During the set up, I called MCR and connected the LU600 with their LU2000 receiver. We were able to conduct a test live down the line including the audio return set up for the correspondent via my ‘old’ on-air IFB boxes. We set up the kit, connected the LU600 to conduct several live ‘two ways‘ directly into BBC World and the BBC’s 24-hour news channel. All went well.

“Earlier in the evening, while the correspondent was filing some audio links for radio, I went back over the mission control building to film additional elements for our second news package and

The UAE leadership has, in recent years, invested heavily in a host of space programmes, of which the key ones are the Emirates Mars Mission, sending Emirati astronauts to space and building a human colony on Mars by 2112. The Emirates Mars Mission is the Arab world’s first interplanetary voyage and was launched as part of the UAE’s objective to provide a complete picture of the Red Planet’s atmosphere.

As part of this mission, the Hope spacecraft, also called Al-Amal in Arabic, will travel 493 million kilometres over a period of seven months before it reaches Mars in February 2021, marking the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE. The probe will spend two years orbiting the Red Planet conducting research into seasonal weather patterns in different regions and weather events in the lower atmosphere of Mars, such as very large dust storms.

The UAE launched its first satellite back in 2009 and in 2014, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai initiated the Emirates Mars Mission.

There was a three-week launch window between late July and mid August, when the Earth and Mars were at their closest, with a seven-month journey ahead of the spacecraft. If the mission missed its scheduled launch slot, the Hope probe would have had to wait another 26 months for the next opportunity in 2024.

A couple of weeks before the launch, Media971’s co-founder and Managing Partner Paul Mongey visited the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) in Dubai to cover the event with the BBC. Mongey, a reputed DoP

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B-Roll for the live hits. During the fifteen-minute slot, I captured a selection of shoots to tell the story of the EMM engineering teams awaiting the launch to the viewers back in the UK. Mongey had pre-booked 10Gb of data on four internal SIM modems and set the encoding at 5mbps. “During the coverage, however, we used just under 5Gb of data through the evening/early morning live hits back to London. In all, we probably did ten hits and a 15-minute feed playing the Mission Control and press conference footage captured earlier directly from the FX9 via the LiveU 600 encoder into the BBC servers.”

The Hope probe will enter Mars’ orbit next February, where all communication data will take thirteen minutes each way. Following this project and his success with the LiveU unit, Mongey has purchased a LiveU LU300 portable live encoder unit for future jobs.

Media971 FZ llc, which has been in Dubai for eight years, is now looking to set up an office in London at the end of the year.

Media Mania OB truck covers Mars mission with FOR-A equipment

UAE-based production facility and broadcast service company Media Mania provided the OB truck for the coverage of the Emirates Mars Mission. A host of FOR-A broadcast video and audio equipment played an essential role in covering the launch.

FOR-A gear included the HVS-2000 3 M/E 3G/HD/SD video switchers, MY-4200 multi-viewers, MFR-5000 Series routing switchers, and FA Series multi-purpose signal processors. FOR-A’s Gear Link virtual control software and TALM tally manager system were used for production control of the Mars mission. Several FOR-A FA-505 and FA-1010 multi-purpose signal processors on board the OB2 provided frame synchronisation of feeds which were delivered all over the world.

“This was a historic event, and we didn’t want to miss any detail or lose the signal at any point,” commented Roland Daou, Managing Director of Media Mania. “We set out to capture this launch with the highest possible quality while staying out of the way of the engineers and mission crew, which was particularly challenging, given current distancing requirements. We needed to run and install a lot of cables and remote cameras in the UAE control room to keep our crew to a minimum. We knew this coverage had to be nothing less than perfect.”

Media Mania, which has a long-standing relationship with FOR-A, was confident of its equipment. “With OB trucks, you need to select the gear with the most function, best reputation, and smallest footprint. FOR-A is known for their technology and after-sales support,” added Daou.

The UAE’s Hope probe is the first of three international missions to Mars. The US and China have also joined the race with the Perseverance rover (launched on July 30) and Tianwen 1 (launched on July 23) respectively.
When MBC Group’s OTT platform Shahid beefed up its content portfolio earlier this year to coincide with its relaunch, the streaming service also anticipated a huge spike in traffic and subscription uptake, both of which pushed the deployment of a private CDN to the forefront.

In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, Shahid CTO Dominic Farrell and Head of Digital Infrastructure Adriaan Bloem talk about the context that led to the recent installation and what it will mean for the streaming service in the months to come.

“Shahid has been MBC Group’s blue-eyed star in recent months with the broadcast network’s CEO Marc Antoine d’Halluin announcing at the platform’s relaunch in January 2020 that if the company had invested $1.3bn in the streaming service over the last ten years in acquiring and producing approximately 46,000 hours of Arabic-language entertainment content and 20,000 hours of TV series, it had plans to double that spend within the next couple of years. The new and revised platform includes a host of Shahid Originals, new drama series and other exclusive content. More recently, it became the first SVOD service to offer exclusive Arabic-language blockbusters prior to their theatrical release.

All of this content addition, a brand-new interface and the relaunch has dramatically increased Shahid’s subscription base – which has meant ensuring that its content distribution network (CDN) remains equally robust to deal with the traffic while offering its viewers a superlative viewing experience. To ensure that, MBC Group recently completed the addition of a private CDN to its existing multi-CDN setup.

Dominic Farrell, Shahid’s Chief Technology Officer says MBC Group is constantly monitoring and evaluating options to improve the quality of the service it offers users. “With the arrival of global streaming giants into the region, relatively small problems become magnified: if a specific buffering issue affects 1% of our users, that’s still hundreds of thousands of people impacted. And with paying subscribers, there is a very direct link to satisfaction and therefore our revenues. They rightfully expect to receive perfect HD streams without issues, and it’s our job to do everything we can to make that happen,” explains Farrell.

Adriaan Bloem, Head of Digital Infrastructure at Shahid who initiated and oversaw the whole project, alongside MBC’s DevOps manager, who ran the PoCs; and the Media Engineering lead, who set up the routing and runs the operations, explains why the team chose a private CDN this time.

“Delivering reliable video streams to end users in this region is still quite challenging. In Europe and the US, it is basically a solved problem. You contract it to a good CDN, negotiate a good price and your video will work as intended.”
In emerging markets like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the landscape is much more heterogeneous. Most of North Africa has no dedicated CDN nodes from any of the major suppliers and the quality of home internet connections ranges from pretty-low bandwidth in Egypt, to the high-speed, high-quality fibre we get in the UAE. This takes constant tweaking and chasing CDNs and ISPs and challenging them to improve the delivery.

An additional CDN has long been in the planning phase, explains Bloem. In fact, the team ran its first POC with Equinix five years ago, with the prototype built by MBC’s DevOps team in Jordan. Although it proved the concept would work, it was not urgent enough for the team to properly resource it at the time. The relaunch of Shahid in January 2020, and the apps that were built ground-up in-house were the kind of things they wanted to get out fast, he elaborates. Hence, there was a long waiting period before the CDN was deployed.

MBC has had a multi-CDN ecosystem since 2013 with all the usual suspects like Akamai, CenturyLink, Lumen, Microsoft and AWS CloudFront primarily “because it is the only way to fill in the gaps between the different suppliers and their regional coverage”, says Bloem.

“We’ve used various different tools to switch to the right CDN for the right location and time, including our own APIs,” he adds. The private CDN is operated by Medianova as a managed service and this addition will help MBC provide much better video delivery. Medianova’s CEO Serkan Sevim steps in to explain that while 80% of content today is delivered with a multi-CDN approach making it the industry standard, “a private CDN should be one of the important delivery points for OTT”.

“A private CDN PoP provides more control, better quality by not fighting for the cache space, and more agility by letting you run your own microservices at the edge,” says Sevim.

“While we recommend that clients keep the existing multi-CDN architecture in place, we explain that a private CDN platform improves the quality of content delivered in the region and offers greater control on where to cache their valuable content. This platform can also be considered as a private cloud at the edge where OTT providers can run their own microservices such as packaging, DRM, real-time data analysis or machine learning applications. This way, the key data and operations stay in the region without going back and forth to Europe or other locations,” he elaborates.

For MBC, which has a relatively low priority it deserves,” explains Bloem. “That objective is not always aligned with the priorities of global CDNs that need to satisfy multiple customers,” he points.

“Crucially, our library is enormous; we have much more content available than some well-known global streamers. That ‘long tail’ of content is much harder to deal with, because the number of plays on an asset may be relatively low; an ‘out-of-the-box’ CDN would de-prioritise that content and wouldn’t keep it in the cache very long. So, every time it gets played, it is like it’s being played for the first time. This offers a terrible user experience. Having our own CDN allows us to set the rules, and our VIP library gets the priority it deserves,” explains Bloem.

Sevim seconds this. Besides

**MBC is constantly evaluating its options in order to improve the quality of its service for users, says Farrell.**

The Shahid team at their new offices in Dubai with a boxed seating area specially designed for events
The revamped version of Shahid has a redesigned UI and includes a host of Originals, new drama series and other exclusive content.

It is this search for greater control and a more stable service that has the kind of traffic Shahid has," explains Bloem.

Perhaps what is unique about Medianova is that it is customised in terms of cache rules and where its deployed, “without us immediately having to master all of the details of how to make it work”, explains Bloem.

“We compete on video quality with a company like Netflix, but they have years of experience with this already and probably about a dozen people dedicated to their OpenConnect CDN for MENA alone. With the enormous growth of our traffic, this allows us to catch up with that, and do better than our competitors.”

Of course, it is not without its technical challenges but the Shahid team is gradually building its internal expertise.

“We have very competent teams – particularly our DevOps and Media Engineering teams.

“For instance, I discovered that even in Greenland, we have a few hundred Shahid users. It will not make sense for us to deploy a CDN node there. The plan, therefore, is to focus on our core volume markets, such as KSA and Egypt, and get good coverage with the ISPs.”

But running a CDN requires very specific skills especially with regards to routing – something that not many people outside of a telco environment have much experience with,” Adriaan Bloem, Head of Digital Infrastructure, Shahid

The fact that global CDNs may not have enough POPs to support an entertainment provider’s specific target market, existing POPs may also have old and slow equipment with not enough cache, and CDNs may not necessarily have all the features that a user needs, he points out.

“One CDN could be great at image or video optimisation features but not so great on latency. Another could have good latency but not so great on control, and a more stable service to ensure a stable service, but it requires for the agile world. So, we have flexibility on integrations and PoPs that building out their own CDN would require a very specialised skillset. It would take time to build this in-house and would also mean dealing with a lot of hardware again.

“Shahid is very much based on a cloud-native infrastructure,” explains Bloem. “Working with hardware again would mean taking a step back into the past and we didn’t necessarily want to take that on ourselves. So we looked at how we could be able to build this ourselves (for instance using Medianova or nginx). We also had a look at specialist companies that could, at least partly, run it for us. Medianova stood out because they’re familiar with the region and have the experience to do this.”

Having had a multi-CDN setup since 2013, adding one more to the existing ecosystem didn’t seem a Herculean task, Bloem says.

“You add it to the load balancers and monitoring, and then jump immediately into analysis and tweaking, which are the operational concerns of maintaining a solid QoS across the various channels,” he elaborates.

MBC had the new CDN up and running in a few months.

“The main delay was because we were also simultaneously dealing with a massive increase in traffic on Shahid before Ramadan. It’s running in production with several ISPs peered through the UAE-IX internet exchange here in Dubai now, and we’re slowly ramping up traffic. It’s in production now and we’re expanding the coverage. Then we’ll start on the second phase expanding into other exchanges as well as moving on-net with individual ISPs, which is almost inevitable with a service that has the kind of traffic Shahid has,” explains Bloem.

For consumers, the addition of a CDN will reduce the video start-up time. The time it takes from when a user clicks play, and the first frame of the video is shown will be hugely improved. There will be reduced buffering, and a huge improvement in the bitrate rates get.

“This will especially be visible on big screen TVs,” explains Bloem.

“Shahid is very much based on a streaming service that has the kind of traffic which is almost inevitable with a telco environment. We have very competent teams – particularly our DevOps and Media Engineering teams.

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Adriaan Bloem, Head of Digital Infrastructure, Shahid

But the team has no plans to stop there. With the aim to conquer the region’s streaming market if not global just yet, Bloem says the team has the Maghreb and Levant on its radar next.

“For that, we will likely take increasingly more control of the infrastructure,” he says.
African films are now reaching more homes globally thanks to the ubiquitous power of OTT to bring their stories to the world. Canon, which has actively endeavoured to bring some of those voices to the forefront through local collaboration, recently brought together two filmmakers as part of a webinar to briefly discuss their ecosystem and their choice of technologies in making films. We bring you a report

Canon hosted a virtual press conference and webinar last month for the central and North African market to kickstart Canon Tech Talk, a series of 42 free-to-attend webinars and online workshops aimed at educating film aspirants and camera enthusiasts to maximise the potential of their equipment while also learning more about specific technical aspects such as codecs, colour grading and editing in post among others.

The panel, which included celebrated Nigerian producer-director Kunle Afolayan, Algerian cinematographer Hammoudi Laggoune, and Amine Djouahra, Sales and Marketing Director, CCNA, was moderated by BroadcastPro ME Editor Vijaya Cherian. Afolayan and Laggoune enjoy a good reputation in the African film industry and both have a number of award-winning films that make them notable artists in their respective countries.

Afolayan, who started his production house Golden Effect Pictures in 2005, is renowned in Nollywood for releasing a number of stellar productions. His film *The Figurine* won five major awards in the African Film Academy and more recently, he made headlines when his feature *Mokalik* was acquired by Netflix. His much-anticipated feature *Citation* is currently in post-production.

One element that makes Afolayan critical to this discussion is the fact that he takes a keen interest in the technology that is used in his productions and has often had a say in the use of cameras and lenses as well as editing for his productions. While his firm has invested in a number of different high-end cameras, Afolayan claims he has a special affinity for Canon technologies.

“In 2018, when we wanted to shoot *Mokalik*, I wanted a light-weight camera that could give me a specific look and feel with high contrast and we felt the C300 would be perfectly suited for that. *Mokalik* was a success story and got acquired by Netflix. Back then, we used a new set of EF-mount prime lenses from Canon. At IBC last year, I saw the C500 and the C700, but I didn’t think I was ready for the C700 primarily because of its size. It’s at the show that I also saw the Sumire Prime series lenses and with the C500, you can easily change the mounts on the go. I recommended the C500 to Jonathan Kovel, the DoP on *Citation* and we are really impressed with what we captured.”

The filmmaker says the decision to invest in a camera is often driven by resolution demands in the market, versatility in both production and post, budget and most importantly, the local support.

“Five to six years back, my films were shot on 2K and then, 1080. Today, it’s mostly 4K because that’s what Netflix demands for its Originals and it works perfectly for theatrical releases as well. With Citation, we decided to go with UHD keeping the Netflix prerequisites in mind. The C500 gave us the opportunity to shoot in 6K and it was pretty
“Today, everyone is aspiring to make it to the cinema or creating productions for YouTube and Netflix”

Kunle Afolayan, Nigerian producer-director

easy to edit that footage in proxy and then syn it back down and convert it to the resolution we wanted.”

The Nigerian filmmaker was so impressed with the C500 that he invested in one recently along with the Samvio prime lenses.

“We now have a number of projects lined up from 2020 and the great thing is that I can match this with my C200. There are plans to get one more Canon because we may be doing a lot of big shoots that will require a multiple-camera setup. I've tested it and I really like the end result.”

Afolayan belongs to a new generation of Nigerian filmmakers and a new age of production, where theatrical releases, streaming services and YouTube have taken precedence over older methods of film entertainment such as DVDs.

There was a time when the Nigerian film industry, for instance, used to produce more than 700 films a year. Afolayan explains the reason for the proliferation.

“This is true for the time when we had the DVD boom. Back then, the DVD distributors would commission most of the films and they were shot straight to video. The DVD market isn't as vibrant anymore, and so much more expensive.Canon, who offer good local support,” explains Afolayan.

“When you buy a camera from outside and have a problem with it, you have to ship it out and wait for it to be serviced. The wait is long, and your work is stalled and it’s so much more expensive. Canon came to the market with a local team on the ground, who were accessible, made us familiar with their products, ensured instant after-sales support and created workshops to train aspiring filmmakers.

All of that has had a huge impact on the local market,” he points out.

Afolayan cinematographer Hammoudi Laggoune, agrees.

Laggoune has worked on several critically acclaimed films, including Khoufi al-Bahar, by Thierno Moutar, selected in 2015 for screening at Cannes and Detroit Wale, directed by Merzak Allouache in 2018, and selected for TIFF. Allouache is one of the most recognised faces in Algeria's film history. Laggoune has collaborated with Allouache on other films as well including Women in Motion, Autumn Landscape and more recently, Une Famille, which is presently in post-production.

The Algerian filmmaker was with the C500. We found it and we really like the end result.”

Amine Djouahra, Sales and Marketing Director, CNDA.

Canon presently has six offices in Africa, that it has so many different cultures, whether it is Morocco, Egypt, Algeria or Nigeria, that it has so many different stories to tell and truly needs that kind of support,” says Amine Djouahra, who doesn’t just represent Canon but is also an industry veteran when it comes to Africa.

Canon has collaborated extensively with freelancers, production houses and commercial offices. Canon, as a brand, has always advocated developing knowledge and transferring that to customers in each market. If they are going to buy our devices, we want to ensure they can take 100% advantage of it. This made us think about how we can extend our partnership to enable users to have knowledge of the product and get the best out of it. We do that through the Canon Academy and various workshops.”

When the coronavirus outbreak brought in person training sessions to a halt, Canon moved to the web with its Tech Talk series, an initiative aimed at reaching out to aspiring filmmakers and camera enthusiasts as the next step in its African journey.

“With Canon Tech Talk, we bring tech experts, ambassadors, international and African influencers, to share their experiences about shooting or how to enhance your capabilities in various technical areas of production. The webinars are held in French, Arabic or English and sessions are also recorded so end users can revisit training sessions in the future.”

This is typically Canon’s journey. This is how we want to support creators with the tools and knowledge and transferring that to customers in each market. If they are going to buy our devices, we want to ensure they can take 100% advantage of it. This made us think about how we can extend our partnership to enable users to have knowledge of the product and get the best out of it. We do that through the Canon Academy and various workshops.”

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The Canon Tech Talk series will continue until the end of November.
There has been a reluctance among many traditional broadcasters to move to IP workflows. The associated cost, the learning curve, a move into unknown territory and several other factors have contributed to the fear and reluctance to take that step. But the global pandemic, which forced people out of their offices spaces, has compelled broadcasters to revisit their attitude to IP.

According to Kieran Kunhya, Managing Director, Open Broadcast Systems, the biggest barrier to IP adoption has been the feeling among traditional broadcasters that “migrating to IP means a drop-in quality and a rise in latency”.

“This is simply not the case but many in this industry believe that,” he says.

Tim Burton, Managing Director of 7fivefive also believes mandates have played a big role in deterring broadcasters from taking that step.

“When broadcasters start looking at IP, they often assume that it will mean a massive undertaking to change the infrastructure. That often plays a part in delaying projects from migrating to an IP-based workflow or planning extremely long-term projects.”

That is not to say that there haven’t been some interesting examples of broadcasters using IP to good effect prior to the coronavirus pandemic. Examples include live boxing, and Atlantic Cup football. In the Middle East, Prolane is delivering a managed service to enable IP contribution and distribution using the Reliable Internet Stream Transport (RIST) protocol. However, it is still mainly the domain of niche video content or as a backup for mainstream programming.

While many other broadcasters have IP firmly in their plans, Chris Clarke, CEO of Coburn, points out that “often, IP is part of a very long-term roadmap for many of the more traditional broadcasters and content providers”.

“Rather than looking at it as something they can switch over quickly, it has been seen as several years down the line.”

Of course, one of the other barriers to IP adoption has been the stability of internet connectivity. In many areas of the world, internet is simply not reliable, and it varies from region to region. Kunhya points out that the Middle East is an example of a challenging region for delivery of video content using IP.

“Not all countries across the Middle East have stable and reliable internet connectivity, which could lead to a drop in signal quality if left unchecked,” he explains.

Producing Content with Social Distancing Measures

With social distancing rules still enforced, and in the vast majority of cases, people still staying at home, 7fivefive’s Burton says: “In the last couple of months, the global events have undeniably made it challenging to produce live content. However, that has led to a total change in mindset. Whereas before, a live show would require everyone to come to a facility, now broadcasters are having to find innovative ways around that.”

Clarke seconds this, adding that live sport has been one of the worst affected areas within broadcast.

“When major sporting events were cancelled, we saw smaller sporting events filling that content gap. This meant those sports providers suddenly had to figure out how to reach big, global audiences. Sporting events and sports broadcasters will now be compelled to be innovative with the type of content they can create in such a situation does not shut them down again.”

There have been some great examples of that innovation. Formula 1, for example organised an esports race featuring a mixture of Formula 1 drivers and other celebrities. Whilst it won’t replace the real race, it did help to keep some level of fan engagement while races were cancelled. A lot of broadcasters have been digging through the archives to find pivotal moments for highlight reels. This includes rare footage found of an F1 World Championship race from 1950.

One of the most significant examples of that has to be the One World: Together at Home broadcast, which saw artists from across the world filling themselves performing in their own homes now,” says Kunhya.

“The way in which live content is produced changed in no time at all. All sorts of broadcasting content, from news reports to entertainment, are being filmed in people’s own homes now.”

“More time spent at home inevitably means more time spent viewing content. At the same time, consumers are fickle and will quickly cancel subscriptions if their content demands are not being met adequately. VOIP content fills a gap but there will always be a strong appetite for live content. Anything that can be created virtually or shot from home will be important to fill that gap and keep those viewers satisfied.”

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homes. It saw bands doing collaborative performances despite all being in separate locations.”

**IP During the Crisis**

With broadcasters facing the need to continue content production while observing social distancing guidelines, IP has a massive part to play.

As Kunhya highlights: “Obviously, it would not be practical to run dedicated broadcast fibre links to every presenter’s home, but IP means you don’t have to. By implementing IP contribution workflows, broadcasters have been able to enable their staff to create video from literally anywhere.”

This is a view shared by Clarke. “The crisis has forced many traditional broadcasters to turn to IP and cloud workflows from production right through to delivery. They are also having to adapt extremely fast. We are seeing many cloud tools offering free access, credits, and/or tutorials to help make that transition quick and seamless and that is certainly making a massive difference for broadcasters to take that leap.”

However, Burton warns that “the biggest challenge right now is for those broadcasters that have legacy platforms and have not invested time and money in modernising them over the years.”

“It is having to adapt fast but that means they are not building on a solid base; instead, they are having to adapt a very different infrastructure to work with IP and remote workflows. Inevitably, something will be missing. Prior to social distancing, access to the studio and on-premise infrastructure was unlikely to be an issue and broadcasters would generally take the approach of gradually modernising infrastructures over a long period of time. This crisis forced many to get on board very quickly with a whole new way of working.”

Clarke agrees: “Right now, there is a certain amount of ‘sticky tape’ approach to IP adoption. Broadcasters should be using this time to consider their future roadmaps and begin scoping out the tools and processes they need to help them get there. This means that when live events pick back up again, they are ready to run with new, more efficient and robust tools and processes already developed and in place.”

**The Future of IP**

“Obviously, this crisis has brought the value of IP to the fore. “This period will help prove the untapped potential of what IP can do, together with demonstrating its flexibility, adaptability, and cost-efficiency. Once broadcasters realise the potential of IP, they are unlikely to go back to more unwieldy and expensive options,” comments Clarke.

Burton also believes that IP will become more widespread. “This crisis has forced media companies to adapt their infrastructures to enable IP contribution and distribution. As that was previously one of the biggest barriers to IP adoption, I think it is likely the transition will happen naturally now. It will no longer be a massive undertaking that is looming, but something that is already operational and can simply be tweaked to suit where needed.”

Kunhya comments: “We have been saying for a long time that the tools are already available to enable reliable IP contribution and distribution. Technology such as the RIST (Reliable Internet Stream Transport) protocol even makes it possible to deliver video over unstable internet connections without losing quality. Now that broadcasters are experiencing that first-hand, they will much more likely see it as a viable alternative for the future, even when other methods become accessible again.”

However, broadcasting needs to change to adapt to this new normal. “Conventional broadcasting will have to become more flexible to incorporate this new approach. I believe this crisis has taught us that content is king, not the technical delivery,” concludes Burton.

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**Middle East is a challenging region for video content delivery via IP, says Kieran Kunhya, MD of Open Broadcast Systems.**

Mindsets have played a big role in deterring broadcasters from IP adoption, says Tim Burton, MD of 7fivefive.
Saimanish Prabhakar, a recent high-school graduate from GEMS Metropole School, Dubai, has enjoyed great success with three of his short films in the festival circuit. Shifa Naseer catches up with the 17-year-old, whose latest film *Metanoia* won several awards at film festivals.

Saimanish Prabhakar, who hails from Chennai, India, is one of the youngest award-winning cinematographers in the industry today. Armed with several awards for his shorts even before he heads off to university, Prabhakar has already donned several hats as director, cinematographer and editor.

He has been involved in three award-winning films so far including two narrative shorts, *Flicker* (2019) and *Metanoia* (2020). He also collaborated with a friend on a third film, titled *Flux*. However, his most notable work to date is *Metanoia*, which won him multiple awards at international accredited film festivals such as Calcutta International Cult Film Festival and the Indie Short Fest at the Los Angeles International Film Festival.

Like many young “creators” today, Prabhakar began a vlog. Unfortunately, this led to him being bullied by fellow students. Instead of letting the situation deter him, it made him more determined to pursue his hobby in a professional manner. Thus, began his filmmaking journey.

“I started making vlogs back in 2016 but when kids around started bullying me and teasing me, I decided to pursue it professionally and prove people wrong. That’s when I began learning how to use professional software like Premiere Pro and KHDA-approved certificates.”

Social issues have, thus far, dominated the theme of his films.

“I’ve watched many films with linear storylines with romance or action in focus. I don’t have anything against that format, but I feel that if cinema has the power to be more than that, I must exploit it to reach a wider audience with a message. This is what inspired me to become a filmmaker.”

Hence, the tagline for his projects is “Films created with purpose”. “For me, the tagline means that by the end of the film, my audience goes home with a meaningful message and applies it to their lives like in *Metanoia*. The film talks about how it is not necessary to donate millions of dollars to save the environment. Small steps matter like not using single-use plastic.”

*Metanoia* follows a young boy and his journey in understanding the impact of individual actions on the environment. “The film shows a boy from a low-income family change his perspective towards protecting the environment. He changes his lifestyle by the end of the film,” says Prabhakar.

Prabhakar came up with the idea for the film with his mother and the film was shot last year in July at two locations, Chennai and Dubai.

“The part in Dubai was shot with the help of my classmates who acted in the film and the rest was shot in Chennai. We went to India for just seven days with no plan of action. We did not have any cast or crew,” says Prabhakar.

“There is a small residential colony near my aunt’s house in Chennai. We approached the people there and talked to them for the scenes. We shot a majority of the scenes in Chennai, India, and chose people from the local community to ensure authenticity.”

For *Metanoia*, Prabhakar shot a majority of the scenes in Chennai, India, and chose people from the local community to ensure authenticity.
them about my film. We asked if we could have their kids act in the film as I wanted people with an authentic local experience to depict the issue at hand. I wanted to capture the character’s innocence.”

Eleven-year-old Naveen Kumar from the locality was finally cast as the protagonist in Metanoia. “He is a really happy kid and it was great working with him,” says Prabhakar.

The shoot in India was concluded in August last year while the scenes in Dubai were shot much later.

Perhaps one area that was particularly challenging for Prabhakar was sound. “Editing took really long as I had to include sound to the film and add several layers. It was also my first time doing it. We didn’t record any sound and it was really important to the film. I had to add the sound of waves while showing the beach, the sound of birds if they were visible in the shot and so on. It is the small details that took time. I completed the film by January. My music teacher Lambert composed the music for the film.

“It was all very spontaneous. We were making it as we went along. Usually, I like to pre-plan my films, but this was a different experience,” remarks Prabhakar.

Metanoia was released in January this year to international festivals. “The first festival that got back to me was the Calcutta International Cult Film Festival where Metanoia was screened. I also received positive feedback from the Tagore Film Festival.”

Bullying is another theme Prabhakar explores in his film Flicker (2019). “I have a lot of authentic stories to share especially the ones that are not shown often like mental health. Flicker shows exactly that and is based on how people live out their lives based on the opinions of other people. I wanted to share my honest opinions and perspectives on the issue,” he says.

Flicker was shot around November 2018. Except for one scene, the rest of the film was shot at Gแนว Metropole School, where Prabhakar studied. The film is about a kid who is into acting but gets bullied by his classmates.

“My school was pretty cooperative for the project. My classmates stayed back after school hours with me and our team used the school premises for the film. The film shows how bullied people stop doing what they love because of the traumatic experience of being made fun of. I have experienced bullying as well. The lead character also goes through that trauma.”

The team for the film included Prabhakar, two writers, actors and a few extras. Flicker was shot and ready within two months. “That was my first experience shooting a film with an actual team. As a director, it is very important to have clarity. If that is missing, then everything stops.”

Explaining the process of shooting, Prabhakar says: “There were lots of days when I would wake up at 6 am, finish school by 3 pm and work on the film until 7 pm. It was very strenuous, but it was all worth it.”

In 2019, the film was officially selected for a film festival in Australia and was screened at a cinema in Melbourne. “I was over the Moon. Flicker will always be close to my heart because it opened doors for me and was a big learning curve.”

Both Metanoia and Flicker are passion projects and funded by Prabhakar’s parents. He does not have a fixed team in place but takes guidance from his mother, who is a teacher, in researching possible topics to depict in his projects.

Prabhakar is very fortunate to own most of the gear he uses for shooting. “My parents invested in the gear which has been accumulated over a period of three years. I have a Canon 70D. I use that to shoot my films.” He adds: “I have tested more expensive cameras, but I am not in a position to buy expensive gear myself. However, my priority is light and sound gear for a smooth visual and audio experience.”

“I would not be where I am if it was not for this country, giving me a platform to work towards my passion.”

“Flicker is a film that will always be close to my heart. It opened doors for me and was a big learning curve”

Saimanish Prabhakar, filmmaker

“My priority is light and sound gear for a smooth visual and audio experience. I might not have the best cinema camera, but I do want to get the details right like lighting, and audio.”

Prabhakar is currently working on a TV show script with his classmates since quarantine has limited everyone to their houses with ample time at hand. “It’s a fun concept. I have a feeling that whatever genre I get into, I will somehow link it back to a social issue because that’s just me. That is my forte. I am also working on a short film script.”

He reiterates that “social issues are the most relatable topics”. “For now, most of my work subconsciously relates to a social issue. I target different spectrums of social issues.”

But someday, the young filmmaker hopes to script a sitcom.

When asked about his experience as a filmmaker in Dubai, Prabhakar says the city offers opportunities and the freedom to realise your dreams. “There are plenty of opportunities in the UAE. Dubai, especially, is the perfect place to create good films and get recognition for it. There are many platforms and locations where you can go out and shoot. The convenience of going out, filming, lenient rules and easy permissions make it a lot easier.”

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Lawo has announced new software with additional options, functionality and security features for its radio mixing consoles, RAVENNA/AES67 mixing engines, and VisTool GUI Builder software.

The first feature introduced with Radio Software v6.6 is a new license package for Lawo’s Power Core DSP mixing/routing engine: the Power Core EDGE. This license provides an entry-level configuration designed for deployment as a high-capacity audio gateway, where mixing surface control is not required. It is designed for NOC and TOC installations where audio ingest is needed, or for large-scale conversion of legacy baseband signals to AES67 networking. Power Core EDGE license supports two MADI interfaces with 128 audio channels, and up to 64 RAVENNA/AES67 streams with a maximum channel count of 128. Power Core EDGE can be controlled with the Lawo VisTool user interface application, which supports as many as 128 patchable audio PPM. It can be controlled with KSC control panels, and the EMBER+ network protocol.

The software includes features such as a “Make before break” functionality for RAVENNA AES67 stream switching to mitigate audio interruptions during live switching of network audio streams. The camera head measures 100x128x90 mm WHD and weighs only 1.1kg. Digital zoom from 1.0x to 10x magnification can be combined with a 0.7x to 6x optical zoom lens to achieve natural long-range wide-angle to close-up effects.

www.lawo.com

Ikegami promises flexibility with 4K HDR camera

Ikegami has launched the UHL-F4000 compact multi-role 4K HDR camera with very low power consumption. Designed for aerial video capture and studio robotics, the camera captures broadcast-quality colour video across different conditions.

Developed from Ikegami’s HDL-F3000, the UHL-F4000 is aimed at programme producers seeking to future-proof their work by mastering in 4K. The camera delivers HD cutout images as well as 2160p 59.94 or 50 Hz 4K. The image sensor unit uses three CMOS global shutter elements to avoid rolling shutter distortion even in aerial imaging applications where subjects are constantly moving in parallel. The camera head measures 100x128x90 mm WHD and weighs only 1.1kg. Digital zoom from 1.0x to 10x magnification can be combined with a 0.7x to 6x optical zoom lens to achieve natural long-range wide-angle to close-up effects.

www.ikegami.de

Let there be light with the new Astera NYX Bulb

Astera has launched its first colour-tuneable LED bulb called NYX Bulb for professional film, stage, and event productions. NYX Bulb, the same size as a standard LED bulb, comes complete with a CRMX receiver for wireless DMX, plus RF and Bluetooth modules for control via the Astera app on a smartphone or tablet.

It is designed for gaffers, DoPs, lighting and set designers, and visual artists. In addition to movie shoots and television studios, it is useful for theatrical sets, scenic elements on tour shows and live events. NYX Bulb can be powered via an E27 socket (E26 in the US version) or with a standard power bank. Its Titan LED engine delivers precise colours and authentic white tones with an ultra-high CRI and TLCI, while emitting 750 lumens and using only 10W of power.

www.astera-led.com
Synamedia Iris focusses on customised advertising

Synamedia has introduced a new addressable advertising solution called Iris for pay-TV, broadcasters, OTT, and hybrid service providers to help create compelling advertising propositions for specific TV audience segments. From a single platform, Iris looks to support unified campaign management, delivery, and measurement to multiple screens across apps and live, linear and catch-up services, overcoming one-way and hybrid broadcast/OTT challenges. This helps service providers and broadcasters to merchandise their inventory more efficiently while also minimising operational costs and boosting income. Combining the effective advertising screen available with digital campaigns, Iris hopes to provide cross-platform ad measurement to exploit all forms of video inventory in a single campaign. As a result, big brands and new advertisers can reach their target audiences cost effectively without wasting impressions, and consumers can enjoy a more relevant viewing experience, while service providers and broadcasters boost income.

Matrox offers Monarch Edge for remote production

Matrox has launched the Monarch Edge 4K/multi-HD encoder and decoder to enable remote production workflows. The solution promises to deliver low-latency 6:2:2 10-bit video at resolutions up to 3840x2160 or quad 1920x1080 over a standard one Gigabit Ethernet (GbE) network. Monarch Edge includes improved connectivity, like 12G-SDI and SMPTE ST 2110 over 25GbE connections, while supporting streaming protocols. It extends the production studio by transporting up to four synchronised HD/3G-SDI camera feeds or a single 12G-SDI signal with latencies as low as 100ms. Users can select between two encoder options: the 6:2:2 8-bit H.264 encoder version for programmes for web or OTT delivery, or the 4:2:2 10-bit H.264 encoder model for broadcast productions.

Chaos Group brings peace to artists with all-in-one V-Ray 5

The V-Ray 5 for 3ds Max from Chaos Group now gives artists and designers the choice to composite renders, enhance materials and interactively relight images without losing the programme.

Two of V-Ray 5’s big additions are Layer Compositing and Light Mix, which can be found in the new V-Ray Frame Buffer (VFB). With Light Mix, artists can explore different lighting scenarios without having to re-render an image. Users can adjust colour and intensity of any light source right away ensuring faster iterations when designing looks and moods.

The Layer Compositor offers a faster path to final images, helping users post-process shots in VFB without outside applications. Using this non-destructive workflow, artists can adjust different render elements and perform colour corrections with ease. V-Ray 5 adds seven features focused on materials, including a new management system and more than 500 ready-made materials designed to cover most objects and spaces. New built-in presets can help dial-in options like metal, glass and plastic, as well as common hair colours, helping artists achieve photorealism much faster. Its new randomisation tools enable artists to add variations to materials, increasing believability of a scene. V-Ray MultiSubTex colours can be shifted by hue, saturation and gamma, while a V-Ray UDF (randomize map) will adjust the offset, rotation and scale of textures and procedural materials. For repeating texture maps, artists have Stochastic Texture Tiling, which removes tiling artifacts.

Technology And Art Combined!

One of our latest projects. A 30 camera UHD/HDR OB van for a German customer. A good example that an OB van can be a perfect production tool and a piece of art at the same time. Looking forward to seeing this one on the road!
“Creating interactive content helps increase viewing times and even further data capture, while helping to influence how the rest of the consumer’s viewing experience will unfold”

Reviewing video content in the wake of Covid-19

The impact of the coronavirus has seen many TV networks brace themselves for a significant drop in advertising for the remainder of 2020 as brands reduce marketing budgets due to global lockdown measures. These changes have been alleviated by opportunities created from an increase in subscriptions to streaming and OTT services. A recent report from Nielsen stated that staying in our homes can lead to almost a 61% increase in the amount of content streamed via TV.

This probably serves as the perfect time to step back and evaluate the market because ultimately, broadcasters have to start drawing up long-term plans to navigate the ‘new normal’ left in the wake of the crisis.

Audience viewing habits

Audience viewing habits have changed significantly long before the Covid-19 outbreak. Research firm eMarketer predicted that the number of cord cutters in the US would increase to one fifth of households by 2021, and one fourth by the end of 2022. A recent report from Comcast said the average household is watching TV at least eight hours more per week. In early March 2020, audiences watched 57 hours of content per week, but this is now up to 66 hours a week and only continuing to grow. Interest in movies has also peaked, with the viewing of drama programmes increasing by 30%, followed by comedies at 18%, and drama programmes increasing by eight hours more per week. In early March 2020, audiences watched 57 hours of content per week, but this is now up to 66 hours a week and only continuing to grow. Interest in movies has also peaked, with the viewing of drama programmes increasing by 30%, followed by comedies at 18%, and drama programmes increasing by eight hours more per week.

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People want a more personalised service and those expectations have become more prevalent with viewers hunkering down with video content at home. Broadcasters need to take the initiative to gain an understanding of their individual viewers - there has never been a better time to harvest audience data than now. By analysing how long viewers watch for, the devices they use, where they choose to watch and what they watch next, broadcasters can draw a picture of individual viewing behaviours and preferences to unlock better experiences in the long term.

Making the most of data

Broadcasters can use data to review video content in the wake of coronavirus and ensure they are sharing relevant content with the right person, at the right time and on the right platform. There are several tools to help businesses process this data to help better understand consumer behaviour at an individual level and gain more value from their video content. Machine learning tools, for instance, can be trained to find patterns from historical data, predicting what content the consumer wants to consume next to help boost audience engagement in just a fraction of the time.

Once data has been gathered, broadcasters can create interactive content better aligned with the individual’s interests and viewing habits. Instead of a passive user experience, this type of content requires the person watching to take action, such as answer a question, vote in a poll or even make a purchase. Creating interactive content helps increase viewing times and even further data capture, while helping to influence how the rest of the consumer’s viewing experience will unfold.

Refining video content while consumers crave connections will help boost overall engagement and retention. A recent study reported that interactive content leads to an 87% increase in engagement, as the tailored messages are speaking one to one rather than one to many.

Finally, video must no longer be a one-way flow of information. Audiences should be able to engage with the broadcaster’s content and make watching active - it’s all about personalisation and interactive experiences.

Ian Sharpe is CEO of Prometheus TV.

Discover more at Shure.com/AD3

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