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Welcome

It's been 13 years since we launched the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards, and by God's grace we saw the event enjoy significant growth this year compared to previous editions. We had several firsts in the 13th edition, where we ventured out of our usual hotel space to the Dubai Knowledge Park Conference Centre, quite unsure of how it would impact attendance. Fortunately, attendance was back to pre-Covid numbers with a little under 300 attendees in the morning and a good 270-odd guests at the evening gala.

For the first time at the conference this year, we also attempted seven panel discussions instead of the traditional four, explored a fresh set of topics, took a few risks in terms of timing but managed to wrap the whole event up by 5pm.

Summaries of the discussions will be shared between this issue and the next, but what struck me the most was how the industry had matured in its discussions since those initial days, when CEOs of premium offerings were adamant they wouldn't lower prices but had no flexible options to attract new entry-level customers. I

recall most CEOs shaking their heads in the negative when the first discussions of potential collaboration took place at our conference.

At this year's summit, it appeared that all were working closely with each other, either formally or informally. In fact, Evison, a telco division, has gone so far as to take a telco-agnostic approach with regard to its media distribution and is working with multiple telco operators within the Arab world.

The gala awards in the evening celebrated a stellar mix of big and small innovators and disruptors from the content, sports, tech, OTT and broadcast spaces. We have compiled a whole section with this year's winners. We invite you to enjoy the photos, videos and discussions as well as highlights from the summit and awards on our website. It's a great prelude to the festive season. Have yourselves a merry Christmas and see you all in the New Year.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director



On this month's cover...

The winners of the 2023 ASBU BroadcastPro Awards.

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CULTIVATING ENGAGEMENT AND MONETISATION IN OTT



THE FUTURE OF CONTENT CREATION IN THE ARAB WORLD



GAME-CHANGING TRENDS IN SPORTS BROADCASTING



THE WINNERS OF THE 2023 ASBU BROADCASTPRO AWARDS



OSN+ and Anghami set to transform MENA entertainment with merger

OSN+ and music streaming platform Anghami Inc have signed a landmark deal to merge their businesses. The two local home-grown brands will provide consumers with a digital hub offering premium movies, TV shows, music and podcasts, ensuring an immersive and seamless user experience.

With OSN Group injecting a cash investment of up to \$50m into Anghami, the collaboration aims to unite more than 120m registered users and 2.5m paying subscribers, generating over \$100m in revenue at closing. This merger reportedly positions Anghami as one of the largest streaming platforms in the region, combining its extensive music catalogue with OSN+'s video content library and exclusive partnerships with global studios.

The new platform will leverage Anghami's tech stack and music catalogue alongside OSN+'s premium video content, delivering a unique streaming experience enhanced



by AI-driven hyper-personalisation tailored to user preferences.

Elie Habib, co-founder of Anghami and set to be the CEO of the combined business, said: "Joining forces with OSN+ is a leap in Anghami's journey to reinvent entertainment in the Arab world. We're combining technology, music and video to build a comprehensive media ecosystem. It's a chance to deepen

our connection with our users and to create something they will truly love."

Joe Kawkabani, CEO of OSN Group, added: "This is a major milestone in OSN's journey as we continue to scale up our streaming business. Combining OSN+ content with Anghami's technology enables us to deliver the best of entertainment all in one place for our customers, ensuring we are continuously evolving our offering to meet their needs."

Under the terms of the agreement, OSN Group will invest in Anghami at a valuation of \$3.65 per share, marking a 3.9x increase from the stock's average price over the past month. Anghami plans to maintain its listing on the Nasdaq Stock Market post-transaction. The deal is anticipated to close in Q1 2024, subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals, with OSN Group emerging as the majority stakeholder in Anghami Inc. OSN will continue its linear TV business, OSNtv, led by Joe Kawkabani as Group CEO.

Evision launches free streaming platform

Evision, the media and entertainment arm of e&, has launched its own free-to-watch streaming platform, Starz ON. This new platform aims to bring a diverse array of content, including regional, Hollywood, Bollywood, English, Arabic and French, as well as sports, to viewers for free.

Starz ON, a premier ad-supported video-on-demand (AVOD) and free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST) service, is now available to users in the MENA region and West Africa on Android and iOS devices. Subscribers have access to 50 FAST and linear channels without a subscription fee. Evision plans to expand its content library to offer more

than 25,000 hours of content and over 100 channels by 2024, making it available on all devices and smart TVs.

This new venture is part of Evision's long-term strategy to leverage cloud-based technologies and promote a digital lifestyle, enhancing the online content experience for users.

Khalifa Al Shamsi, CEO of e& life, said: "As e& transforms into a global technology group, e& life is championing a revolutionary AI-powered digital journey and we look forward to changing the landscape of the streaming industry with a positive impact on the communities we serve. Starz ON is poised to redefine the dynamics of regional



entertainment and become the gold standard in streaming."

Olivier Bramly, CEO of Evision, added: "Currently, the growth of video streaming in the MENA region is expected to proliferate over the next five years. Evision is bridging the content gap for a multilingual free ad-supported

platform in the MENA region. The new streaming platform will include AI-based recommendations to engage users and deliver relevant content to audiences to enhance their experience. Users will be segmented and targeted across different groups."

Viory inks multiple agreements with media companies

Viory, a video news agency representing the Global South, formally inked several agreements in Abu Dhabi last month. The agency signed multiple agreements, including a memorandum of cooperation with UNA (Union of OIC News Agencies) focusing on international news coverage and collaboration on events related to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and BRICS countries. This partnership involves joint projects



and knowledge sharing.

Viory also entered a content licensing partnership with CCTV (CCTV News Content Co), allowing

Viory clients access to CCTV's content. The agency also became a member of AUB (African Union of Broadcasting), committing to

training media professionals and contributing content to the AUBvision platform.

Gregoire Ndjaka, CEO of AUB, said: "We are proud to welcome Viory as a new member of the African Union of Broadcasting. It is very important and timely to welcome Viory, we need balanced information in Africa and we can see Viory as supporting the development of this. On behalf of all the members of the AUB, we wish Viory a welcome. Viory: you are at home in Africa."

Subhash Ghai's Mukta Arts to manage cinemas across KSA

Mukta Arts Ltd, led by Bollywood filmmaker Subhash Ghai, has inked a deal with Al-Othaim Investment Company of Saudi Arabia. The deal aims to establish and manage cinemas across the Kingdom, operating through Mukta A2 Multiplex WLL, its subsidiary in Bahrain. The partnership underscores the strategic alignment between Al-Othaim's real estate presence and Mukta A2 Cinemas' expertise spanning the entire movie exhibition business. The company currently oversees more than 100 screens through Mukta A2 Cinemas, Mukta A2 Multiplex and various joint ventures.

BeIN Sports marks World Cup anniversary with special coverage

In commemoration of the 2022 World Cup, beIN Sports is set to transport fans back in time with extensive month-long coverage starting November 20. This marks exactly 12 months since the tournament's kick-off, which saw Qatar facing Ecuador, and concluded with Lionel Messi leading Argentina to victory against France. The special broadcast will feature all 64 matches, replayed as-live and in their entirety, maintaining the original kick-off times from one year ago.



Al Arabiya Network launches new business service

Al Arabiya Network has launched Al Arabiya Business, a brand-new service dedicated to news and updates from the world of business and finance in response to the growing demand for real-time coverage of political events in the region. Al Arabiya Business is available for FTA broadcast and live streaming via Shahid, in addition to Al Arabiya Network's website and YouTube.

SRMG adds podcasts and radio station to Asharq News Network

SRMG has expanded its audio presence with the launch of new radio and podcast platforms Asharq Podcasts and Radio Asharq with Bloomberg. The new offerings are in response to the rapidly growing demand on audio platforms locally and regionally.

Asharq Podcasts seeks to introduce new and original content from nine different infotainment podcast programmes focused on business, tech, lifestyle and well-being, documentaries and



true stories, news and current affairs. It will also feature original podcasts exploring leading topics in Saudi Arabia

through a journalistic and creative storytelling lens. Radio Asharq with Bloomberg is dedicated

to the local Saudi market, covering the latest financial and business sector news, stock markets, trading and investment, banking services, personal finance and business development insights. Programming will also cover local news, tech and sports, among other things.

Asharq Podcasts is available on all major streaming platforms, including Apple Podcast, Spotify, YouTube, Anghami and Google Podcasts.

Manga Productions secures licensing deal for Japanese series

Manga Productions, a subsidiary of the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation Misk, has inked a strategic agreement with Japanese production company and studio Production I.G, in a significant move towards expanding its distribution and licensing portfolio. The collaboration focuses

on the licensing of the animated series *Great Pretender razbliuto*, slated for release in 2024. As part of this partnership, Manga Productions gains exclusive rights for distribution, licensing and marketing of the third season of the acclaimed animated series across the MENA region.



From left: George Wada, President and CEO of Production I.G, shakes hands with Dr Essam Bukhary, CEO of Manga Productions.

WAM and Fujairah Government Media Office forge media deal

The Emirates News Agency (WAM) and the Fujairah Government Media Office have entered into a Media Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) to collaborate and organise the upcoming Fujairah Media Forum, scheduled for February 2024 under the theme 'Parallel Media'. The deal aims to strengthen media collaboration between WAM and the media office, laying the groundwork for future joint endeavours in various media domains. According to the deal, WAM will extend media support for the forum. It will assign a dedicated team of editors and photographers to cover the forum's proceedings.

OSN+ and Google Cloud tie to integrate new GenAI solution

OSN+ has announced the integration of Google Cloud's Vertex AI Search for Media Recommendations, a next-gen large language model that builds on Google's research in ML and AI. This will empower subscribers to interact with their own virtual assistant, ensuring more accurate and personalised content recommendations. This agreement aims to offer OSN+ subscribers an enhanced and tailored content discovery journey.



Route any combination of SD, HD and Ultra HD at the same time!

Blackmagic Videohub 12G-SDI video routers let you connect all your equipment without creating a complex cable mess! Blackmagic Videohub routers support 12G-SDI so they allow you to connect and route any combination of SD, HD and Ultra HD on the same router at the same time. Plus they have zero latency so are perfect for live production and broadcast!

Advanced 12G-SDI for SD, HD and Ultra HD Routing

Blackmagic Videohub 12G features advanced 12G-SDI connections which are multi rate so they support any SD, HD and Ultra HD video format up to 2160p60. Plus Blackmagic Videohub 12G supports routing any video standard on the same router at the same time. 12G-SDI gives you high frame rate Ultra HD via a single BNC connection that also plugs into all of your regular HD equipment!

Elegantly Designed Front Panel

The built in front control panel lets you route video, so you get the perfect solution for live production racks that don't have the space for extra hardware panels. The front panel features a spin knob for browsing, direct entry buttons for speed and an LCD for displaying labels. As the panel is built into the router, you can also see live video on the LCD! The LCD also has menus so you can change router settings.

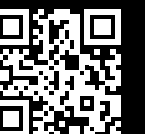
Change Router Crosspoints Visually!

With a built in LCD, Blackmagic Videohub 12G can show you live video of all your router inputs! This means you can see all router inputs as live video before you change a route. There are also labels displayed below the live video to make it easy to identify the input you are viewing. What this means is you can scroll up and down the router sources in alphabetical order and see each input as live video.

Features Full SDI Re-Clocking

Videohub includes built in SDI re-clocking on every 12G-SDI input. SDI re-clocking regenerates the video signal for maximum video quality. This is extremely important because longer video cables degrade the signal. With SDI re-clocking all of the SDI devices in your studio receive a regenerated signal with improved jitter performance. That means longer cable lengths, and no drop outs in your video.

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Content Kings expands into Middle East with Dubai office

UK production house Content Kings has announced its expansion into the Middle East with the inauguration of its second office in Dubai and the appointment of Darren Arturi as Director of Middle East and Asia Operations. This move signifies a strategic entrance into the region's entertainment landscape, promising a redefined approach to storytelling and entertainment.

Content Kings aims to introduce a fresh perspective to the UAE's content realm, delivering high-quality storytelling and entertainment experiences. The company's inaugural major project, scheduled for filming in Saudi Arabia at the end of January 2024, will feature contestants vying for a substantial cash prize. Additionally, collaborations are underway in the UAE, involving a



From left: Gavin Hay, CEO, and Jonathan Levi, MD of Content Kings.

prominent US star. MD Jonathan Levi commented: "The traditional path for a UK production company might be to look west to the US, but those waters are overfished. Not many are looking east, and it felt exciting to extend our reputation for producing excellent content to a fresh audience within the Arabic and Middle Eastern region." Founded in 2020 by

entertains but also resonates with the local audience, and we are eager to collaborate with the creative talent in the Middle East to bring our vision to life."

Gavin Hay, CEO of Content Kings, shared his vision for the company: "We are storytellers with a passion for both entertainment and enlightenment. Our mission is to craft premium content with a global reach that speaks to diverse audiences. We focus on real-life, emotionally charged human narratives that transcend borders, resonating worldwide."

Content Kings boasts collaborations with prominent global names, including Neale Whitaker, Ed Westwick and director Ray Burdis, known for *Love, Honour and Obey* featuring Jude Law, Ray Winstone and Sadie Frost.

Gavin Hay and Jonathan Levi, Content Kings has quickly become a go-to producer in the industry. The collaboration brings together complementary skills, extensive expertise and a vast industry network. Arturi remarked: "We are eager to embrace the rich cultural tapestry and untapped potential of this region. Our aim is to create content that not only

Saudi Fund for Development signs media coverage deal with Saudi Broadcasting Authority

The Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) and the Saudi Broadcasting Authority have formalised their commitment to enhanced cooperation through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. SBA will provide comprehensive media coverage and documentation for development projects financed by the fund

in developing nations. Additionally, both organisations will engage in the exchange of knowledge and data, fostering a dynamic environment for collaborative learning. The partnership will also involve the organisation of joint training courses to further enhance their collective expertise.

Quickplay launches EMEA office

OTT technology firm Quickplay has announced its latest expansion strategy, which involves establishing a new office in Europe and appointing media, sports and technology veteran Wim Ponnet as President of EMEA. The new European office is set to address the surging industry demand for cloud-native,

open-architecture OTT solutions. Quickplay will harness its market-specific expertise and its global talent and innovation capabilities to provide fast, flexible and scalable solutions customised to drive digital transformation success for pay-TV, telco and MVPD customers across the EMEA region.

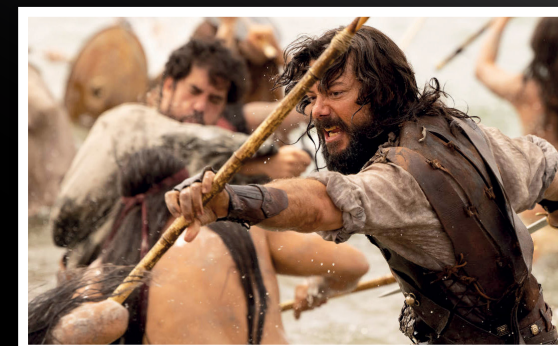
STG affiliate completes acquisition of Avid for \$1.4bn

Avid has successfully concluded its acquisition by an affiliate of Symphony Technology Group (STG) in an all-cash transaction valued at approximately \$1.4bn. This acquisition, originally announced on August 9, 2023, received the unanimous approval of Avid stockholders on November 2. According to the terms outlined in the

merger agreement, Avid stockholders will receive \$27.05 per share. As a direct result of the completion of this transaction, Avid common stock ceased trading before the opening of trading on November 7 and will no longer be listed on the Nasdaq Stock Market. Avid will continue its operations as a privately held company.

MBC Group and Dubai Media secure rights for Spanish drama *Boundless*

MBC Group and Dubai Media have secured the rights for Spanish drama series *Boundless* from German distributor ZDF Studios. The six-episode series, each episode with a duration of 45 minutes, is set to be featured on MBC's Shahid streamer in MENA territories, while Dubai Media has secured the rights for its free TV channels Dubai TV and Dubai One. With a total budget of \$21m, *Boundless* narrates the historical tale of the first circumnavigation of the Earth undertaken 500 years ago by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan.



Amagi to acquire Tellyo

Amagi has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Tellyo, a real-time live cloud remote production, clipping/editing and social sharing platform. This move aims to enhance Amagi's video toolset, specifically enhancing capabilities for live sports and news broadcasts and improving live video streaming and editing experiences for its global customer base.

Empire Cinemas launches branch in Saudi Arabia's Madina region

Empire Cinemas has expanded its footprint in Saudi Arabia with the inauguration of a branch in the Madina region. Situated at Al Rashid Mall, it is Empire Cinema's 10th branch in Saudi Arabia, featuring 10 screens with a total seating capacity of 764. The Madina branch introduces four exclusive experiences, including IMAX Laser, designed to immerse audiences with laser technology projectors and advanced sound systems.

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NURTURING GROWTH IN DUBAI'S DYNAMIC MEDIA CLUSTER

Dubai serves as a global destination for media companies and professionals, thanks to the support provided by Dubai Media City, Dubai Studio City and Dubai Production City, part of TECOM group. This media cluster offers a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and grow, with world-class infrastructure, facilities and services. We spoke to Majed Al Suwaidi, Senior Vice President of Dubai Media City, about some of the new initiatives and services that attract companies to its media ecosystems

Tell us about some of the new initiatives that TECOM has put in place to attract media houses to its media cluster.

A good number of companies here today are part of one of our ecosystems, whether it's Dubai Media City, Dubai Studio City or Dubai Production City. Our enduring mandate has been to attract companies from around the world to establish their businesses in Dubai. Initially, the challenge was to attract companies to Dubai but now, that's no longer a concern. So, our focus has shifted to what companies who came here wanted. We have adapted to industry changes and developed infrastructure to support new entrants, offering services to simplify the set-up process and logistical details, allowing companies to concentrate on their core business.

Can you elaborate on some of the services you have offered to clients at TECOM?

Over the last two decades, we've been pioneers in simplifying company set-ups in the region. We've sat with a lot of companies and learned from our extensive interactions with them on what their concerns are and have tried to address them. Based on their feedback, we've refined our services and streamlined processes for swift set-ups. Our one-stop shop concept facilitates ease of operation, making it attractive for companies to collaborate with us. There are companies that still would need to fly in employees to Dubai for their business. That is a tedious task, but with Emirates flying to more than 200 destinations, I guess we have made it easier for people to fly in and fly out. Still, a lot of time is wasted in travel.



Tell us about some of the new media companies that have come on board in recent months.

One of the recent significant entrants to our space is Blinx. They have come with a very innovative concept and impressive content. In the last two years, 200 to 300 companies, including freelancers and startups, have joined us. We're keen on fostering regional content creation for global distribution, recognising it as the next significant development across the GCC. We have seen some great content on Shahid, StarzPlay, OSN+ and so on. Content is the next big thing across the GCC, and we anticipate further developments that will add significant value to the entire media ecosystem.

I hear you do tours of your soundstages?

Indeed, the soundstages are the crown jewel of Dubai Studio City. For the content production market, it is quite impressive to see the filming facilities in the UAE, which many may not be aware of. Our soundstages give people the opportunity to create top-notch content, whether it is for long form or short form. These soundstages are one of the largest in the world, spanning more than 50,000sqft of filming space. The equipment and amenities we have are one of the best in the region. We organise tours often to Studio City and would be happy to do this for interested businesses.

What are the specific challenges that media companies have brought to your attention here in the UAE, and how have you tried to address them?

We act as mediators, impartially dealing with diverse challenges from different businesses that work with us. We try to ensure that your logistical environment is more conducive for you to be able to do



“The soundstages are the crown jewel of Dubai Studio City. For the content production market, it is quite impressive to see the filming facilities in the UAE, which many may not be aware of”

Majed Al Suwaidi, Senior Vice President, Dubai Media City



Majed Al Suwaidi at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit.

business here. A lot of the benefit that Dubai Media City brings to the table today is its network and the opportunity to come together with industry peers and see if there is an opportunity for them to collaborate. What are the productions that you can work on together? How can you make bigger and more interesting productions for the world? We are here to help facilitate that.

I think the region is also going through a massive restructuring. The earlier stereotypes about our region are gradually being rectified with content that showcases the development and opportunities that we have here. The media cluster plays a major role in consolidating these aspects. The opportunities here are immense.

Our focus extends beyond logistics to offering legislative support as well, collaborating with legislators to create business-friendly environments and opening up new markets for exploration. We are very happy to sit down with clients and look at what they want and create a conducive environment for businesses to succeed as well as collaborate. **PRO**

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FROM VIEWS TO VALUE, THE MONETISATION TRENDS SHAPING OTT TODAY

As the OTT media space becomes increasingly competitive, industry professionals at the **ASBU BroadcastPro Summit** discussed ways to improve viewer engagement and monetisation to stay in the race



As in other industries, broadcast professionals see a role for artificial intelligence (AI) – including generative AI applications such as ChatGPT – in enriching and personalising content while also optimising costs. However, there’s more to engagement and monetisation in broadcast than AI. The ASBU BroadcastPro Summit in November tackled a vast number of subjects in a panel discussion on OTT. The annual summit typically reflects on trending issues and is designed to help MENA media professionals forge a future-ready blueprint for the entertainment, broadcast and satellite industries.

The day’s first panel discussion brought together Karim Morgan, Head of Digital Technology at Asharq News; Nadine Samra, Chief Business Officer, OTT at Weyyak; Pankaj Krishna, founder & CEO, Chrome Data Analytics & Media; and Zahra Zayat, Chief Commercial Officer, evision | e&LIFE. Guy Spivack, Director of Sales at Comcast Technology Solutions, moderated.

As the industry navigates an evolving landscape hit by production costs and increasing competition, it must strike a balance between embracing digital transformation and technological advances, fostering a customer-centric culture, and nurturing talent capable of leveraging new technologies for sustainable growth in the broadcasting domain.

Large-scale transformation expands platform variety

Panellists got the conversation started with a discussion of these challenges – and how, in many cases, they represent new opportunities.

“The whole industry is going through massive transformation with different monetisation opportunities coming in the OTT space. We’ve also evolved from DTH to IPTV to subscription-based services and now ad-supported models,” said e&s’s Zahra Zayat.

OTT streaming services can support other core businesses, she said, citing international models integrating OTT with

e-commerce, though the region has yet to see a true success story on this front. “We’ve seen new models supporting cryptocurrencies and watch-and-earn mechanisms that are linked back to crypto.”

Earlier this month, the broadcaster launched its own free-to-watch streaming platform, STARZ ON, offering regional, Hollywood, Bollywood, English, Arabic and French content to Android and iOS users in the Middle East North and West Africa. It straddles the line between advertising-based video on demand (AVOD) and free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST). The key differentiator of the new service, Zayat said, is that it aims to serve all demographics.

Ad-supported broadcasting remains essential in the MENA region

FAST and AVOD promise to have a significant impact in the region. Audiences are familiar with and accept FTA products, said Nadine Samra. “We are



“It’s important to decide whether your primetime show starts at 9pm or at 8:59pm. That makes a huge difference”

Pankaj Krishna, founder & CEO, Chrome Data Analytics & Media

used to FTA for a very long time.”

Weyyak, established in 2017, provides its content for free, backed by advertising support – although the brand does have a small subscriber base, Samra added. The brand targets the global Arabic audience in the same way as its sister brand, Zee5, caters to South Asians worldwide.

While monetising AVOD can be difficult, a key aspect of Weyyak’s approach involves collaboration with other entities, including telcos and TV channels, aiming to offer diverse content

targeted at the Arabic audience. “Anything that would work well for the Arabic audience, we’re going to do ... anything that will make us a one-stop place for them, we’re going to do that. And we’re happy to explore new options.”

At the same time, producers are reluctant to offer new content to AVOD players first. Advertising-supported services become a third or fourth window because producers want to maximise other revenue channels first. But for AVOD players, it can be costly to produce their own content. Hybrid formats can work, but locking down sponsors remains a tried-and-tested route to monetising original content.

“The key to monetisation is ensuring you’ve got enough sponsorship revenue booked and guaranteed before you even commit to the production ... [as well as] seeing how we can make the content travel internationally,” Zayat said. “It can be exclusive in the region, but travelling internationally and guaranteeing revenue against it, in addition to



sponsorship revenue, will get you the ROI required from year one.”

Although FAST has been seen as the best option for monetising direct-to-consumer streaming services, broadcasters often don’t have the required levels of inventory, Guy Spivack said.

Competing with big tech for advertiser dollars

At the same time, FAST and AVOD channels must compete for advertising with major platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. On this point, Pankaj Krishna delved into the dynamics of content scheduling and commercial breaks in the context of linear broadcasting and VOD platforms.

“It all depends on audience insights,” he said, underscoring the role of data in understanding audience behaviour and preferences to optimise airtime effectively. For example, after analysing viewing patterns, he learned not to run wildlife programming at lunchtime. “You don’t want to see snakes ... when you’re eating.”

Likewise, with high levels of competition in the broadcast space, FAST platforms must weigh the odds when it comes to the timing of commercial breaks – but also around determining programming times. “It’s important to decide

whether your primetime show starts at 9pm or at 8:59pm. That makes a huge difference,” he said.

Over time, viewership patterns become apparent and broadcasters can take advantage of audience

“Anything that would work well for the Arabic audience, we’re going to do ... anything that will make us a one-stop place for them, we’re going to do that. And we’re happy to explore new options”

Nadine Samra, Chief Business Officer, OTT, Weyyak



migration. In fact, big data can help predict optimal break times, helping broadcasters increase revenues without reducing break duration. “It’s all about managing audiences,” Krishna said.

Data analytics supports audience targeting

Success lies in understanding audience preferences and utilising data to dynamically deliver content in real time, Zayat remarked. She said big data allows content to be positioned strategically for users and enables targeted advertising based on user needs and preferences.

“If you truly understand what people want to watch and read the data, and you’re able to deliver content on your FAST channels in a dynamic way that addresses the needs of that user in real time, then that’s a true success story. Because this will allow you to position that content at the right time at the right moment in front of the user who wants to watch that content at that time, and target them with smart targeted ads. So it’s really the power of data and the tech behind it.”

However, data and technology must be complemented by inventory, said Samra, describing herself as a data technology person and a computer engineer. Increasing inventory improves market positioning, allowing increased sales to clients, in turn generating greater revenue. FAST can enhance inventory through the creation of digital channels with space for new ad placements. With more content, users consume more.

Weyyak is therefore establishing partnerships with entities such as Dubai TV, Rotana and OTTera to bring their channels – and premium inventory – to the platform.

Transformative impact of AI visible at every level

Over the course of the discussion,



AI came up again and again. As in every other business sector, AI will have a transformative impact on how broadcasters do business. Developments have come thick and fast over the past year, and the technology has been likened to the steam engine in the first industrial revolution. Generative AI, in particular, presents broadcasters with avenues for innovation and differentiation.

At the top of the value chain, AI could soon change how content is produced. The economics-focused channel Asharq News is already experimenting with AI to generate an entire news bulletin from a script in plain text. “All I feed the system is a simple script, and I get a full news bulletin covering exactly what I have in that script,” said Karim Morgan.

Such a feed could complement a human presenter, speeding up production while cutting costs.

How that might play out for longer-form content remains to be seen, Morgan admitted.

Perhaps more interesting is the way AI can help personalise content, making it more relevant to specific audiences. In this context, Krishna reminded the audience of Cadbury’s award-winning post-Covid ad campaign. The confectionery

brand teamed up with Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan to create personalised advertisements for thousands of small retailers, using machine learning. By

“The key to monetisation is ensuring you’ve got enough sponsorship revenue booked and guaranteed before you even commit to the production ... [as well as] seeing how we can make the content travel internationally”

Zahra Zayat, Chief Commercial Officer, evision | e&Life



directing people to the nearest store, the campaign helped more than 200,000 shops struggling in the wake of the pandemic, a feat that won it the Creative Effectiveness Grand Prix in the Market Disruption category at the Cannes Lions International Festival this year.

“With AI, any retailer who was willing to buy Cadbury’s products would get a free commercial. And imagine getting a commercial for a retailer running a business of a few hundred dollars being endorsed by India’s biggest star,” he said. At the same time, he acknowledged the potential for harm. “There’s a lot of controversy obviously now, where you’ve got some deep fakes going around on the net, which is the bad part about it. But the good part is AI can be used hugely to impact markets.”

Streamlining the value chain

In the trenches, AI offers value enhancements by way of dubbing and subtitling.

“Subtitling and dubbing is the second-most expensive budget that I have after the production,” explained Samra. “So if I manage to reduce my costs there, that would be amazing. I think going forward within the next few years, we will start seeing good implementations

of subtitling using application programming interfaces (APIs). And on the dubbing front as well.”

Such developments could make a business impact within the next two years, or even sooner, added Zayat.

E& has already been experimenting with AI in subtitling and dubbing. For now, there remain limits, such as the replication of emotional intonation, but Zayat does not see this as a long-term hurdle. “This is something that we’re trying to explore and see how we can go around it.”

Similarly, generative AI can act as a curator, making content libraries and archives discoverable and searchable, and presenting tailored recommendations to the viewer. By analysing video transcripts and identifying key elements such as objects, faces and locations, algorithms can add tags and metadata to archival content. This makes it easier for viewers and broadcasters alike to find material on demand, and cuts out hours of repetitive work.

Morgan offered an example of his own experience with tagging “a massive archive of material with zero metadata ... up to no title of the actual files”. With tags and enriched metadata, the material suddenly became searchable. “Now you have all these clips and snippets that have all these people in them, and all of a sudden you have thousands of hours of content that you can put on your digital platforms and make available to the public.”

Although such AI-tagged content won’t always be 100% accurate, it serves as a starting point for human moderators. “Using this as a basis, and then doing manual moderation and verification on top of that, is definitely something that I can see as being very valuable for the future,” he added.

An immediate application of such newly searchable content



“All I feed the system is a simple script, and I get a full news bulletin covering exactly what I have in that script”

Karim Morgan, Head of Digital Technology, Asharq News

would be in turning live news into short-form video-on-demand content. Such an increase in the shelf life of news bulletins enables them to be repackaged for new viewers, expanding revenue streams, Krishna said, speaking from his firm’s experience in media and market research.

“There is immense potential as far as live streaming of news is concerned. And you can get from 10m to 15m views for the same three-minute piece of news without any content enhancement. So it really does have great potential.”



Nascent OTT market ready to explode

Overall, OTT is still a new and developing segment. As the representative of a data and market research platform, Krishna laid out a few numbers for the audience. Streaming, he said, is a market that is “waiting to explode”, explaining that in India, industry revenue totals \$2bn, while the MENA region totals \$5bn, as against \$100bn worldwide. The rising number of platforms, a larger number of viewers coming to OTT, and the declining costs of data will all drive an exponential growth in content consumption.

Globally, there are about 1.3bn subscribers, an eighth of the world’s population. “That number has to grow. And the moment that number grows, you will see that translating to revenue,” Krishna said. “If you look at any industry, the way it grows, you get the first few years where the curve is flat, and then suddenly you see a spike happening. And I think we are at that cusp, where the spike and the growth will happen as we speak.” - Keith J Fernandez PRO

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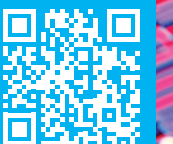
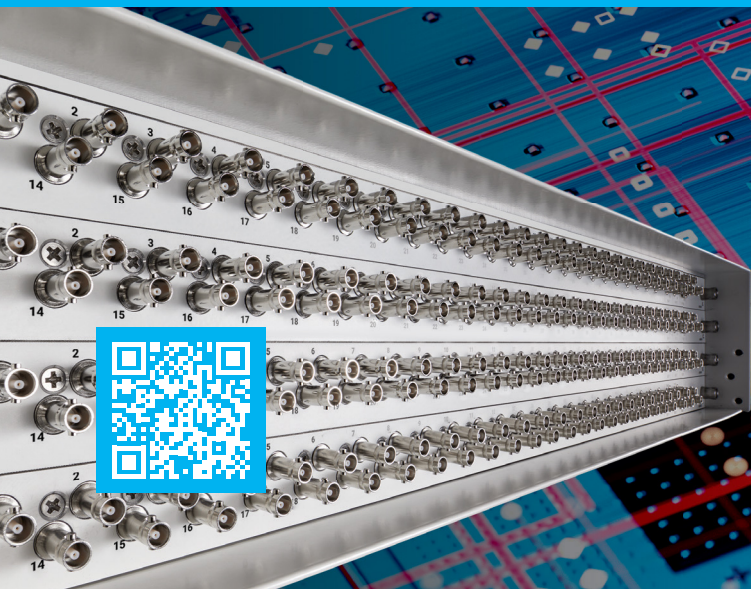
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THE FUTURE OF CONTENT CREATION IN MENA: TRENDS AND BUSINESS PRACTICES

As formats compete to dictate trends in a diverse MENA environment, what is the nature of content production? Content experts discuss new trends, upcoming business models, changing consumer behaviours and how to work in an evolving marketplace



While connectivity and consumption grow, accelerating the content economy, broadcasters are set to capitalise on the opportunities. From scripted and non-scripted shows, international adaptations, partnerships and co-productions to their funding and financing, where are we headed?

The nature and scale of these trends and formats, the pressing need to create rich Arabic content that can travel, and the challenges and opportunities of co-production models as well as their monetisation capabilities were analysed extensively at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit last month.

Discussing *The Future of Content Creation in MENA: Trends and Business Practices* was an expert panel consisting of Ayham Al Zyoud, co-founder and Executive Vice President, Charisma Group; Nader Shehata, VP – Production and Creative, Zee Entertainment Enterprises; Ralph Matar, Managing Partner, M For Media; Tony Saab, SVP Content and Strategic Partnerships, StarzPlay; and Ziad Srouji, SVP

of Business and Content Development, Rise Studios. Charting the course of the discussion was moderator Badih Fattouh, CEO, Creative Venture, who opened by summing up what was in store for us during the session, namely gaining insight into existing trends and understanding the status of content production. Addressing Charisma's Al Zyoud, Fattouh asked him to identify the trends that prevailed, what was working, and what people were watching.

Cause and effect: The chicken or egg dilemma

"From a producer point of view, to be honest, we don't know. Is it the chicken or the egg?" said Al Zyoud, laughing. "Are platforms pushing content, or audiences pushing demand? At the end of the day, we are watching what they offer, not exactly what we want, and I'm not sure how they choose content. As a producer, we notice clients follow trends based on their statistics, and they need to explain how



they bring their statistics." Fattouh queried if this was within the context of scripted versus non-scripted, a combination of the two or relevant to shorter or longer episodes.

"I don't think the market is still mature, especially for platforms," Al Zyoud observed. "There's demand for linear TV even as platforms get bigger. We have scripted and unscripted; for scripted, it is the international adopted formats. It is a tested idea: good title in the West, ticks all the boxes, so let's Arab-ise it."

While this enhances local skills, he says it limits the ability to produce original content. "We need to see how we can take local original content to the world."

Zee's Nader Shehata took the discussion forward from here. "For ATL, the production arm of Zee, we are using data from our broadcasting channels to gauge what viewers want," he said. With Arabic content evolving rapidly, "You cannot have a standard manual for

what viewers want. And you will always find different points of view between the producer and the broadcaster."

He remarked that rating guidelines dictate what is trending, whether they be drama or sitcoms, etc.

"Social and family drama is always on the top, but trends change. Two years ago, it was horror-thriller, with *Safah El Giza* becoming very successful."

Al Zyoud asked if platforms had the power to push trends and Shehata confirmed that they did indeed have that power. If so, Al Zyoud wanted to know how platforms made their choice.

With demand constantly shifting, the only genre that was stable was "talk

"Our business model has shown us that content travels. We have produced nearly eight series, four of which are travelling outside the MENA"

Nader Shehata, VP – Production and Creative, Zee Entertainment Enterprises

shows, especially free-to-air ... a must on every grid", observed Ralph Matar. "And as Ayham mentioned, the non-scripted show has proven its viewership. However, it is an emerging market and we're still in the trial-and-error phase where we are trying to gauge what genre is more in demand than others."

StarzPlay, however, is confident about its data.

"From our side, we have very good knowledge on what our users want," said Tony Saab. "We act based on the analytics of our data. If we think something is working for us, we continue to enhance and produce more of it. We rely on three major verticals: sport, output deals with major Hollywood studios and production. Recently, we commissioned a production from a Qatar studio, a combination of local and Hollywood talent – in this case, Eric Roberts."

Within the mutually agreeable genres and a 'what-works' ecosystem, platforms and channels have their comfort go-to content.



Ziad Srouji said: “You can check what will work ... through benchmarking, comparing, contrasting ... this is how you keep on acquiring, but it can be a tricky, slippery slope because you’ll end up repeating yourself. And this is where Rise Studios steps in. We take risks. We work on content that has previously succeeded, but we also try to [introduce] content that has never been thought of.”

Hiring good talent, working on new concepts and having a good partner to de-risk content are important, he remarked. “This takes the argument back to the dilemma Ayham pointed out at the onset – are we the chicken or the egg? Sometimes it works to be a chicken, whereby you come up with content, you have a good partner and it pays off. Sometimes it doesn’t. At Rise Studios, we don’t claim to be creative producers, but are a platform that understands content and the business behind it.”

Asked what value Rise brings in terms of financing, being neither a producer nor a broadcaster, he stated that Rise’s business models are evolving and changing according to market demand.

the beginning, then became very costly.”

He sees a market re-shift towards co-sharing or co-production: “If we believe in a project, we get it off-plan or commission or produce completely to be made available for a platform, as complete buyout or as windowing, on a deal-by-deal situation.”

“We need to adopt the Turkish and Korean models, where you break even from the local market and profit from international markets”

Ayham Al-Zyoud, co-founder and Executive Vice President, Charisma Group



Financing strategies and modules

While it was the norm for channels and platforms to depend on the executive director for bridge financing, financial plans do not really facilitate production. There are limitations on content produced, staff, development and so on.

“We facilitate that progression. Because commissioning doesn’t only mean ‘I’ll pay you up front’. It also means that you have my approval to produce and make it available for you,” stated Srouji.

Saab described StarzPlay financing models as a mixed bag. “We started producing a while back and co-produced with some big local production houses. We are now syndicating or selling our original content, and we are open to working with all platforms and channels.”

Further clarifying the StarzPlay windowing models, Saab said: “We have the pay-one window, re-license the second exclusive window, and do the library after. Doing this gives us a revenue stream to produce more content that we believe will work. The other way is to co-produce with another platform or with major production houses.”

Additionally, the rebate system is showing positive signs, Matar pointed out. “It is healthy, and it used to be for movies and scripted but now they’re venturing into non-scripted as well. We are producing a show in Neom, which is funding half the production. It helps because even if you’re commissioned, you need to bridge finance the whole thing. Having entities such as Neom or twofour54 venturing into non-scripted is good for producers.”

Having commissioned a lot of scripted content in the last few years, Shehata spoke about Zee’s financing prototypes.

“At ATL, our vision is to reduce gaps in the industry and to create a running franchise that can generate revenue and attract more viewers. We position ourselves as a production

studio and private investor while using our broadcasting power to help production. And in doing this, we are trying to create successful formats that can travel outside the MENA.”

Al Zyoud remarked that “commissioning is less risky for producers and for the end user ... they pay less, take their money, supervise the work and give you commission. You make your 10-15% safely, but it’s not great for the industry. What we should work on is co-production between us producers and, say, broadcasters, so we both pay and make money from international distribution.

“We need to adopt the Turkish and Korean models, where you break even from the local market and profit from international markets. We need to watch content from the region other than *Aladdin*. We have the talent and the stories, and we don’t want to watch *Spider Man 11,12 and 13*.”

Creating the right partnerships

Co-production is a complex, multi-layered process in terms of co-production, co-financing and



“If we think something is working for us, we continue to enhance and produce more of it. We rely on three major verticals: sport, output deals with major Hollywood studios and production”

Tony Saab, SVP Content and Strategic Partnerships, StarzPlay

windowing, and Fattouh asked what sustainable working styles would endure.

Co-production is a big word, agreed Srouji, and the production process is very complicated, with a lot of decision-making from a creative, financial and distribution perspective.

“It’s important to identify the right partner, because decision-making in the important aspects of the field is crucial. Co-producing with a platform is different.

I don’t know if a successful co-production deal has been done with a platform, because platforms usually want entire rights. They are not going to be sub-licensing, so there’s not another stream for revenues.”

What about co-production in terms of creative collaboration between entities, so as not to be entrapped in the commissioning model? asked Fattouh. When a platform or broadcaster cannot pay more than X amount of money for a certain production in which two parties come on board, production is taken to a different level, with different windowing opportunities in terms of pay-TV rights, SVOD and FTA.

The panel then went on to discuss why co-production does not work in the region.

Al Zyoud clarified: “In cinema, you have three main streams – digital rights, FTA and cinema – whereas in drama, you only have FTA and platforms. But here we are discounting international distribution, and this is an area to tap into.”

When Fattouh countered that this didn’t currently exist, Al Zyoud averred that it must be created.





“You asked a very important question at the beginning of the session about who was creating trends. It is somebody who has the courage. In the past two years, we have watched 10, 15 episodes on Shahid and Netflix. Then MBC came forward with a long-form series that is trending. They created that trend. Maybe it’s not in the mandate of the platforms to go international. That’s why we’re proposing to create content that appeals to the international market.”

“I think it can be done with movies and series, like we did with *Baghdad Central*,” said Saab. “We co-produced with Hulu and a major European one. With a movie like *Harley*, we

“[This] is an emerging market and we’re still in the trial-and-error phase, where we are trying to gauge what genre is more in demand than others”

Ralph Matar, Managing Partner, M for Media

“We take risks. We work on content that has previously succeeded, but we also try to [introduce] content that has never been thought of”

Ziad Srouji, SVP of Business and Content Development, Rise Studios

took all the buyout after theatrical and kept the theatrical for the producer. So there are ways of doing a co-production.”

Shehata seconded this. “We don’t have the same windows for drama and cinema, but it exists and you have different territories that you can sell in. The main challenge with co-productions will be to solve IP sharing issues. Our business model has shown that content travels. We have produced nearly eight series, four of which are travelling outside the MENA.”

Why, then, are we not growing that side of the business? asked Al



Zyoud. “Because the market is unorganised,” Shehata responded.

The panel looked at all the current missing links, such as a media fund and a government-led organisation that could regulate processes. “Not only governmental, maybe a proper union would help us push our content externally,” remarked Srouji.

Winding the session down, and optimistic about a dynamic period in the future, Fattouh asked about the challenges and opportunities in taking content forward.

Al Zyoud urged that the industry “take the risk together ... we still need linear TV, but we need to see the opportunity in prime-time viewing and rethink and re-study the strategy, because live TV will never die”.

Shehata pointed out that challenges include “not having insurance for productions, monetisation issues, and a responsible IP registration procedure”, but added that there was opportunity in collaborating with global platforms.

Matar pointed out that Dubai is one of the best cities in the world and Saudi Arabia has one of the biggest projects coming up, “so the industry should reflect on its evolution and aim to reach a point where we have an Arab Hollywood or an Arab Bollywood in the region”.

Saab listed costs of production that are “sometimes not justifiable” and piracy as big concerns. “We invest huge amounts of money in content that is on all the pirated platforms the next day.”

Srouji concluded that in an industry rich with multiple layers of audiences, needs and requirements, “It’s time we take risks with content, rethink our business models, the way we position and how we position. Our market is a wide and abundant market, and it is worth looking at things more in a chicken-egg situation, and not be afraid to be the chicken or the egg.” - *Kalyani Gopinath* PRO

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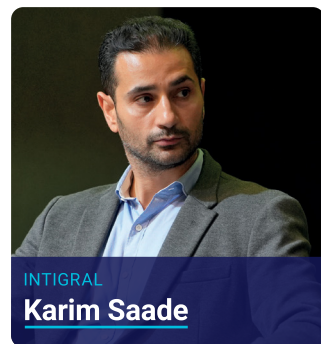
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TRENDS AND TECH CHANGE THE GAME IN MENA

The sports media industry in the Arab world is rapidly evolving due to a slew of emerging tech and swiftly changing viewer trends. Market leaders discuss the state of the industry at the **ASBU BroadcastPro Summit**



INTIGRAL
Karim Saade



SAUDI PRO LEAGUE MEDIA HOUSE
Peter Van Dam



VITEC
Fadi Jumaa

The Middle East sports industry is expected to grow by 8.7% by 2026 – more than double the rate of the global sports industry, which is forecast to slow to 3.3% growth over the same period, according to the World Economic Forum. In esports, the global market is projected to grow by 21%, from \$1.44bn in 2022 to \$5.48bn in 2029, according to Skyquest's Global Esports Market Size report. Notably, the fastest growth rate is in the Middle East.

Given the statistics, it is evident that the regional industry is in a state of incredible flux, with mega-investments coupled with rapidly evolving trends and technological advances impacting the industry within very short periods. This dynamism raises several questions: how can sports broadcasters and rights holders make sense of these rapidly evolving and changing trends, and monetise them? How will OTT transform sports broadcasting? Which are the emerging technologies to watch out for?

BroadcastPro ME brought together industry leaders to answer these questions at a panel discussion titled *Game Changing Trends in Sports Broadcasting*. Part of the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit, it featured Fadi Jumaa, Business Development Director Middle East, VITEC, and Peter Van Dam, Chief Operating Officer, Saudi Pro League Media

House (SPLMH), with sports media expert Karim Saade, Marketing Communications Director at Intigral, moderating.

Factors influencing trends

Karim Saade set the stage for the discussion by pointing out that Saudi Arabia is the industry's top broadcast tech and content trendsetter now, with Cristiano Ronaldo's induction into Al Nassr. "When Ronaldo came in, it was the first indication of what the leadership wanted to do with sports and what it would enable." His move to the Saudi Pro League's (SPL) Al Nassr club captured the world's attention and put Saudi Arabia on the global football map. The country is now set to host the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup later this year, followed by the World Cup in 2034. The same ambition can be seen in the Saudi women's football league.

"Saudi Arabia is not just looking at bringing the sport up but is also bringing in new standards and new technologies," said Peter Van Dam.

Sports and sports media are a massive part of the Kingdom's economic diversification plan, and the government is investing heavily in building a robust infrastructure and producing eclectic content that resonates regionally and globally. This makes return on investment (ROI) a critical performance

index for broadcasters and rights holders, and therefore a prime motivation behind any innovation in Saudi Arabia and across the region.

In addition to enhanced ROI, several vital factors shape emerging trends in sports broadcast, noted VITEC's Fadi Jumaa. These include the rising cost of content, high competition in content acquisition, the emergence of several viewing platforms for audiences, and optimising content and its delivery for these platforms. "The content itself is becoming very dispersed, which creates issues for the broadcaster, and then there is the need to diversify the production for different audiences," he said.

Emerging tech in sports broadcast

Innovation sometimes responds to circumstances that push companies to think outside the box. Jumaa gave the example of the 2020

"Saudi Arabia is not just looking at bringing the sport up, but is also bringing in new standards and new technologies"

Peter Van Dam, Chief Operating Officer, Saudi Pro League Media House (SPLMH)

Olympics, which occurred amidst COVID-induced restrictions. Given the 'no audience' rule, VITEC had to also develop a way to add multilingual commentary to the video transmitted from the stadiums in Japan.

"Eurosport needed to translate the commentary for the different matches and tournaments into several languages, so VITEC offered them a remote production solution where the video was sent to the commentators who were working from home. The commentators added the audio and

sent it back to the production facility in Tokyo from where it was broadcast. The whole process took less than 300 milliseconds. This arrangement enabled the channel to save costs, as it didn't have to fly the commentators to the venue and could draw part-time contracts with them. This created a new trend," said Jumaa. The multilingual commentary also helped Eurosport acquire more extensive reach, and it is now using remote production for different sports to lower costs and enhance ROI.

Remote commentary is being used for the broadcast of Saudi Women's League matches, with commentators in UAE and KSA working remotely from home, added Peter Van Dam.

"We did the same thing in the last season with Portuguese and English for the Al Nassr games. These new technologies are not limited to the 90 minutes of the game, but also





around the game. We can't change the players, goals or the form of play. But we can change how the viewers experience the game, which is a very important part of what we aim to do in the future."

Immersive tech in sports broadcast

Broadcasters are increasingly relying on technology to capture the younger generation's attention, and the panellists agreed that they demand more engagement. "They like to be part of the game. It's about having bragging rights with their friends and on social media," noted Saade. This means broadcasters must now look at novel ways to attract younger audiences and keep them engaged in multiple ways during matches.

Van Dam recalled witnessing a sporting event during which Gen Z fans were watching one match on TV and another on their phones, and discussing both simultaneously. "This is one segment we want to tap into. We are looking at getting influencers on board to give alternate views on the game as it plays out. Engaging Gen Z viewers in commentaries, interviews and content is also part of the roadmap and strategy."

SPLMH is also exploring technologies allowing viewers to create avatars for SPL players, as this has proved

popular with NFL and NBA fans.

Gen Z is heavily invested in vertical- and short-content video formats such as TikTok, and broadcasters must also cater to this demand. This is where AI plays a big role in sports broadcast.

Van Dam said that SPLMH uses WSC and Greenfly, which are heavily reliant on AI. WSC creates highlights and generates short-form video

"To counter piracy, broadcasters must look at incorporating different kinds of content on one platform"

Fadi Jumaa, Business Development Director Middle East, VITEC



content from live broadcasts that can be published to any digital destination. Greenfly categorises and files the clips generated by WSC into user-defined categories, and also allows photographers to upload their photos on the platform, which will segregate them. These catalogues are then available to broadcasters, clubs and even players, and the clips can be uploaded to their social media accounts.

SPLMH is now testing the use of WSC for highlights with commentary by adding voice recognition. "We want WSC to analyse the commentary, and where the commentator stops a sentence, fit that part into the clip," explained Van Dam.

Jumaa pointed to the use of AI in VITEC's products, such as adaptive bitrate, which allows the broadcast bandwidth to adapt to device bandwidth as it moves. "It makes sure the video is continuous. Of course, it will affect the quality, but you will have a continuous feed," he said.

VITEC is now looking at the possibility of using AI and metadata to analyse which devices a viewer uses to consume content, and then automatically create different profiles for that user based on the screen being used.

E-gaming and data collection are also set to become a vital part of broadcast tech going ahead. The panellists expected data collection to extend beyond the limits of simple game analysis to enabling comprehensive player profiles, boosting fan engagement, and developing rewards and loyalty programmes.

Using technology to monetise macro infrastructure

Moving beyond the borders of production studios, technology can be used to enhance the spectator experience at stadiums. With match-goers spending nearly six to seven

hours at the stadium, broadcasters and rights holders feel the need to work closely with the organisers to enhance their experience and derive maximum revenue from that platform. As a technology vendor, VITEC is looking at devising lucrative business models to help its clients get maximum ROI.

"There are multiple ways in which we can leverage technology," said Jumaa. "For instance, we are considering the technology for ultra-low latency to transmit the same event to fan pits. We are also looking at having video wall processors inside stadiums, covering walls and even vending machines to create more advertising avenues."

The role of OTT in sports broadcast

While regional networks will continue to play a critical role in reaching local audiences, broadcasters must look at expanding their reach internationally. Streaming platforms are a potent platform for this.

Van Dam admitted that SPLMH is exploring the integration of OTT platforms for the long run: "We believe that OTT will play a crucial



"We are looking at getting influencers on board to give alternate views on the game as it plays out. Engaging Gen Z viewers in commentaries, interviews and content is also part of the roadmap"

Peter Van Dam, Chief Operating Officer, Saudi Pro League Media House

part in monetisation, because we can use it to reach a bigger audience with more diverse and unique content."

In addition to enhanced ROI, OTT also gives broadcasters access to more data, such as who is watching the content, from where and for how long, allowing broadcasters to acquire more accurate audience analyses.

The panellists agreed that broadcasters must also develop new ways to address advertisements

and sponsorship formats if OTT platforms are to be roped in for live sports broadcast. "We will have to make sure we get the technology in place and put it in a frame where we can sell it regionally and internationally on the right path," said Van Dam.

Subscription fatigue is another challenge rights owners must tackle as the number of streaming platforms increases, Jumaa pointed out.

"Right now, the average subscriber needs to pay for different platforms or apps to get content they like. This can add up to quite a lot of money. And that is a great push for pirate boxes, which give you a single access point to all the content. For just \$20-30 a month, a viewer gets access to all the sports content in the region on a pirate box. Of course, it's not a seamless experience, there are glitches, but the viewer can access the content."

He concluded: "To counter piracy, broadcasters must look at incorporating different kinds of content on one platform and selling it as a comprehensive support package to the consumer." - *N Nomani* **PRO**





AI IN BROADCAST: EMPOWERING CREATIVITY

A look at the impact of AI technology on TV broadcast, and where it could take the industry

Hailed by some as the next industrial revolution, AI is already disrupting the broadcast industry. For instance, the latest Disney+ Marvel series, *Secret Invasion*, opens with an AI-generated title sequence. The NFL also used Respeecher, a deep-learning audio tool, to recreate the voice of deceased football coach Vince Lombardi for the Super Bowl.

For both on- and off-set talent, these types of changes might be alarming. British radio and TV presenter Greg James recently said he was afraid that his career would be rendered obsolete with the rise of ChatGPT and the prospect of “AI robots who will become better, funnier, cleverer, and at the fraction of the price of human beings on screen”. In the midst of new AI tools that enhance production and efficiency, there is growing uncertainty on how AI may replace jobs and workflows in the near future.

After over a decade of working with broadcasters like NBC, CNN and Univision, I can understand why disruptive technologies like AI can be concerning. But I also believe that AI will have a more positive effect than the headlines might have you believe. Yes, just like the internet, the potential of AI is vast and that can be pretty scary. But if we integrate it correctly and make sure the right education and safety

regulations are in place, it is likely to be transformative. Below are some benefits where AI can take the broadcast industry to new frontiers and bring more value to viewers.

More engaging content

With AI, we’re seeing a more interactive approach to production. It’s easier than ever for on-set talent to interact with a virtual character, because AI can track them and use that data to drive the motion of the virtual character. At disguise, we recently teamed up with Move.ai to create Invisible, a real-time markerless motion capture solution that helps broadcasters to do just that. This type of AI improves efficiency by reducing set-up times, lowers cost by removing the need for expensive suits and equipment, and limits the number of repetitive clean-up tasks by extracting natural human motion from performances.

Our team has also been playing around with the capabilities of Adobe Firefly, a tool that allows you to create generative content for video production or replace content. Therefore, if you have a physical performance caught on camera, you can use that performance to power an animated character, or even replace that performer with a virtual one in the shot.

For off-set talent, accessible AI tools like ChatGPT are

helping to create more exciting content for audiences. If, for example, a team needs to create a metahuman double of a real person, they could ask ChatGPT for a detailed rundown of their characteristics and physicality. They could even feed that information or photos into another AI tool like HyperHuman to create the 3D model for them, saving days of work.

These are just a few examples of AI technology enabling bigger creative ideas while decreasing the time and money needed to make them a reality. It’s easy to forget just how quickly tools like ChatGPT and Firefly are developing; the former was only released to the public around six months ago. Another year from now, AI could help us do complex tasks like creating digital twins, which currently takes months, in half the time. In five years that could be just a tenth of the time.

Faster production workflows

AI is already making virtual production and 3D graphics easier and cheaper than before. Using transformative AI technology known as NeRFs (neural radiance fields), broadcasters can take images of the real world with the latest iPhone or another high-spec capture device and upload them onto an AI platform (for example, Volinga.ai), then, through workflows like disguise RenderStream, transform that image into a 3D virtual scene in minutes. This lowers the carbon footprint for TV broadcasts, allowing content captured from anywhere in the world to be used in a production in one place. No more building hard sets, shooting on location or making room for lengthy pre- and post-production workflows.

New possibilities for data-driven storytelling

Broadcast is in essence storytelling, and stories are driven by data. Whether it’s the score on a game

show or player statistics before a sporting event, the presentation of data helps to frame an audience’s understanding and enjoyment of the content. Here at disguise, much thought is going into how AI could be used to generate or analyse data in new ways in the wider broadcast industry. We could use sports footage to create new data and data visualisations that offer viewers a new perspective, or tailor that perspective to each individual viewer.

Much of the data we see on broadcast TV is created by humans that track and enter it in real time, and now we are seeing that change, with AI- and machine learning-generated data visualised and captured in a new and exciting way. While processes that require imagination and emotion might not be AI’s strongest suit for some time, a task like data analysis could prove an ideal application.

It’s not hard to imagine big sporting organisations like the NFL or Premier League telling compelling stories across the season with AI-gathered footage and information from past events. An AI tool could even record live content and data for use in later broadcasts.

Another ideal application for AI is limiting the number of repetitive and time-consuming tasks for creatives. For example, we’re already seeing MetaHumans on television screens, appearing in shows ranging from esports competitions to virtual song contests. Controlling and animating those characters requires a huge amount of repetitive work that could be automated and realised to a high standard by an AI application.

If this sounds something like a video game, that’s because it almost is. Over the coming years, we’re likely to see video game technology inform broadcast content more and more. A recent example saw the 2023 NHL Winter Classic capture live data from players and use it to create a cartoon that was later broadcast on Nickelodeon. This could bring new, younger audiences to content that they would otherwise not find engaging.

A creative future

Such is the promise of AI that it’s

easy to forget just how early in its development we are, with broadcasters and developers still exploring capabilities and limitations. That obviously comes with a certain amount of apprehension. As AI continues to evolve, the risk of content being created to mislead audiences grows. As with any new technology, some way to regulate its use will help to ensure we get the best out of it. There are some accuracy issues, but with more public and private data, the models will only get better and less erroneous. The big elephant in the room, of course, is copyright and ownership of assets created by AI tools. Until there is more industry standardisation and regulation, the terms will be a grey area and up for negotiation. The current potential of AI in broadcast lies in automating repetitive and often solitary tasks. Things like tracking data could, in a few years, be done better and more efficiently thanks to machine learning. Jobs in high demand, those based on creativity, expression and communication, will remain for humans. In fact, advances in AI will allow human creativity to thrive, achieving new heights in broadcast as most repetitive and straightforward content tasks are automated. This will lead to better, more engaging content. I can’t wait to see how things change in the next few years. **PRO**



Grigory Mindlin is GM for Broadcast at disguise.



THE 2023 MEDIA CHAMPIONS

The 2023 ASBU BroadcastPro Awards celebrated the crème de la crème of the industry, recognising their contributions to the MENA TV and OTT market

The 13th edition of the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Summit & Awards wrapped up with a dazzling outdoor gala against the iconic backdrop of Ain Dubai and the scenic Dubai Marina at Ritz-Carlton JBR. Honouring 21 industry trailblazers, the awards spotlighted those whose dedication and creative prowess helped raise the profile of the MENA Media & Entertainment industry. Celebrating excellence across TV and OTT, the awards spanned content production, studio installations, traditional broadcast, streaming innovations, sport, tech projects and individual achievements.

Attended by 250+ industry leaders, the awards followed a day of networking and intelligence gathering at the ASBU BroadcastPro ME Summit, drawing nearly 300 participants.

Renowned as the region's premier event, the summit united a diverse audience to engage with influential leaders in the broadcast and OTT space. The day featured discussions on content production, tech and commercial

strategies in broadcasting and streaming, along with discussions on new trends and challenges in sports broadcast and virtual production. A departure from tradition, this year's summit assembled an impressive lineup of 35 high-profile speakers from the industry.

The evening gala recognised outstanding achievements with one award in the satellite segment and 20 in broadcast. A notable highlight was the presentation of a special honorary award to Abdelrahim Suleiman, Director General of ASBU, acknowledging his exceptional efforts in raising ASBU's profile in the MENA region.

We also extend our gratitude to our judges this year: Awad Eid and Feten Fradi of ASBU; DoP Hasan Aslan; Hasan Sayed Hasan of Master Media; Heba Korayem from HConsult; independent consultant Manoj Mathew; Mai El Khalifa from All is Media; Miljenko Logozar of StoryDeck.io; and Vijaya Cheria from BroadcastPro ME.

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BEST CONTENT STRATEGY OF THE YEAR – FOOTBALL

UAE Pro League

In the 2023-2024 season, the UAE Pro League transitioned to 4K production, delivering exceptional image quality for 26 local matches. The league has strategically positioned itself for future readiness by harnessing innovative technologies. Additionally, it successfully sold the rights to locally produced football content in international markets. The UAE Pro League team received the award from Khaled Hamad Bin Hatrash (extreme left), Operations Manager of Dubai Studio City and DSC Filming Facility.



BEST LOCAL ADAPTATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL FORMAT

Million Dollar Land – Blue Engine Studios

Set against the stunning backdrop of the Bajdah desert, *Million Dollar Land* offers a compelling narrative and top-notch production. It brings together 100 adventurers from 15 different Arab countries, representing a diverse range of Arab men and women. The show's high-quality visuals and attention to detail resonated with Arabic audiences from across the MENA region. Pictured with the award is Ziad Kebbi, CEO of Blue Engine Studios.



BEST REGIONAL ORIGINAL DRAMA SERIES

The Giza Killer – Shahid VOD

This horror story earned its place in the spotlight with its top-notch acting talent and exceptional production value. The outstanding choice of cast and script is also reported to have elevated it to a cultural phenomenon, making it a standout selection for the judges. Kudos to The Planet Studios as well, the production house behind *The Giza Killer*. Pictured with the award is Ali Ghamloush, Head Of Originals at Shahid.



BEST UNSCRIPTED PRODUCTION OF THE YEAR

Escape Kitchen – Qeesh Productions & Fatafeat Channel, WBD

Qeesh Productions won this award for its innovative format that brilliantly combines culinary expertise with an escape room concept. The studio is also a visual treat, where oversized teapots serve as hiding spots and quirky hedge mazes hide essential ingredients. The Qeesh Productions team received the award from Samir Isbaih (right), VP Sales, ME and APAC, Pebble.



BEST SPORTS STRATEGY OF THE YEAR

beIN MEDIA GROUP

When football's grandest showcase – the FIFA World Cup – arrived in Qatar, beIN Media Group shouldered the responsibility of comprehensive coverage across the MENA. From meticulous preparations to round-the-clock coverage, the use of 20 cutting-edge studios and groundbreaking documentaries, it exceeded all expectations. It also won our hearts by broadcasting key matches to refugees in the Arab world. Jassim Al-Muftah (r), Corporate Communications Director, beIN Media Group, received the award from Fadi Jumaa, Director of Business Development – ME at VITEC.



OUTSTANDING TECH IMPLEMENTATION OF 2023

RightsHero – Anti-piracy & Content Security Solution

RH V5, the latest release from RightsHero, was reengineered by a team of Arab tech experts. Used by major MENA broadcasters to combat piracy, this release integrates cutting-edge technologies designed to detect, monitor, report and take down pirated content. Pictured with the award is the RightsHero team, who received the award from Hasan Sayed Hasan (l), MD of Master Media.



BEST STUDIO OF THE YEAR

Al Mashhad TV

Al Mashhad brilliantly maximised limited space with two innovative studios, seamlessly merging TV and digital broadcasting through cutting-edge technologies and setting a regional benchmark for efficient and advanced studio solutions in compact settings. One studio uses Cinema Line cameras with prime lenses to create a cinematic style for recorded programmes, while native 4K cameras in both studios facilitate the integration of VR/AR sets. Olivier Bramly (left), CEO, Media & Entertainment, evision | e& life, presented the award to the team at Al Mashhad TV.



BROADCASTPROME INNOVATIVE PROJECT OF THE YEAR

blinx

Blinx, a digital storytelling hub in Dubai targeted at Gen Z and millennials, boasts the region's first NDI-based facility. It features innovative production workflows, metaverse and XR studios, AI integration, and a mobile-optimised, graphic-rich content strategy that sets a new standard for culturally resonant and technologically advanced broadcasting in the region. Pictured is the Blinx team with the award, presented by Khalid Sweidan (l), VP Sales – MEA of ROE Visual.



MENA TRENDSETTER OF THE YEAR

StarzPlay

From crafting world-class Arabic original productions to developing the UAE version of an Emmy-nominated show, StarzPlay has pushed the boundaries. It also introduced an online sports platform, progressively enriching it with live sporting events. It recently pioneered a 3.0 fantasy sports game infused with blockchain technology, and followed that up with the launch of a store giving users access to major global box office hits. The StarzPlay team is pictured with the award, presented by Craig Newbury (l), Head of Sales, EMEA & LATAM, Lawo.



SYSTEMS INTEGRATOR OF THE YEAR

Ideal Systems

Ideal Systems Middle East stood out for completing some outstanding outside-the-box projects in the last year with a full-IP facility in Doha for Alaraby TV, a brand-new digital storytelling hub in Dubai for blinx that included several firsts on the technical front, and a cutting-edge studio facility for Al Ghad TV that was launched last month in Egypt. Pictured with the award is the Ideal Systems team, who received the award from Nadine Samra, Chief Business Officer, Weyyak.com at Zee Entertainment.



STREAMING SERVICE OF THE YEAR

OSN+

With diverse content, tech innovation and strategic collaborations, OSN+ has solidified its position as a leading entertainment platform in MENA. The platform offers access to premium content at the same time as its US release, thanks to OSN's partnerships with major international studios. It has also invested in several Arabic and Turkish original productions. OSN+ has seen 40% year-on-year increase in engagement, and its social reach has extended to 80m. Dan Steele (extreme right), VP – EMEA Sales, Brightcove, presented the award to the OSN team.



BROADCAST PROJECT OF THE YEAR

Sky News Arabia Studio Automation Project

Sky News Arabia recently transitioned to fully automated studios, resulting in a 40% reduction in operational costs and significantly fewer on-screen errors. The project's complexity, handling various production requirements, simultaneous outputs and live productions from different locations, made it a standout achievement. The Sky News Arabia team received the award from Baher Al Zaher, Regional Director, RCS MENA.



SAUDI PROJECT OF THE YEAR

Saudi Broadcasting Authority - Studio A

SBA recently launched a brand-new studio that boasts seven distinctive sets, each tailored for a variety of programmes, from news to sports and talk shows. The studio integrates top-tier solutions from industry majors, creating a seamless production experience. The highlight of the studio is an XR stage featuring a versatile LED wall and fully immersive floor, setting a new standard for live broadcasting. Pictured with the award is the SBA team, who received it from Raz Islam (l), MD of CPI Trade Media.



SPORTS TECHNOLOGY OF THE YEAR

SPboard, Virtual Advertising Solution - Sponix Tech

Sponix Tech has revolutionised sports advertising with its remote, AI-powered virtual advertising solution. Its remote implementation, real-time adaptability and global reach eliminate the need for physical billboards, offering huge flexibility while reducing operational costs. Mohammad Ali Abbaspour (r), founder and CEO of Sponix Tech, received the award from Souha El Assal, Director – Content & Marketing, MENA, Zee Entertainment.



CEO OF THE YEAR

Joe Kawkabani, Chief Executive Officer, OSN

Joe Kawkabani has demonstrated remarkable leadership, spearheading transformation at OSN. Under his guidance, OSN has experienced significant subscriber growth and introduced groundbreaking initiatives. He played a key role in establishing crucial partnerships with major international studios and championed the implementation of impactful marketing strategies that have elevated the company's market presence. Kawkabani (r) received the award from Anas Hantash, Regional Director – MENA & South Asia, Imagine Communications.



MEDIA ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR

Maaz Sheikh, CEO, StarzPlay, and Danny Bates, CCO, StarzPlay

StarzPlay co-founders Maaz Sheikh (CEO) and Danny Bates (Chief Commercial Officer) have been instrumental in taking the UAE streaming platform from a small startup to the prominent name it is today. They represent the brain and heart of the company, according to peers. Together, they've navigated the entire spectrum of challenges, continuing to inspire awe in the market.

Their recent forays into local productions span genres from horror and science fiction to reality shows. Their investment in sports particularly marked a pivotal move for the company. Regardless of the venture, they've approached it with flair and determination. Whether on the content front, the investment landscape or the technological aspects, their entrepreneurial spirit has shone through.

Their collaborative approach involves bringing a plethora of ideas to the table and subjecting them to meticulous analysis before deciding whether the risk is worth taking. With their outside-the-box thinking, evident in their platform development, product strategies and content creation, both Sheikh and Bates have earned not just the respect of the market but ours as well.



CTO OF THE YEAR

Dominic Farrell, Chief Technology Officer, Shahid – MBC GROUP

Dominic Farrell led numerous tech milestones at Shahid last year, including the deployment of a low-latency solution for real-time TV, a Micro Front Architecture for enhanced performance, and features like real-time analytics, dynamic ad insertion, 4K sports support and Dolby audio enhancements. He also oversaw the launch of 50 new FAST channels and ensured seamless scalability during peak demand.



OUTSTANDING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Zahra Zayat, Chief Commercial Officer, Evison/e& life

Evison executed strategic expansions this year into Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It also expanded its content offerings, secured exclusive cricket rights across MENA and ensured telco-agnostic media distribution across the region. Zahra Zayat as CCO played a key role in several of these initiatives, with the most recent being the introduction of Starz On. Her contributions underscore the success of these endeavours.



SATELLITE SOLUTIONS PROVIDER OF THE YEAR

Es'hailsat

Es'hailSat undertook several initiatives recently, such as launching its playout service, bolstering its DSNG capabilities, successfully incorporating new TV channels and consistently updating its teleport facility. More importantly, during the 2022 World Cup, Es'hailSat enhanced its DSNG services to manage the increased volume of live events, ensuring a seamless workflow throughout the tournament. Pictured here with the award is Hamad Al-Mannai, Vice President, Commercial at Es'hailSat.



EXCELLENCE IN BROADCAST STRATEGY

Abdelrahim Suleiman, Director General, ASBU

Mr Suleiman's leadership at ASBU has transformed it into a commercially viable entity. Initiatives under him include the \$63m ASBU Link Centre and the ASBU hotel in Tunis. He drove technological advancements with the ASBU Cloud solution and established a commercial arm within the ASBU Training Academy for enhanced profitability. These initiatives are testament to his commitment to ASBU's financial independence, showcasing a remarkable fusion of innovation and sustainability. PRO



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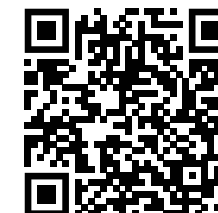
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“With the right support systems in place, including a central order management system, publishers will be set up for success”

How DCO is changing the Streaming Media Landscape

Streaming media is taking off in popularity around the world, with one in five people on earth expected to use it by the end of the decade. Streaming brings together the best part of television and digital, offering high-quality viewing experiences with the data-driven interactivity of the internet.

Advertisers are also embracing streaming. With an expected advertising spend of \$137bn by 2027, it's expected to surpass linear TV spend in many markets by that time.

One innovation that has captured advertiser attention is dynamic content optimisation, also known as dynamic creative optimisation or DCO. This software creates multiple variations by combining media and components, and then targeting the optimal one for a target viewer. This enables advertisers to deliver more relevant ads efficiently and at a large scale. They can deliver ads on a big screen next to premium content, using personalisation, automation and real-time responsiveness for a much more relevant ad experience. DCO is a major opportunity for advertisers on streaming.

Benefits of DCO for Streaming

Streaming media does not have the same limitations as linear TV, which is mostly used by advertisers for mass reach or locally targeted advertising. With the benefits of being a digital channel, streaming delivers several benefits to advertisers, such as the ability to use data,

automation and targeting.

First, DCO enables advertisers to personalise ads. It enhances the value of an ad impression and increases engagement by showing the right ad to the right person.

Second, DCO delivers automation. Advertisers only need to provide the individual imagery, copy and targeting data, and the technology will do the rest. DCO can analyse, assemble and send ads to an advertiser's ad-tech stack, ready to be served in near-real time.

And third, DCO offers real-time or near-real-time responses, which can improve ad performance. For example, advertisers can feed the DCO system real-time online search or shopping data, or the DCO system can use recent response data from ads shown to similar viewers to deliver timely messages and optimise ads over time.

How DCO Works for Streaming Media

DCO can be thought of as a next-generation creative assembly line. The technology takes different images, text and sound (such as music or talk tracks) and assembles them on the fly. DCO can create thousands of different versions of an ad automatically based on data and analysis of individual viewers, to deliver a personalised experience.

AI and ML enhance DCO to make it smarter and more efficient. DCO uses AI to gain viewer insights from large amounts of data, and to assemble ads at a massive scale with ease. This next-generation technology can also use AI to predict what a viewer might react to based on the

response of similar viewers in the past.

For example, Hulu uses DCO to match advertisements to the mood, genre and past preferences of a viewer. This has been proven to lift key advertiser metrics such as brand awareness, purchase intent and ad recall. Similarly, Spotify implements DCO for personalised audio advertising that has also driven improvements in ad performance.

Implementing DCO for Streaming Media

Although DCO is a powerful new advertising technology, it comes with some challenges, including issues with data quality, creative consistency and performance measurement. Publishers must have a few things in place to minimise issues and maximise their lift from DCO.

An order management system (OMS) can help publishers by providing a centralised catalogue for all creative assets for each campaign and advertiser, providing structure, organisation and easy automation. An OMS can also provide seamless connectivity to other systems including ad serving, which allows publishers to deliver DCO-enabled campaigns at scale with accuracy. An OMS also catalogues data from the campaign to aid in reporting and billing, so that publishers can capture revenue quickly and easily. DCO presents a new revenue opportunity for publishers, and with the right support systems in place, including a central order management system, publishers will be set up for success. **PRO**

David Dembowski is Senior VP of Global Sales at Operative



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