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2023

SOARING HIGH WITH ASBU CLOUD

The Arab States Broadcasting Union rolls out new media exchange platform to facilitate collaboration between members

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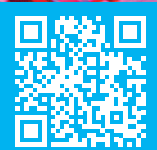
Welcome

As we get ready to travel to Amsterdam for IBC, big changes are unfolding on the GCC landscape with Saudi Arabia playing a central role in these transformations. While there have been spurts of activity in other Arab countries as well, it's the developments in KSA that merit attention. It all began when the Saudi Crown Prince announced the country's 2030 vision. Since then, there has been a sudden surge of activity from different quarters.

At the governmental level, funding has been directed towards film festivals, film commissions, writing labs and the establishment of media entities like Neom and AlUla. Additionally, we have seen a raft of support in terms of grants, training and on-the-ground productions that have collectively set in motion a content market from virtually nothing to a bustling film scene. This landscape is still growing, expanding and evolving rapidly, and for an aspiring filmmaker or those in the media business, KSA is the current land of opportunity.

Many Saudi-owned companies who have long had their base in the UAE or other Arab countries, in the meantime, have also been instructed to head home and preparations for this move have been ongoing. Organisations have tried to incentivise their staff with a 20-30%

hike in salaries to get them going, but many who have settled in the UAE, for instance, are reluctant to pack their bags.

This month, we hear Al Hadath, MBC Group's news channel, will see half its employees make the exodus to Saudi Arabia with mid-November being the deadline to have at least 12 hours of news broadcast from Riyadh. In other companies, staff are shuttling between their old base and the new to ensure things run seamlessly on the work and home front.

While there is no saying if the funding tap will suddenly run dry, all these opportunities in KSA have seen the proverbial gold rush from international and regional businesses. New ventures, TV channels, sports leagues and a variety of related media businesses have sprung up in recent times in KSA. Nearly all are investing in new studios or technologies to up their game and there's no legacy equipment to hold them back. Some of them will be at IBC to explore emerging technologies and solidify their investment plans. We will be there too. See you at the show.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director

On this month's cover...
ASBU Director General Abdelrahim Suleiman (r) and Director of Tech and Innovation Basil Zoubi (l).

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September 2023

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StarzPlay launches Fantasy Sports

StarzPlay has launched StarzPlay Fantasy Sports, the first free-to-play Web 3.0 fantasy sports game in the MENA region. Launched in advance of the 2023/24 Serie A season, StarzPlay Fantasy Sports is exclusively accessible via StarzPlay Sports. Players can engage in live Serie A matches and regional leagues by making predictions, ranging from score forecasts and possession percentages to identifying the first goal scorer, all within the in-game arenas. These predictions offer a chance to win prizes.

Winning participants are awarded real prizes, including STARZ$, the in-game currency usable for acquiring NFTs and, in the future, redeeming vouchers; StarzPlay subscriptions; Serie A and football merchandise; and exclusive 'money can't buy' experiences such as Serie A match tickets and meet-and-greet sessions with cherished football icons. The prize pool will also include offerings from third-party sponsors, establishing a fresh commercial avenue and a means for advertisers to connect with online gaming and sports enthusiasts on a Web 3.0 platform.

While the game is essentially free to play, players possess the option to purchase and trade NFTs within a real-time marketplace. This empowers them to construct a distinct team and enhance their predictive abilities. The game will be hosted on Amazon AWS as a serverless infrastructure to support peak numbers of users and provide a high-performance and high-quality experience during matches.

KSA ministry and MBC sign deal to launch TV channel

From left: Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Farhan and Waleed bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim at the signing ceremony.

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture, Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Farhan and Waleed bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim, Chairman of MBC Group, signed a deal to launch and operate a TV channel dedicated to showcasing Saudi culture.

Set to commence streaming in September, it will be accessible via the MBC satellite package and Shahid.net. Its primary goal is to amplify Saudi cultural content on a global scale. The channel's diverse line-up will encompass literature, poetry, theatre, cinema, fashion and culinary arts, engaging both local and international viewers.

Khulud Abu Homos joins Intigral

Intigral, the media and entertainment division of STC Group, has named Khulud Abu Homos Vice President of Content, showcasing the company's dedication to enhancing its content strategy and venturing into new avenues for expansion. In her new role, Abu Homos will oversee content acquisition, content management, operations and the delivery of Intigral's diverse media offerings. Her role will be instrumental in shaping and optimising the company's on-demand video broadcasting channels, cascading broadcasts and the media delivery network that facilitates daily content releases.

Abu Homos will play a pivotal role in enhancing Intigral's platforms, namely stc tv, Jawwy TV and Dawri Plus, through strategic partnerships with regional and international associates, while also exploring avenues for new collaborations. Abu Homos also serves as CEO and founder of Art Format Lab and previously worked as Executive VP for Programming and Creative Services at OSN, Dubai.

Introducing ATEM Mini Pro
The compact television studio that lets you create presentation videos and live streams!

Blackmagic Design is a leader in video for the television industry and now you can create your own streaming videos with ATEM Mini Pro. Simply connect HDMI cameras, computers or even microphones. Then push the buttons on the panel to switch video sources just like a professional broadcaster! You can even add titles, picture in picture overlays and mix audio! Then live stream to Zoom, Skype or YouTube!

Create Training and Educational Videos
ATEM Mini Pro includes everything you need. All the buttons are positioned on the front panel so it's very easy to learn. There are 4 HDMI video inputs for connecting cameras and computers, plus a USB output that looks like a webcam so you can connect to Zoom or Skype. ATEM Software Control for Mac and PC is also included, which allows access to more advanced "broadcast" features!

Use Professional Video Effects
ATEM Mini Pro is really a professional broadcast switcher used by television stations. This means it has professional effects such as a DVE for picture in picture effects commonly used for commentating over a computer slide show. There are titles for presenter names, wipe effects for transitioning between sources and a green screen keyer for replacing backgrounds with graphics.

Live Stream Training and Conferences
ATEM Mini Pro has a built in hardware streaming engine for live streaming via its ethernet connection. This means you can live stream to YouTube, Facebook and Teams in much better quality and with perfectly smooth motion. You can even connect a hard disk or flash storage to the USB connection and record your stream for upload later!

Monitor all Video Inputs!
With so many cameras, computers and effects, things can get busy fast! ATEM Mini Pro features a "multiview" that lets you see all cameras, titles and program, plus streaming and recording status all on a single TV or monitor. There are even tally indicators to show when a camera is on air! Only ATEM Mini Pro is a true professional television studio in a small compact design!

ATEM Mini Pro.........**US$319**
ATEM Mini Pro ISO.........**US$535**
ATEM Mini Extreme ISO.........**US$1,399**

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae

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New high-tech recording studio in Downtown Dubai chooses Genelec

Soul Sound Music Art Production, based in Downtown Dubai, has chosen the Genelec Smart Active Monitoring system to ensure audio quality and precision at its recording facility.

Soul Sound is a passion project of Lebanese singer and songwriter Aziz Abdo. "I wanted to create a professional studio set-up in a space that will allow me to further my skills and talent and take my musical career to the next level," he explained. "I wanted to give a facelift to today's typical music studio in Dubai, since most of them are located in remote areas or have an old, worn-out feel. Having a passion for both musical technique and powerful technology, I wanted to democratise the creative process, allowing anyone to have access to everything that they would need to create music."

In pursuit of this goal, Abdo enlisted the expertise of audio

Soul Sound owner Aziz Abdo (l) and sound engineer Hosni Abu Zahra.

engineer Hosni Abu Zahra, who helped craft an optimal recording environment.

"I chose high-quality audio equipment, including microphones, preamps, compressors, EQs and monitors to meet the specific needs of the project, and combined this with a proper wiring and cabling infrastructure to minimise signal degradation and interference," recalled Abu Zahra. "I designed the studio with appropriate dimensions

to avoid standing waves and resonances that can affect sound quality. I also ensured proper sound isolation and minimised unwanted reflections through the use of materials like diffusers, absorbers and bass traps."

The solution features a pair of 1234s as the main studio monitors, complemented by a pair of 1032 nearfield models. Low frequencies are handled by a 7382 subwoofer, with a supplementary pair of 8030s employed as nearfield

monitors at the secondary listening position for guests in a separate area away from the main mix position.

"The 1234s and 1032s in the studio provide excellent frequency response and balance, as well as transparency of the reproduced sounds when recording and mixing. The two also provide different listening perspectives for artists and engineers, and I positioned the 1234s and 1032s in an optimal configuration to achieve accurate and balanced audio reproduction," explained Abu Zahra.

With the control room used as a single space to handle mixing, recording and mastering, the use of GLM calibration software has been key to the project. "GLM changed my life by fixing the frequency curve where needed," added Abu Zahra. "I'm extremely happy, as I have personally planned each and every corner of the studio."

Arabic SVOD subs to reach 28m by 2029: Digital TV Research

The number of subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) users in 13 Arabic countries is anticipated to nearly double by 2029, reaching 28m, a significant increase from the 15m reported in 2023, according to Digital TV Research. While Netflix is expected to maintain

its market leadership, local streaming services will emerge as robust competitors. StarzPlay, Shahid VIP and OSN+ are poised to collectively capture 46% of total Arabic subscriptions by 2029, contributing combined growth of 4.7m subscribers from 2023.

Twofour54 plans expansive film complex in Abu Dhabi

Twofour54 Abu Dhabi has revealed plans to construct a major film studio complex that it has named twofour54 Studios. Encompassing a vast expanse of over 100 acres, it is intended to be a cutting-edge production hub that is future-proof, adaptable for virtual production, embedded with metaverse capabilities and fully equipped to meet the escalating demand in both regional and global film production.

The complex will include a line-up of 11 soundstages, an expansive exterior water tank spanning 3,000sqm and six versatile standing
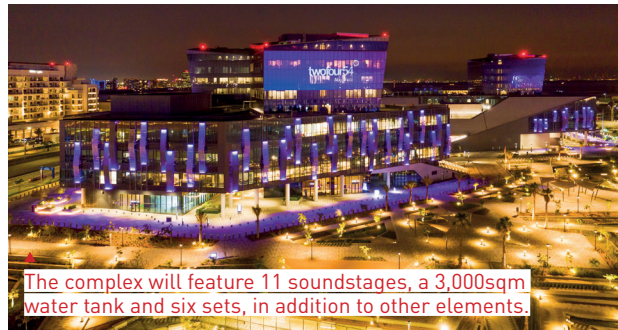
The complex will feature 11 soundstages, a 3,000sqm water tank and six sets, in addition to other elements.

sets. Alongside these, the complex will integrate 7,000sqm of office space and an assortment of additional production facilities. These encompass post-production resources, dedicated permanent spaces

and screening rooms. Twofour54 Studios will also accommodate permanent tenants and production companies to ensure a comprehensive destination that caters to all stakeholders within the industry.

Canal+ secures Saudi Pro League broadcast rights in France and Africa

Canal+ has secured the rights for the Saudi Pro League in both French regions and African territories

for the upcoming two seasons. The network will broadcast two matches weekly.

The 2023/2024 season, which commenced on August 11, will continue until May 2024.

Every week, the matches will be aired on Canal+ sport channels, accessible via myCanal, and will also be featured on social media platforms. The Saudi Arabian league joins Canal+'s football portfolio, which includes UEFA Champions League, Premier League, D1 Arkema and Ligue 1.

Saudi Film Commission announces new industry event

SFC has announced a new industry event, Saudi Film Confex, will take place in Riyadh October 1-4 at the BLVD Expo. A roster of global filmmakers, producers, directors, investors and media luminaries are expected to converge for this occasion.

Occupying 40,000sqm of exhibition space, the BLVD Expo will play host to more than 100 exhibitors and 50 distinguished keynote speakers. Expert-led workshops spanning three days will impart practical insights, nurturing talent across the film value chain.

Netflix and AFAC launch training programme for emerging female filmmakers

Netflix, in partnership with the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), has launched a training programme aimed at nurturing emerging female talent in the field of filmmaking. The programme, titled 'Women in Film: Introduction to the Creative Process', seeks to acquaint participants with the intricacies of creative filmmaking and the diverse roles that women can play behind the camera.

Geared towards female filmmakers who are recent graduates in the field and based in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or the UAE, this initiative will engage a select group of 45 women. They will undergo a series of workshops designed to provide insights into the contemporary filmmaking industry. The programme, which will commence in November, will look at various aspects of the craft, including scriptwriting and the creative journey of filmmaking.

SBA announces new digital audio broadcasting and training academy

Saudi Broadcasting Authority (SBA) has introduced its third generation of radio broadcasting and digital audio broadcasting and the inauguration of the Radio and Television Corp. Training Academy, in a strategic move that underscores its commitment to digital transformation and expansive media growth.

With visionary leadership from Salman bin Youssef Al-Dosari, the newly appointed Minister of Media and Communication,

these initiatives promise to redefine the landscape of media services.

The Radio and Television Corp. Training Academy will offer an array of comprehensive training programmes. Encompassing diverse disciplines such as journalism, television, radio production, digital media, cinema and theatre, these programmes will equip budding talent with the necessary skills to excel in the media landscape. A key emphasis will be on cultivating leadership

qualities, ensuring that the academy remains a beacon of innovation and ingenuity.

With a vision to position the Kingdom at the forefront of technological progress, Saudi Arabia is actively embracing DAB+ technology.

This approach harnesses digital technology to optimise radio frequency distribution, facilitating an expansive array of radio stations that cater to diverse listener preferences. It brings with it a host of advantages over traditional AM and FM radio. This

technology empowers more broadcasts to coexist on the same frequency, all while streamlining operating costs and extending coverage areas by 35%.

The Radio and Television Corp. has set a dynamic expansion plan into motion, signalling the growth of digital broadcast realms. With the launch of three frequencies in Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah, the foundation has been laid to expand digital broadcast areas by 44 digital frequencies.
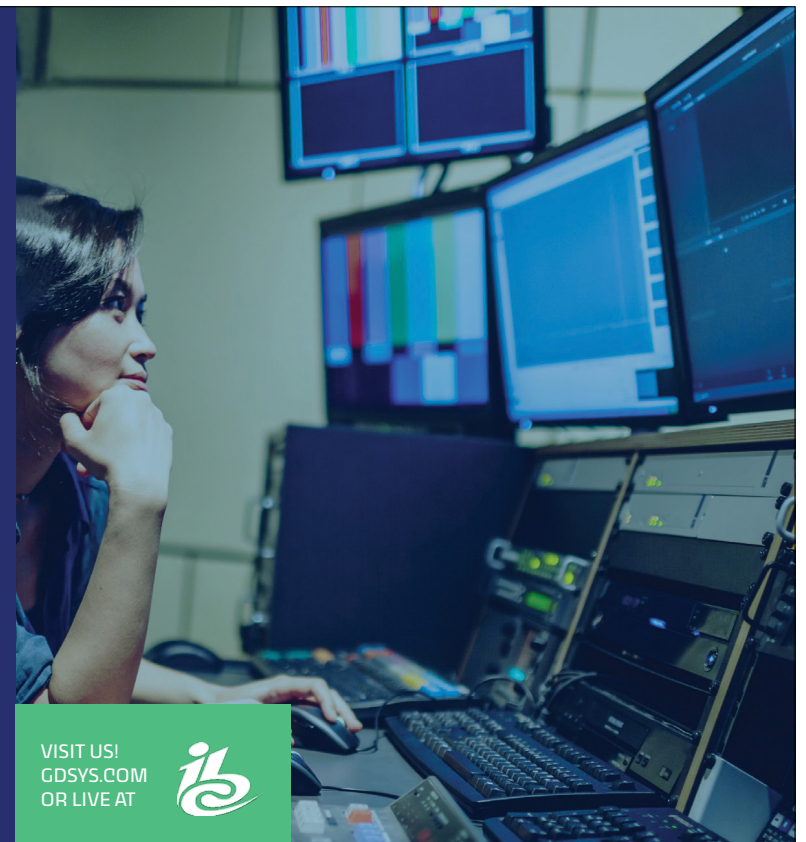
Hares Studios and ATL Media announce first Arabic co-production

Hares Studios and ATL Media, a Zee Network Enterprise, have unveiled their first co-production, *Transit*, a pan-Arab series that serves as Hares Studios' inaugural venture into production. It was produced entirely in the UAE.

Drawing inspiration from the Zee series *Chupke Chupke*, *Transit* was adapted by Syrian writer Lujain Khalaf and directed by Bassem Salka. It narrates the voyage of a couple who set out on a journey, only to be entangled in unforeseen events along the way. It weaves together a blend of romance, drama and human encounters,

From left: Ammar Hares, CEO of Hares Studios with director Bassem Salka.

interwoven with a mystery that gradually unfolds throughout the narrative. It was shot using cutting-edge cameras and meticulously handpicked locales that mirror the fast-paced rhythm of modern life in Dubai.

Manoj Abraham Mathew, EVP and Territory Head of Zee Entertainment, commented: "This is our seventh production of Arabic originals, and we have a slate of five productions on the floor with another one with

Hares Studios signed. Also, as an executive producer of this series, it is a matter of pride that we could do our entire filming in UAE, with the majority of the locations being in Dubai. Ammar very successfully assembled a stellar cast and crew. This country has exceptional creative talent, and at Zee we would love to continue to nurture and invest in this."

Ammar Hares, CEO of Hares Studios, added: "We are thrilled to present *Transit*, our debut production at Hares Studios, and we are incredibly proud to partner with ATL for this endeavour."

STG affiliate to acquire Avid Technology for $1.4bn

Avid has entered into a definitive agreement to be acquired by an affiliate of private equity firm Symphony Technology Group (STG) in an all-cash transaction valuing Avid at approximately $1.4bn, inclusive of Avid's net debt. Under the terms of the agreement, Avid stockholders will receive $27.05 in cash for each share of Avid common stock. The cash purchase price is a premium of 32.1% over the company's unaffected closing share price on May 23, 2023, the last full trading day prior to media speculation regarding a potential sale.

Israel's major broadcasters unite to oppose government bill

Israel's major broadcasters, Keshet 12, Reshet 13 and Kan, have united to launch a collective initiative against the government's latest media bill, forming the Israeli TV Channels Forum to counter anticipated threats to media independence and press freedom resulting from the reform.

In a joint statement, the three networks expressed fears over the government's potential influence over the media landscape following contentious judicial reform. The proposed changes involve reducing local content requirements, establishing a new regulatory body with government-appointed members that could interfere with Israeli content, eliminating the need for independent broadcasting news licences, and placing oversight of rating data under a government committee.

The forum is resolute in its commitment to employ all available means to prevent any form of takeover of Israeli media. The forum underscored the risk of having a political entity control news and television in Israel.

Lebanese filmmaker Nadine Labaki joins Toronto International Film Festival jury

Lebanese filmmaker Nadine Labaki has been announced as a jury member for the 48th Toronto International Film Festival, scheduled for September 7-17. Labaki will be joined by American filmmaker Barry Jenkins, who will serve as chair, and Canadian actor Anthony Shim.

UNLOCKING
THE POWER OF DATA

Streaming companies and TV broadcasters can better target their audience if they have the right data and know how to analyse it

In today's fast-paced digital age, data has emerged as a game-changer for businesses across various industries. In the world of entertainment and media, data-driven insights have become paramount, enabling streaming companies and TV broadcasters to understand their audience better and deliver personalised content that resonates with viewers. This data revolution is a great opportunity to optimise their strategies, enhance customer engagement and ultimately drive business growth.

The Rise of Streaming Platforms in India
The Indian media landscape has had a seismic shift in recent years, with the rise of streaming platforms redefining how audiences consume content. A recent COTT (Chrome OTT services for SVOD and AVOD platforms) report from Chrome DM shows India's over-the-top (OTT) video market in terms of subscription revenue stands at $1.28bn, with over 500m active subscribers. This surge in demand has been fuelled by factors such as increased smartphone penetration, affordable data plans and a diverse range of content options.

Streaming companies like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ Hotstar have capitalised on their users' video consumption data to craft personalised user experiences and deliver content that aligns with individual tastes. In the COTT audience survey, 52% of participants recognise the importance of recommender systems and 41% claim to watch recommended titles.
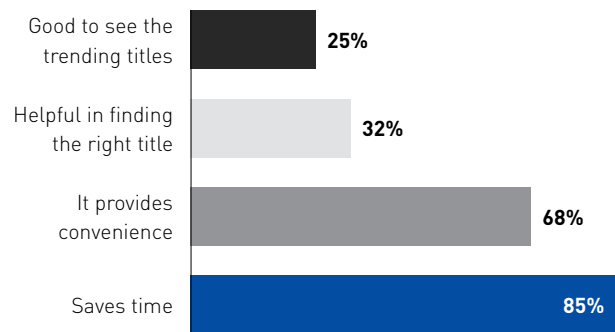
How do we use the data collected from audiences?
- **User behaviour analysis:** By analysing user behaviour, these platforms can identify patterns such as preferred genres, binge-watching habits and peak viewing times. Armed with this knowledge, they curate content libraries that cater to diverse interests and ensure that users stay engaged for longer periods.
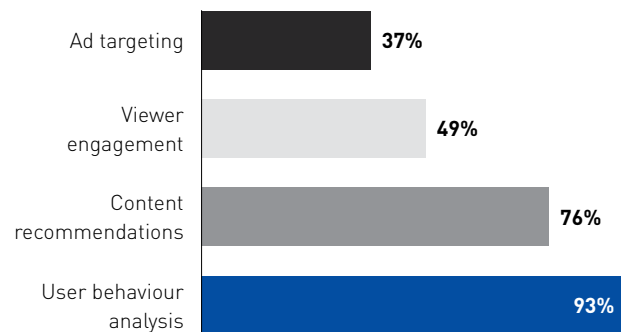- **Content recommendations:** Sophisticated algorithms powered by data analytics are at the core of personalised content recommendations. Based on users' viewing history and preferences, these platforms can suggest relevant shows and movies, increasing content discovery and retention.
- **Viewer engagement:** Data also helps measure viewer engagement with specific content, providing insights into which shows or episodes garner the most attention. Armed with this information, broadcasters can make informed decisions on content renewal and investment in future productions.
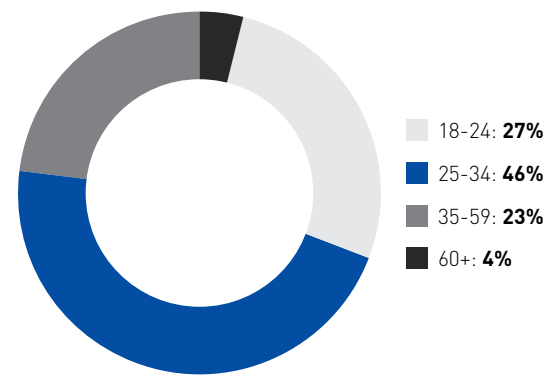
- **Ad targeting:** For advertising-supported platforms, data plays a crucial role in delivering targeted advertisements to the right audience. Advertisers can leverage data to segment viewers based on demographics, interests and online behaviour, ensuring their ads reach the most relevant audience.

Recent Indian TV stats and the implications
- **Viewer demographics:** A comprehensive study revealed that viewers between 18 and 35 account for the highest percentage of content consumption across streaming platforms. Armed with this data, streaming companies can prioritise content catering to this key demographic, ensuring maximum engagement.
- **Regional content:** India's linguistic diversity has increased demand for regional content on streaming platforms. In the COTT survey, 32% of respondents prefer Hindi but 36% prefer South Indian languages, followed by Marathi, English and Bangla. Data on viewership patterns across different regions helps companies tailor their content libraries to meet regional preferences and expand their reach to a wider audience.
- **Trending genres:** Recent data indicates that drama, action/crime/thrillers, romantic dramas and comedy are among the most popular choices for Indian audiences. Streaming companies use this data to invest in content production that aligns with these trending genres, increasing the likelihood of success.
- **Content engagement:** Data also provides valuable insight into content engagement, such as which shows generate the most buzz on social media, receive the highest user ratings and trigger conversations online. This helps identify content that resonates with the audience and drives word-of-mouth marketing.

As the competition intensifies in the streaming industry, data-driven insights will become even more critical for companies seeking to stay ahead of the curve. By continuously analysing user data, these platforms can adapt their strategies, refine content offerings and build stronger relationships with their audiences.

While the opportunities are immense, data privacy and security must remain paramount. Streaming companies and TV broadcasters must adhere to strict data protection regulations, ensuring user data is handled responsibly and ethically.

In conclusion, data-driven strategies have revolutionised the entertainment landscape, allowing streaming companies and TV broadcasters to tailor their offerings to the unique preferences of their audiences. By harnessing the power of data, these companies can foster deeper connections with viewers, deliver relevant and engaging content, and ultimately thrive in the evolving media landscape.

Indian TV statistics: Viewer demographics

- 18-24: **27%**
- 25-34: **46%**
- 35-59: **23%**
- 60+: **4%**

Source: COTT, July report, audience panel details, N=82198, data collection 1-31 July, 2023, India (all states except J&K)

Indian TV statistics: Regional content

- Hindi: **32%**
- English: **8%**
- Marathi: **12%**
- Bangla: **7%**
- Tamil: **11%**
- Telugu: **9%**
- Kannada: **7%**
- Malayalam: **9%**
- Other: **5%**

Source: COTT, July report, audience panel details, N=82198, data collection 1-31 July, 2023, India (all states except J&K)

Question: Why do you use recommender systems?

|	
Good to see the trending titles	25%
Helpful in finding the right title	32%
It provides convenience	68%
Saves time	85%

Source: COTT, audience panel: N=82198, data collection 1-15 June, 2023, India (all states except J&K)

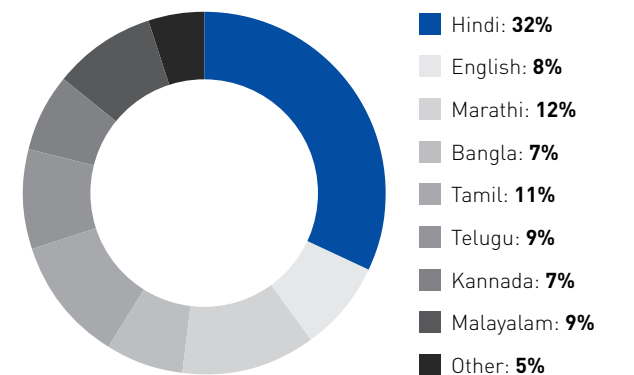### Question: How do we use the data collected?

Ad targeting	37%
Viewer engagement	49%
Content recommendations	76%
User behaviour analysis	93%

Source: COTT, streaming platforms' manager panel: N=30, COTT expert panel, data collection 1-15 June, 2023

Indian TV statistics: Trending genres

Genre	Female	Male	Grand total
Drama	33.62%	30.47%	**64.08%**
Action	13.07%	15.12%	**28.19%**
Thriller	12.13%	14.63%	**26.76%**
Crime	10.37%	12.22%	**22.59%**
Romance	10.63%	11.88%	**22.51%**
Comedy	8.66%	10.06%	**18.73%**
Mystery	7.32%	8.39%	**15.70%**
Reality TV	6.21%	8.01%	**14.22%**
Adventure	5.17%	6.19%	**11.37%**
Horror	3.14%	3.88%	**7.02%**

Source: COTT, N=82198, data collection 1-31 July, 2023, India (all states except J&K)

The MENA relevance

In the dynamic landscape of media consumption, streaming companies and TV broadcasters in the MENA region are harnessing the power of data to intricately target their diverse, multifaceted audiences. Much like in India, linguistic richness, especially with Arabic spoken differently across countries, presents both challenges and opportunities. The context below highlights how data-driven strategies are crucial to catering to MENA preferences and cultural nuances:

- **Celebrating multilingual variation:** Arabic, the predominant MENA language, has dialects that vary across regions. Using data analytics, streaming enterprises and broadcasters gain insight into these linguistic nuances, facilitating the production of content that strikes a chord with regional audiences. By incorporating subtitles and dubbing, and tailoring content to different Arabic dialects, they enhance both engagement and accessibility. Moreover, in the UAE, where 80% of the population is urban, global SVOD platforms like Netflix are flourishing, even embracing languages like Hindi to cater to diverse preferences.

- **Cultural relevance:** Data-driven insights provide an understanding of cultural sensitivities and trends within each MENA country. This empowers content creators to develop shows and movies that reflect local values, traditions and societal norms. By doing so, streaming platforms and TV broadcasters forge a deep connection with viewers and establish a sense of authenticity.

- **Tailoring content for expats:** The MENA region has a substantial expatriate community, presenting a distinctive task of addressing a wide array of cultural nuances and languages. Expatriates and immigrants are 88.52% of the population of the UAE, with the rest Emiratis. Leveraging data analytics, streaming companies can

"**As the competition intensifies in the streaming industry,** data-driven insights will become even more critical for companies seeking to stay ahead of the curve"

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

craft content that caters to expat communities, delivering a mix of local and global content that aligns with their multifaceted preferences.

- **Tailored viewer experience:** Data-driven algorithms have a pivotal role in personalised content recommendations tailored to unique individual inclinations. This significance escalates in a place with expansive linguistic and cultural variety, ensuring that spectators immerse themselves in content presented in their preferred language and style. Moreover, it is essential to emphasise content catering to the male audience, given the male majority in the UAE. A substantial 72% of the UAE's population is male, 6.89m, with females only 28%. This strategy aligns well with the median age for Dubai, 33.5 years.

- **Dynamic adaptation through live analytics:** The power of real-time data analytics empowers streaming entities and broadcasters to pivot rapidly in response to audience inclination and emerging trends. This flexibility enables them to finely calibrate their content approach, introducing subtle modifications that resonate with linguistic subtleties or cultural aspects that strike a chord with the audience.

- **Multi-platform engagement:** MENA audiences are known for their multi-platform engagement, from streaming apps to social media channels. Data-driven strategies help companies distribute their content across platforms in a way that effectively reaches and engages their audience on various levels, enhancing the overall viewer experience.

- **Nurturing local communities:** Valuable data insights empower streaming platforms and broadcasting entities to cultivate close-knit communities. In the UAE, Indians and Pakistanis are nearly 40% of the expatriate population, with distinct linguistic and cultural groups. These communities can forge connections based on shared interests, cultivating a strong sense of belonging and active engagement.

- **Flexible viewing times:** Due to time zone differences, expats may prefer content that is available on-demand, to watch their favourite shows at their convenience. Platforms that offer a wide variety of content that can be accessed at any time tend to attract expat viewers.

- **Sports and news:** Expats in the MENA region often have a strong interest in sports and news from both their host country and their home country. Streaming platforms that offer live sports events and news broadcasts, especially in multiple languages, are likely to be popular among expat audiences. **PRO**

Pankaj Krishna is founder & CEO of Chrome Data Analytics and Media in India

NEW ASBU CLOUD PLATFORM OFFERS SILVER LINING TO MEMBERS

The Arab States Broadcasting Union recently launched its biggest technical innovation since MENOS, with the roll-out of the ASBU Cloud platform earlier this year. In an exclusive interview with **Vijaya Cherian**, senior executives from ASBU and systems integrator Broadcast Solutions discuss how it will empower member organisations to harness technological advances and thrive in the times ahead

The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), headquartered in Tunisia, recently completed the development, integration, hosting and operational launch of its news and programme exchange network over a brand-new ASBU Cloud platform. Designed and developed by the ASBU engineering team, the project was completed in collaboration with systems integrator Broadcast Solutions, with the most important development in the platform rolled out in June.

ASBU works closely with its members, primarily public broadcasters across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), to facilitate the exchange of news and broadcast programmes. All members contribute annually to the common kitty, and ASBU provides a service that enables everyone to benefit. The organisation developed MENOS, a special system for multimedia exchange and satellite services consisting of a central station in Algiers, radio and television terminals and data messaging. Launched back in 2009, the system, though still in use, is missing some of the new services required today. A new ASBU Cloud platform was required to complement the existing MENOS system and provide more sophisticated services in tune with today's technologies and needs.

Helming the whole operation are ASBU Director General Abdelrahim Suleiman and Director of Technology and Innovation Basil Zoubi.

"ASBU Cloud is not designed to supersede the existing MENOS+ satellite-based contribution and distribution network. Instead, it enhances it by streamlining the process of contributing files and live feeds from the field while offering a more extensive and diverse media library of on-demand content," says Suleiman, who has led the organisation for the last few years with several innovative ideas and strategies, including new training programmes and a hotel intended to make ASBU self-sustaining.

Zoubi adds that the upgrade has been part of the plan since 2020.

"We have been wanting to upgrade the cloud for the needs of our members and thought of various combinations and permutations. We looked at different options – a single server cloud location would not serve our members' purpose, as any local or international problems in that location could mean loss of service for a couple of hours. A private cloud was considered, but would have been expensive to maintain in terms of human resources and operations. We would have required people for networking, security, operating systems

and software applications, among other things, and so many overheads can be a burden for any private broadcaster. What's more, there was also the initial investment we would have had to consider in buying equipment for the same."

According to Zoubi, the most reliable solution that was economically sustainable was to opt for a platform hosted by a public cloud service provider. "A public cloud meant we would have to give up some of our sovereignty, but we felt the end result was worth it. In general, these public cloud services have a lot of servers and an army of experts to maintain them. As all our members are sharing the cost, a public cloud solution was easier. Moreover, we can scale as we go and need

"With this cloud solution in place, the scalability and the flexibility are immense"

Basil Zoubi, Director of Technology and Innovation, ASBU

to pay only for what we consume."

Five companies were invited to bid for the project when the tender was released in 2020. Two made it to the final bidding, and eventually Broadcast Solutions was awarded the project in March 2021.

"We were invited to bid for this content supply chain platform and submitted a proposal in late October 2020. Followed a series of detailed workshops, a contract was finalised in March 2021, and work started over the summer," explains Nicolas Hans, a partner at Broadcast Solutions.

ASBU's mandate was to provide a

▲ ASBU Cloud provides its users with advanced filter and search features.

managed service to the organisation. Broadcast Solutions was called in to serve as a one-stop shop, providing design, implementation and integration of the various components, as well as training, hosting, support services and monthly invoicing. The detailed ASBU tender document called for the custom development of a media exchange hub that supported file- and live-feed contribution and distribution over the public internet.

Broadcast Solutions harnessed existing software products to build a comprehensive ecosystem that could fulfil ASBU's requirements. The team felt that using proven building blocks minimised integration risks and lowered total cost of ownership in the long run.

The SI designed a solution around three key ideas. "The primary principle was to consider the variety among ASBU members, given that consistent high-speed internet connectivity across the Arab world is still a work in progress. Secondly, we aimed to exploit AI services to methodically catalogue all files and live feeds to enhance content discovery. Finally, we focused on making the user experience more seamless to encourage user adoption," explains Hans.

The end result was the ASBU Cloud platform, provided as a turnkey managed service by Broadcast Solutions to ASBU, which in turn offers it to its members. Most of the core components, including Auth0, Dalet Flex, Newsbridge, Signiant, Slack and TVU, are hosted on AWS.

As a public cloud provider, AWS brings at least two benefits, according to Hans. Services running on AWS-reserved instances are dimensioned based on the projected workloads. As a result, more costly on-demand, pay-as-you-go services are minimised. In addition, AWS global infrastructure seamlessly acts as the content distribution network (CDN) for the overall platform,

End users working on the ASBU Cloud platform at the Tunis office.

facilitating exchanges between member organisations, he explains.

"Providing the usage pattern remains within predefined limits, and costs for ASBU are predictable. Moving forward, AWS' infrastructure will provide the flexibility to scale as adoption increases and workflows intensify," he elaborates.

What makes this solution interesting for ASBU and its members is that it can be integrated with multiple applications, says Zoubi:

"ASBU Cloud is not designed to supersede the existing MENOS+ satellite-based contribution and distribution network. Instead, it enhances it by streamlining the process"

Abdelrahim Suleiman, Director General, ASBU

"Previously, we were limited to what the service provider gave us. We did not have the flexibility to introduce new services or applications. With this cloud solution in place, the scalability and the flexibility are immense. Also, as the public cloud infrastructure runs across multiple locations, the geolocation redundancy is there, which is an advantage for us. So if I store in Dubai, I could mirror the same content in Germany or France. And if for some reason one location is blocked, we can move seamlessly to another, enabling us to hop around with the same resources with the same data matching and so on. This does not mean all the data will be stored in the cloud. It will be for a time frame like three to six months, and there will be some protocol and rules to follow."

The service designed for ASBU leverages various software tools to address the specific workflow requirements of ASBU members.
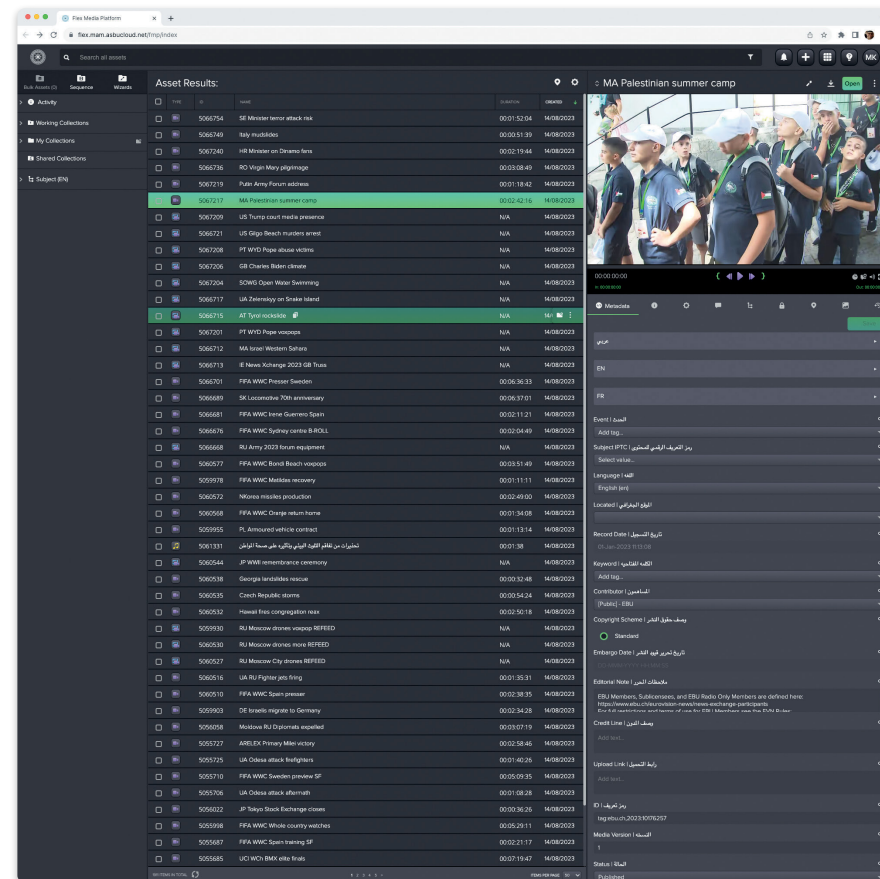

Awad Eid, Head of Multimedia Exchange Networks at ASBU, discusses the platform with team members and partners at one of ASBU's cloud workshops.

Zoubi says three solutions stand out in this project. "We had three major providers – Dalet provided the MAM, TVU the streaming facility and Newsbridge the audio and AI capability."

For live contributions, the TVU Anywhere mobile app allows members to send video feeds using any iOS or Android mobile device. Reception is ensured by TVU transceivers running in the cloud and connected to the TVU grid, which distributes these live feeds across the media supply chain. File-based contributions leverage accelerated uploads thanks to Signiant Media Shuttle.

All received feeds and files – both audio and video – are automatically indexed by Newsbridge multimodal AI services. Descriptive metadata

resulting from speech-to-text transcription and facial recognition is automatically generated and pushed to a Dalet Flex platform. This acts as the digital media supply chain backbone of ASBU Cloud. It is accessed by authorised users who can browse, select, download and exchange

> ## "This cloud system ensures that our members are no longer confined by the limitations of a physical facility but can access international services available to all players across the globe"
>
> Abdelrahim Suleiman,
> Director General, ASBU

news clips and programs. Auth0 streamlines user management and Slack provides notification, communication and collaboration services. Custom reporting tools – including live dashboards and periodic reports – are available to ASBU system administrators and facilitate the tracking of workloads and operating costs.

"We give our members all these resources, based on which they can start their own platform," says Zoubi. "We offer several new services with this new solution. For instance, our members can download a segment of a clip based on their selections. We have an AI element primarily for speech-to-text transcription. People can search for specific words within the text, and all the sentences which include those words will come up.

ASBU staff at work at the Tunis office.
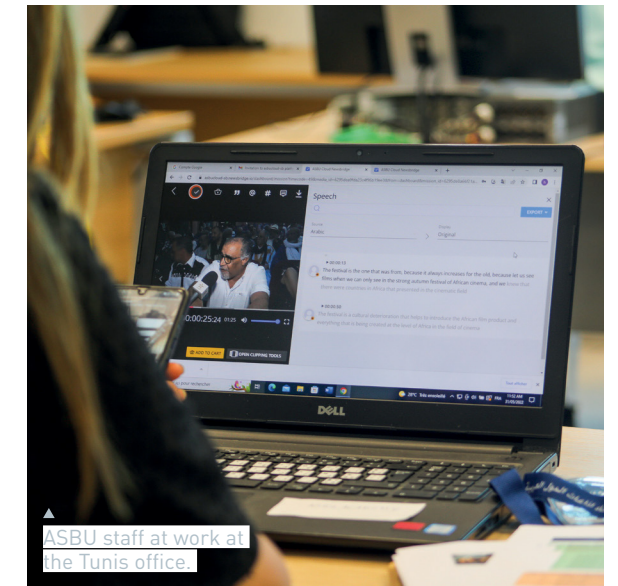
ASBU Director General Abdelrahim Suleiman addresses the gathering at the ASBU festival in Tunis.

The AI will then allow you to select that text or video.

"Likewise, we can undertake subtitling with ease with this. The audio transcription offers a facility to import or export the text with the associated time code of the video. This allows you to present the subtitle easily on any of this content. So we are providing our members with a platform where they can initiate the subtitling at a reasonable cost and they can provide a new service for, say, disabled people. We have been talking about it for a long time. With this new technology, subtitling is now possible. AI does all the audio transcription. You need an editor to supervise and make changes, especially where the AI fails to recognise proper words and sentences. With AI today, 80-90% of the time taken to produce something will be reduced, but human intervention is necessary."

Salah Ayoub, Head of Projects at Broadcast Solutions, says: "The project timeline was greatly affected by the Covid pandemic. Despite the disruption, tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams made collaboration possible between ASBU members in Tunis and Algiers and our design and engineering teams in Geneva,

Paris and Dubai. However, remote collaboration presented additional complexities, especially given the novel concepts introduced by cloud-based architectures that needed comprehensive reviews and explanations. Despite these challenges, we persevered, and although delivery was a few months delayed from the original schedule, the system was successfully rolled out."

ASBU has a network operating centre (NOC) in Algiers and its HQs in Tunis and Algiers are both equipped with TVU transceivers, used to contribute or receive live feeds. These allow incoming contributions over ASBU Cloud to be forwarded to MENOS+ for satellite distribution.

Members, however, only require a public internet connection and proper credentials to access the platform. This makes it much easier for current and future member organisations to leverage the Arab States news and programme exchange programme.

The project was not without its challenges, explains Hans.

"The pandemic's effect on the project timeline was just one obstacle to overcome; three other significant hurdles
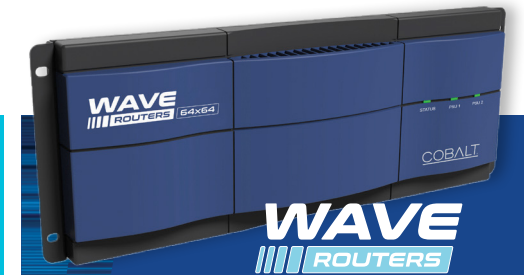
Nicolas Hans, Partner, Broadcast Solutions.

Jean-Christophe Liechti, System Architect, Broadcast Solutions.

Salah Ayoub, Head of Projects, Broadcast Solutions.

existed. Firstly, the issue of design was critical. The range of broadband connectivity in the Arab world is wide and inconsistent, with neither public cloud providers nor content delivery networks maintaining a comprehensive Arab presence. Selecting a robust technology capable of facilitating live contributions via public internet links without compromising quality was crucial. That's where TVU proprietary Inverse StatMux Plus transmission technology proved instrumental.

"The second obstacle was related to integration. While the ASBU Cloud includes software components with application programming interfaces (APIs), connecting these elements is not as simple as assembling a bunch of Lego pieces!

"Lastly, implementing workflows posed an extra challenge due to the trilingual nature of ASBU, which operates in Arabic, French and English."

In terms of standards, ASBU chose to implement NewsML-G2 as a metadata schema and worked with IPTC to ensure it met its standard, so that it could be used by other international organisations like the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), explains Zoubi.

Broadcast Solutions System

Architect Jean-Christophe Liechti elaborates: "This XML-based standard for news exchange was developed and is maintained by the International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC). It's a successor to the original NewsML format and it provides a comprehensive and flexible framework for distributing any type of media, including text, images, audio and video. This metadata standard is language-agnostic. You can use standard dictionaries or manage your own to structure your data. We reached out to IPTC to ensure that our implementation closely met the standard. ASBU exchanges are now available as a NewsML-G2 feed like partner organisations like the EBU or major news organisations like Reuters, AP or AFP."

The final piece of the jigsaw, according to Zoubi, is a minor issue related to monitoring.

"We are looking at how to ensure quality control for each element of each application of each service and pinpoint bottlenecks, if any. This is the only tool that is missing.

> "**Selecting a robust technology** capable of facilitating live contributions via public internet links without compromising quality was crucial"
>
> Nicolas Hans, Partner, Broadcast Solutions

Currently that is under design, but it is not part of the public interface."

The big challenge now, as the platform is rolled out, is to ensure members, editors and engineers are well trained to use these new technologies. "There is always a resistance to change when you introduce new technologies, but we are sure these things will be ironed out in time," says Zoubi.

Director General Abdelrahim Suleiman adds that ASBU has always led with innovation. "With the implementation of a cutting-edge cloud system, we have not just made a technological leap but also brought about a profound shift in how we empower our members. This cloud system ensures that our members are no longer confined by the limitations of a physical facility but can access international services available to all players across the globe." ASBU's dynamic transformation through the development of its ASBU Cloud platform will undoubtedly help bolster media exchange across the MENA region. Its approach has been to harmonise cloud technology, AI and diverse services, while also nurturing efficient collaboration between member organisations. The new solution will help achieve that goal. **PRO**

Snapshot

Client: Ministry of Information, Oman

Systems integrator: UBMS, Dubai

Key objective: To replace the existing production asset management and newsroom computer systems with brand-new solutions at sites in Muscat and Salalah

Key solutions

> EVS – PAM, including transcoding farms, storage and proxy edit

> Avid – Avid Media Central | Newsroom management

> Adobe – Long-format edit

> Dell – Servers, workstations and monitors

> Network switch – Cisco

Special technical highlights

> Content preview within seconds of start of ingest

> Content browse/transfer between two sites

> Virtualised environment for EVS PAM and Avid iNews

> Multiple transcoding engines to improve production efficiency

> Redundancy at multiple levels – server infrastructure, DB/application, network

Extensive training was provided to users at the ministry to familiarise them with the products.

OMAN'S MINISTRY OF INFORMATION IMPLEMENTS EXTENSIVE UPGRADE WITH UBMS AND EVS

With an ageing broadcast system that had reached the end of its lifecycle, Oman's Ministry of Information roped in systems integrator UBMS for a complete overhaul. **BroadcastPro ME** goes behind the scenes to explore the technological set-up deployed

Oman's Ministry of Information has taken significant strides to modernise its broadcasting capabilities, embracing technological advancement to enhance its media infrastructure. In collaboration with Dubai systems integrator United Broadcast and Media Solutions (UBMS), the ministry has embarked on an ambitious project to upgrade its Avid production asset management (PAM) and iNews newsroom computer system (NRCS) at two of its sites in Muscat and Salalah.

After a rigorous and critical evaluation process that began with an RFP in 2017 and only ended early last year, the project was completed in July 2023. Although the project deployment itself took only eight months, it was not without its challenges owing to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, which led to delays in delivering essential infrastructure components such as network switches, Dell servers and client PCs.

Parwaiz Anjum, a consultant with UBMS, led the charge in upgrading and replacing the Avid PAM and iNews NRCS systems. The project's scope extended to expanding the central apparatus area (CTA) and introducing EVS' new MediaCeption Signature, a complete end-to-end live production asset management (PAM) solution to replace the existing Avid solution. Additionally, Adobe Premier edits were adopted in place of Avid Media Composer, alongside the implementation of Media Central and new client PCs. Additionally, Adobe Premier edits were adopted in place of Avid Media Composer, alongside the implementation of Media Central and new client PCs. EVS MediaCeption

Signature is integrated with the existing Tedial MAM system at the site to achieve the Archive and Restore workflow and send clips from the PAM to the current playout system.

The project's foundation lay in the modernisation of server, network and hyper-converged infrastructure. Anjum and the SI team oversaw the installation of the latest generation of XS-VIA servers for the EVS PAM and Avid iNews systems. A notable enhancement was the upgrade of the PAM Network backbone to 100G and the edge network to 10G. The collaboration between Adobe NLEs and XS-VIA servers was fortified by a dual 10G network, significantly improving system performance.

An important technical highlight is the new virtual environment, which gives flexibility to add VM instances when required. "VMware vSphere powers the system to virtualise the servers and host multiple virtual machines. While this reduces the rack space and power consumption, it increases the flexibility for the system administrator and gives scalability for future expansion," explains Anjum.

One major reason for the upgrade was that the existing PAM and NRCS, installed back in 2012, had reached the end of their life. "The legacy system had multiple hardware failures and was no longer supported, so the client decided to replace it with a brand-new solution that offers better workflow and support," explains Anjum, adding that the team stuck with DNxHD 120, the ministry's house format.

The EVS PAM and iNews Media Central NRCS systems promise improved workflow and enhanced support, marking a significant departure from the legacy systems.

The seamless transfer of media from the old Avid system to the new EVS system, as well as the migration of the iNews database to Media Central, ensures continuity and a smooth transition.

Integral to the project's success was the comprehensive training provided by the UBMS & EVS teams. Extensive on-site technical and operational training on EVS solutions, Adobe editing and MediaCentral were part of the project deliverables, says Anjum: "Our team conducted trainings for multiple groups and multiple rounds to give more confidence to

> **"Training was the most challenging part of the project.** We had run multiple training courses covering each part of the system for a total of 130 days in Muscat and 80 days in Salalah"

Parwaiz Anjum, consultant, UBMS

Muscat – Overview

EVS PAM
The system includes EVS XS Via servers providing 24 ingest and 32 playout channels. The transcoding farm consists of transcoding engines, which handle file-based ingest, transcoding, rendering and file transfers between EVS systems and between EVS and third-party storage. The central storage, powered by EVS X Store, has 500TB capacity, used to share video content across the PAM system. XS Via servers are future-proof hardware capable of being upgraded to IP UHD when required.

There are eight virtualised servers to host all the backend services of EVS. The complete EVS system is designed with redundancy at multiple levels – hardware, database and applications, and handles both news and production workflow across eight galleries.

NRCS
Media Central | Newsroom management is installed in a two-host environment. The network infrastructure in these hosts is dual 10G and configured vSphere HA to handle host failure.

NLEs
Adobe Creative Cloud replaces the existing Media Composer NLEs. These systems are installed with dual 10G to access the PAM/Central storage.

Integrations
EVS PAM is integrated with the existing Tedial MAM system to achieve the Archive and Restore workflow and send clips from PAM to the current playout system. The EVS IPLink plug-in allows editors to import video clips into the Adobe sequence, and the export option allows them to define the metadata. Adobe Premier Pro and Viz

graphics are integrated for editors to access the Viz graphics template, key in graphics data and render both video and graphics together. There is also integration between EVS Proxy edit and Viz graphics.

EVS integrates with iNews to publish a rundown from iNews to EVS and get the rundown status/feedback from EVS to iNews. iNews is integrated with Vizrt and Netia for Active X integration and rundown publishing.

Workflow highlights
Content acquisition can be signal-based or file-based. The user can select the router source and do the recording during feed ingest. File-based ingest is handled by multiple watch folders to ingest files coming from FTP, Reuters, external hard drives, etc. EVS Multicam recording allows ingesting operators to access the content missing

from their ingest list.

PAM users can browse the proxy while the ingest is in progress. Multiple bin mapping and bin filters make content available in the user bin for quick access, with automated file transfer between PAM systems, EVS and Tedial per the workflow requirement.

For news production, EVS proxy edit can be used for a new package that requires basic editing and voiceover. Through Avid iNews, the edited clip can be published to the gallery for playout. If needed, the project from EVS proxy edit can be passed to Adobe as an EDL.

For remote content browsing and transfer between Muscat and Salalah, Muscat PAM users can access the Salalah EVS PAM content and initiate content transfers. Similarly, Salalah users can access Muscat content and initiate transfers.

the operational users and system administrators. Following the training, UBMS was also on-site for further support to the end user."

The system is going through several dry runs now, and a date has not yet been set for the system to go live.

"Training was the most challenging part of the project. We had run multiple training courses covering each part of the system for a total of 130 days in Muscat and 80 days in Salalah," explains Anjum. "The end user was able to achieve several key business benefits with this upgrade. For instance, with the upgrade of the server and network infrastructure, the client will see an overall improvement in the equipment's performance and experience a more efficient

workflow. By upgrading the storage infrastructure, the client has more capacity now and will see an enhanced storage performance that allows multiple users to perform the editing. The XS Via servers are future-proof hardware that are capable of being upgraded to IP and or UHD as and when required." Amid dynamic shifts in media technology, Oman's Ministry of Information's collaboration with UBMS is a testament to the importance of adapting to changing times. The upgrade not only addresses technical challenges but also equips the ministry to disseminate information more efficiently, ensuring its media apparatus remains robust and resilient in an ever-evolving digital age. PRO

Salalah – Overview

EVS PAM
The system includes EVS XS Via servers ingest servers to provide eight ingest and 12 playout channels. The transcoding farm consists of transcoding engines which take file-based ingest, transcoding, rendering and file transfers between EVS systems and between EVS and third-party storage. The central storage powered by EVS X Store has a storage capacity of 128TB, used to share video content across the PAM system. XS Via servers are future-proof hardware capable of being upgraded to IP UHD when required.

There are five virtualised servers to host all the EVS backend services. The complete EVS system is designed with redundancy at multiple levels – hardware, database and applications – and installed to handle both news and production workflow across two galleries.

PLOTTING AN
INDEPENDENT PATH

In an exclusive interview with **Vijaya Cherian**, Pratixa Shah, co-founder of The Plot Pictures, talks about her role in shaping the UAE's indie film scene and shares insights into her journey of fostering independent filmmaking and redefining storytelling

In the world of storytelling, there are the dreamers who weave stories – and then there are the creators who bring them to life. Pratixa Shah, co-founder of The Plot Pictures, an independent narrative studio launched recently in the UAE, is among the latter. She is on a mission to craft compelling narratives that are also commercially viable.

With a background in filmmaking and production, Shah has spent the last 17 years navigating the dynamic landscapes of the UAE, India, Saudi Arabia and the US. Born and raised in Dubai, her love affair with advertising and film began in her teenage years. At 14 she had the opportunity in India to do small errands on set, and that put her on the filmmaking path.

With a degree in Advertising from Sophia College, Mumbai, Shah then moved to UCLA to delve into the world of entertainment and learn about the intricacies of financing and producing films and TV series, before returning to India and working at Picture This India. Here, she had her first chance at independent feature films. She then moved to Dubai and a couple of jobs later joined Dejavu, where she spearheaded production for ten years. She then ventured into the agency world, setting up the production unit of Craft for FP7/McCann MENA over two years.

"Until 2017, we were purely doing advertising at Dejavu. But because I had a long-format background and there were a lot of scriptwriters coming to us from a production point of view, we took that leap of faith to channel our energies into something new that we wanted to sustain and build on. And that's when the script for *Beneath a Sea of Lights* came by. I really loved it and saw great potential in it," she explains.

That film, starring Barkhad Abdi and Jim Sarbh, and the company's next production, *One of These Days,* were game-changers for Shah. The former garnered significant attention thanks to Abdi's Oscar success. It piqued the interest of a major network, Showtime,

paving the way for a successful distribution deal.

"Previously in the UAE, we were just servicing Hollywood films, who would often only produce one leg of their film in the UAE. So our creative input was limited. With *Beneath*, we got to keep the entire cycle in Dubai, from development to production and post-production. This was really refreshing for everyone involved, as the project was in pre-production for four months, with two months of principal photography and four months of post-production.

"In the first week of the shoot, I was nervous because all the elements needed to come together. The pre-production part was challenging, but I think logistically the UAE made it very easy for us. From week three, things moved extremely smoothly. We knew where it was going and even the funding through those weeks was perfectly planned."

By the end of that exercise, a plan had taken shape in Shah's mind and in March 2023, she co-founded The Plot Pictures MENA with Dejavu Media Network.

"Usually you have companies here that take up any one vertical, either development, production or distribution. We decided to take ownership of the entire chain. That way, we can cultivate intellectual property, nurture talented screenwriters and provide the necessary support to bring those stories to life," explains Shah.

A narrative studio undoubtedly comes with its own set of challenges. "Unlike advertising, it takes anything from nine months to a year to mount a development project. There is a lengthy and meticulous development process where we ensure the scripts undergo a thorough curation and are imbued with authenticity for the audience they cater to. Typically, from the time we first talk about the script to seeing it come to life on screen, we are easily talking two to three years," says Shah.

She herself plays an integral role at this stage of the process, collaborating with writers and directors to shape

narratives that resonate with the audience. As the development process is long, the team works on multiple productions at a time – an environment Shah is well-accustomed to. In fact, The Plot Pictures MENA is currently involved in four productions at various stages of development. A Taiwanese production has just concluded filming; at the time of this interview, Shah had just returned from Taipei.

"That project is in post-production and is scheduled for release next summer. It is a Taiwanese-UAE film with Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka and English being part of the dialogue. We are co-producing it and are confident it is going to be a festival darling; it will do the whole circuit starting from Cannes and Berlinale to Toronto, etc."

Shah says participating in film festivals ensures their "stories resonate with audiences worldwide and open up opportunities

On set for the production of *Locust* – a Taiwanese/UAE/LA co-production that The Plot Pictures is currently working on.

for international distribution".

Other co-productions include a UAE/Bahraini project and a KSA/Bahraini project on which The Plot Pictures MENA is collaborating with Fable Mill Studio, a writing studio in Bahrain. Both are GCC series in the early stages of development.

"The Saudi indie film is based on a very radical subject; it has already done all the script labs in the Kingdom, whether it is the Saudi Film Commission or the Red Sea Film Lab. We are just finalising the deal in terms of who we're going to bring onboard as the script doctor, to ensure authenticity is

paramount in the language and tone of the script," explains Shah.

One thing that has helped Shah in the local market is her understanding of Arabic. In fact, her keen understanding of the market has helped her identify hidden gems and under-represented stories.

"I studied in Dubai and took Arabic quite seriously, as did my family. You need to not just understand the language thoroughly but also its finer nuances, although I do have two native speakers to vet the scripts

as I could perhaps miss some of the analogies and overtones. It's critical to identify the right writers and directors and have the right mix onboard for each project.

"My main attention at Plot is always development. I prefer to spend two more months doing that and making sure that we have everything watertight, so when we're on the floor, production becomes easy. Development and sourcing the right talent are very important and there are many avenues in the market to get this aspect right. So we use that and our social radar to see that the story strikes a chord with the audience."

One other critical aspect is funding. The Plot taps into a "network of investors, hedge funds and festival grants scattered across different regions, to ensure a steady flow of financial support while putting in 10-20% of the investment ourselves", says Shah. "We also actively engage in co-productions, building partnerships with entities worldwide to broaden the reach of our stories. And we are the angel investors that step in when there's a roadblock. This ensures seamless and uninterrupted progress throughout the filmmaking process."

One other way to ensure money is used wisely is to keep the team small, says Shah. "We are currently a team of six, with two development and distribution experts in the mix."

Distribution is a critical aspect, and Shah says the company has engaged two experts – one with local connections and one with international know-how – to ensure the products are well marketed and sold, for a good return on investment. The Plot's distribution strategy entails a mix of theatrical releases, festival circuits, cable, OTT, TVOD, SVOD, AVOD and internet platforms, ensuring that the stories reach diverse and engaged audiences.

"Actually, any narrative studio's

bread and butter is the distribution part. With *Beneath a Sea of Lights*, for which we spent a modest $725,000, the financial mounting happened in the first six months of development. However, the actual sale was only done once we were ready with the post-production, and we were already having conversations with Shoreline Entertainment for the Showtime network. They took a five-year licensing deal with us and renewed it recently for another three years," she says.

Shah takes us through the process.

"My vision is to bring out those smaller stories, and I have no doubt there is more than enough room for it"

Pratixa Shah, co-founder, The Plot Pictures

For independent films: "We identify sales agents for international markets during the development process, to ensure all feedback for the markets is well incorporated into the script. So sales agents know what to expect once the filming is completed, and our spending is curbed to ensure we are not over-budget for the market. Once you have your screener ready, which is the trailer plus all the key scenes from the story, we submit it to our sales agent and tell them what amount we spent and what we hope to get in return. The sales agent then has a target to get us the right distribution.

"We could have taken *Beneath a Sea of Lights* to the festivals, but we chose not to because Barkhad at the time had something releasing at the festivals and ours would have

Filming *Aalish*, a short film.

Filming one of the company's short films, *Aalish*.

Pratixa Shah at a shoot.

come second. By then Showtime came in, although that negotiation took nearly nine months. That's how long it will take if you don't take the festival route. Although we haven't yet recovered what we invested, the revenue shares and the renewal of the deal until 2025 are helping us get there."

On distribution platforms, Shah says: "You must do a mix now. You have to target a particular distribution channel and do a simultaneous release for a short window theatrically, and then take it out to whichever platform. YouTube also can help you recover your money if you were to really put it at the right time and send it to the right multi-channel networks (MCN). But that requires a lot of marketing effort. In the last four projects, we are leaving a good chunk for P&A and making sure that the distribution team gets the time and tools to maximise their efforts."
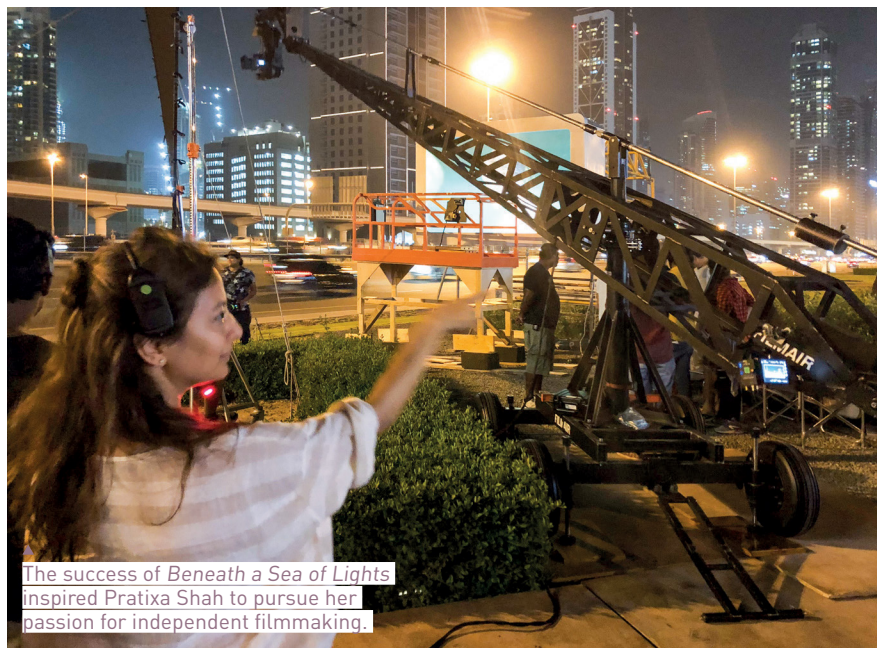
Knowing how important funding is, Shah actively seeks out grants and funding from film commissions and organisations worldwide, and does not limit herself to local capital. "These grants play a significant role in supporting hyper-local content and empowering filmmakers to bring their unique stories to the screen."

She stresses that the GCC region has been incredibly supportive of independent filmmakers. Organisations like Abu Dhabi Film Commission/Image Nation

Abu Dhabi, the Doha film Institute and the Saudi Film Commission have been instrumental in providing generous grants for development projects, extending their support to stories from the region,

> ## "Usually you have companies here that take up any one vertical, either development, production or distribution. We decided to take ownership of the entire chain"
>
> Pratixa Shah, co-founder, The Plot Pictures

even if the filmmakers themselves are not from those countries.

"My vision is to bring out those smaller stories, and I have no doubt there is more than enough room for it. I've been in touch with so many GCC directors who have so many niche gender-led stories, the stuff that is culturally authentic, which they're ready to now come out with. Typically, in a month we get 15 to 20 scripts. I keep reminding every filmmaker that my goal is for them to get to their second film. So I will invest the funds, but I will also want to see the results at the end." Shah's vision for The Plot Pictures MENA goes beyond creating captivating films; it extends to empowering filmmakers and representing the cultural richness of the GCC region. She envisions her studio as a platform for emerging talent, providing the support and resources needed to bring their visions to life. By promoting these narratives, she aims to create a cultural exchange through cinema, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation between different societies. PRO

The success of *Beneath a Sea of Lights* inspired Pratixa Shah to pursue her passion for independent filmmaking.

EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF GRAPHICS WITH NEXT-LEVEL DATA HANDLING

Carol Bettencourt explores the advancements in graphics fulfilment and efficient data integration in modern newsrooms

Over the past two decades, the task of graphics fulfilment has gradually moved into the broadcast newsroom, where stories are created, and the ongoing adoption of MOS (media object server protocol) workflows has introduced new efficiencies in bringing those stories to air. Integration of graphics and CG systems with leading newsroom computer systems (NRCS) has been empowering for producers and journalists, who can simply select graphics templates, insert text, images or clips, and add them directly to their stories in the NRCS MOS rundown.

While this MOS-enabled graphics model has been vital in enabling quick turnaround of news stories, even greater efficiency and agility in handling increasing volumes of data is proving critical in the modern newsroom. Whether for politics and elections, sports, weather or community health reporting, producers and journalists today have access to massive amounts of data: predictions, polls and election results;

stats on every aspect of a game or a player's performance; information on drought, flood zones and other climate events; details of Covid-19 and other health concerns; and much more.

Enhancing visuals across the newscast

How can a broadcaster help viewers make sense of all this information? Graphics play an essential role in parsing and prioritising information. In addition to engaging the viewer, they clarify and impose order. And when the broadcaster's NRCS is integrated with a MOS-driven graphics system equipped with robust data handling capabilities, it becomes easy for producers and journalists to infuse their storytelling with dynamic, engaging data.

Whether presented in an on-air graphic such as a lower-third or video wall, on a virtual set or with an augmented reality element, the data itself can work with logic to determine how these visual elements are displayed at any given moment. The data-handling capabilities of the modern

CG can be leveraged within the familiar graphics workflow driven by the NRCS, to efficiently feed data into every element. Databinding to scene elements enables easy visualisation of data to showcase real-time events as they unfold. Logic-based scenes function as editable templates that can refresh up-to-the-second based on data feeds and trigger controls.

With greater flexibility and efficiency in presenting data-driven graphics, producers and the larger organisation can streamline their workflow, focus on storytelling and deliver captivating news content that engages and leaves a lasting

impact on viewers. This is a critical differentiator when broadcasters have so many more ways to enrich their stories – and the studio environment – with visual displays of data.

Doing more with more

It's not just the weather person who presents using data-driven graphics and touchscreen controls, though those graphics have evolved dramatically – augmented reality elements and virtual sets present tremendous creative opportunities for dynamic visuals illustrating changing weather conditions. For sports reporting in a green screen environment, automatically updated stats on a pop-up or drop-down leaderboard add interest and a connection to live play. On election night, this might be useful in displaying an AR bar graph, perhaps growing up out of the floor, showing vote counts. The possibilities are endless.

In addition to fulfilling certain graphics template fields or elements with data, or causing a graphical element to shrink, grow or change colour in response to changing data, an advanced graphics system also enables auto-population of a template with media assets based on metadata. A graphic that includes a headshot of a local newsmaker plus their name and title can thus be automatically populated with text and an image from the media asset manager, then edited by the journalist as needed. (While data is typically sourced from a database, third-party data provider or CSV file, a manual over-ride can allow the producer or journalist to enter data.) This is a further efficiency that speeds time to air and frees up time to focus on other aspects of storytelling.

Because data can dynamically populate graphics, updating in real time, producers and journalists have the option of configuring completely automated visual elements, or setting up manual updates with control over when and where the latest data is revealed. On election night, rather than enable immediate visually distracting changes to that vote count bar graph as new

data comes in, the presenter might instead trigger the update manually as they explain fresh results.

Finally, having improved their capacity to enrich news stories and presentation with graphics that inform and illustrate, broadcasters also benefit from looking downstream. If the branding engine used to overlay additional content such as school closings, emergency information, headlines and stock tickers leverages the same design engine as the CG, then it's likely the same data integrations and tools can be used to support and display those elements in coordination with the rest of the newscast.

Leveraging data capabilities to connect

With more powerful data-handling capabilities and improved efficiency to match, broadcasters have greater capacity to drive both newer and traditional visual elements as part of a cohesive storytelling environment. It's easier and less time-intensive than ever. With a data-driven, producer-friendly interface for creating graphics, producers and journalists can present visuals that adapt to events in real time, draw viewers' attention to the most important information, make sense of large volumes of data and break through the noise to connect with audiences in a meaningful way. **PRO**

Carol Bettencourt is Vice President of Marketing at Chyron.

Creative Process

Idea **85%**

Brainstorm **50%**

Analysis **30%**

Plan **18%**

Start **5%**

DECODING AI AND
NEW TECHNOLOGIES
IN MEDIA

Keeping up with the AI chatter in regional media, **BroadcastPro ME** hosted a webinar delving into the latest and greatest of AI and other trending technologies that have taken the broadcast world by storm. Sarah Nathan sums up the discussion
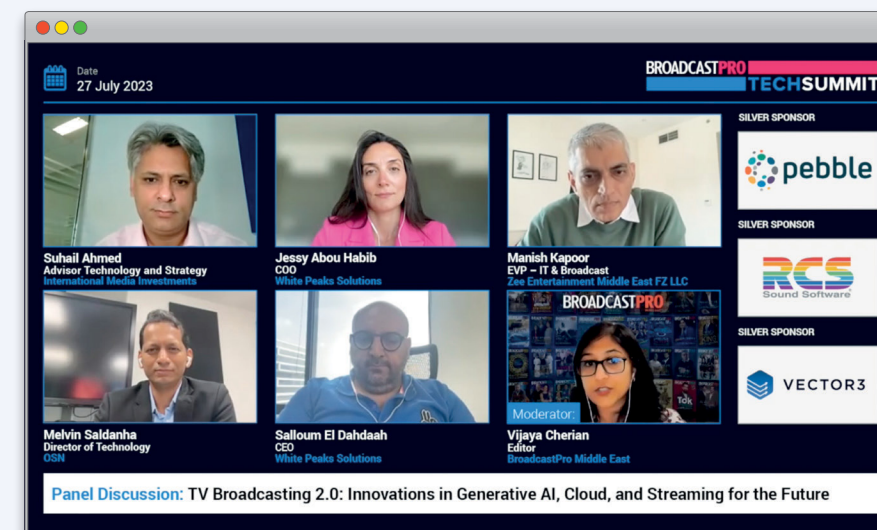
At the recent BroadcastPro Tech webinar, panellists shared their thoughts on AI, cloud, next-gen technologies and FAST business models. Moderated by *BroadcastPro ME* editor Vijaya Cherian, the panel discussion featured Manish Kapoor, Executive VP of Broadcast and Technology, Zee Entertainment Middle East; Salloum El Dahdaah, CEO of White Peaks, who attended with COO Jessy Abou Habib; Melvin Saldanha, OSN Director of Technology; and Suhail Ahmed, Advisor of Technology and Strategy at International Media Investments, the parent company of Sky News Arabia.

Where do we stand in terms of artificial intelligence, and what is its future potential?
AI is the latest murmur across the region's media industry. Although the discussion revealed that the opportunities unlocked appear endless, it is largely being used for content localisation at present.

"This is still the infancy of AI," pointed out OSN's Saldanha. At OSN, any acquired content goes through speech-to-text software before being passed to editorial, programming or language service departments for further curation and localisation. Since AI is not

immune to error, human intervention is still called for.

"Will you get a 100% correct result?" pondered Abou Habib. "Definitely not, but the result we are getting today is much better than what we used to get before." Saldanha agreed, estimating that potentially complete accuracy is not that far away.

Systems integrator White Peaks Solutions already offers clients several AI services. "You still need human intervention, but instead of spending two hours on each video, you spend about 15 minutes with our AI content moderation services," explained Abou Habib.

Meanwhile, at Zee, although AI has not yet been officially implemented, the broadcaster is getting a feel for its benefits, especially in India. With approximately 40 channels internationally, Zee boasts an extensive library of content and employs AI to dub and subtitle content for faster reach to international viewers and to filter specific scenes, characters and languages. "As a broadcaster, content creation is not there with AI as yet," Kapoor reflected. "What is there is post-production, a bit of production and, of course,

it can be used in the distribution of channels or other streams."

The panellists also concurred that while AI is here to stay, it will not replace humans. "AI cannot make the decision on your behalf," explained El Dahdaah. "It can provide you different decisions whereby you choose one of them. It's just here to accelerate your job."

Ahmed noted that such apprehension deters the region from unleashing its full potential. He noted that AI is "augmented intelligence" and brings greater efficiency to the workplace.

Despite its services, however, AI comes with numerous complications, especially security. Errors could particularly transfer to external software and kickstart a chain of

viruses. "If I build an app and I'm tricked into misclassifying data as real input, the output would be that the app carries a malware, which could be dangerous to a platform and could also bypass security. AI models that lack human oversight can lead to data poisoning," Saldanha said.

The region's legislative and legal obstacles may discourage companies from adopting AI. El Dahdaah posited that Middle Eastern content is not as enriched with data as in the West. For instance, if companies wish to offer viewers the option to view IMDB databases of characters on their screens, content has not yet been indexed with this information. "We came late to this," he commented. However, with the influx of companies joining the cloud, Ahmed is optimistic that data will be shared more freely between entities, opening up more prospects.

Another controversy is content creation. "If a story is written by AI, who owns the copyright? More importantly, if you recreate the voice of a dead actor for a programme, who then benefits from the revenue?" challenged Ahmed. "If we come up with a regulation that allows AI to have copyrights, that means they get a bank account. If they get a bank account, this leads to us agreeing that they exist. There are a lot

"As a broadcaster, content creation is not there with AI as yet. What is there is post-production, a bit of production and, of course, it can be used in the distribution of channels or other streams"

Manish Kapoor, Executive VP of Broadcast and Technology, Zee Entertainment Middle East

we were to do a Middle Eastern version of ChatGPT, it would make decisions differently because of different datasets and different training of those datasets."

How are cloud and next-gen technologies shaping the region's media world?
When the question of cloud arose, all panellists agreed that security and cost were still major deterrents for regional players. El Dahdaah explained that their solution to the security issue was to have the data in the cloud but provide access only via private networks. "We're using the servers [the public] has, but we're blocking all network access and just allowing a specific encrypted tunnel for connectivity," he elaborated. "Whenever the tunnel is lost, it's just the system running there on its own. At the end of the day, we need the infrastructure of these big systems and we see that as the way forward."

Saldanha hoped to phase out some OSN on-prem operations: "I can't remember the last time I spent CAPEX investments on on-prem." With the cloud comes greater capacity for flexibility and scalability. With the company having widely adopted cloud services, not only does this bring better large-scale streaming capabilities and higher concurrent viewership, but also the flexibility to scale up or down.

Kapoor said that a hybrid solution is working for Zee. On the one hand, the flexibility of the cloud is useful for international ventures, especially subtitling. With cloud services, one channel with one subtitle language can become one channel with 12 subtitled languages – multiple channels can stem from one playout stream. Additionally, headaches of physical upgrades to hardware are eased as cloud vendors oversee all updates. Again, this promises efficient delivery of channels. On the other hand, some of Zee's

of questions that need answers, especially on the ethical level."

Ahmed also highlighted that AI software, like humans, can fall victim to bias. Platforms like ChatGPT rely on existing datasets to inform data output. However, these platforms are often largely infused with Western and European datasets, as opposed to those from the Middle East. "How do we ensure that our region's culture and art infuse the data that is often used for training these AIs?" wondered Ahmed. "If

offerings in general entertainment and sports mean file-based channels, live events and sports content have last-minute graphics changes, making them better-suited to on-prem operations.

"It's not 100% cloud," posited Manish. "Hybrid is still the way forward." Ahmed pointed out that some tasks, like graphics, are still achievable on the cloud. "If your creative team is happy to adopt HTML-based graphics as opposed to traditional RTF-based graphics that we've known in the region, the change is instant. Again, the barrier is humans."

A firm supporter of switching to cloud services, Ahmed was

"You still need human intervention, but instead of spending two hours on each video, you spend about 15 minutes with our AI content moderation services"

Jessy Abou Habib, COO, White Peaks

emphatic in his proposition to reinvent the traditional approach whereby broadcast companies purchase technologies using capital expenditure and spend operating expenditure on SLAs. Instead, a company could rely entirely on operational expenditure by switching to cloud services. This would even lower operating costs, since construction of data centres necessitates utility bills and civil costs and can take months to complete. Instead, the cloud allows visions and creative projects to materialise almost instantly. Costs are further minimised as the workloads of first-line maintenance and support staff are reduced.

Commenting on the region's apprehension of the security risks that accompany switching to cloud services, Ahmed claimed that safety is comparable to that

of operating with private data centres: "[However], the efficiency would outweigh this risk."

Speaking about next-generation technologies, El Dahdaah brought in the context of caching dynamic content. With large-scale and heavily viewed live events such as the men's World Cup, systems that can handle large influxes of registration and

"Connectivity is not a luxury. We need to have this understanding; it's a must. If we don't act fast, we'll always see Europe, USA, Canada and all those countries get ahead of us"

Salloum El Dahdaah, CEO, White Peaks

payments by eager users while still caching dynamic content are a must. Since modern audiences are growing, both on bigger screens and mobile phones, their hunger for content urges companies to make things content-accessible – that is, not only do last-mile delivery methods ensure that content reaches audiences, but audiences are also able to reach content, especially with lowered latencies.

"About last-mile delivery, here, it's becoming about both up and down, not just down," he said. "It's no longer about last mile on a country level; it's also on a city level. You need to have more capacity at the levels of the cities whereby you lower latency." White Peaks Solutions has addressed this by placing nodes across different parts of the UAE to help Asharq TV achieve low

latency rates of less than 4Mbps.

Again, however, the Middle East must rely on regional collaboration to keep up with its international counterparts. Since Western markets have connected IXs complete with fibre optics and numerous data centres, production output is guaranteed to reach centres in a few milliseconds. Despite the impressive infrastructure in some of its cities, the Middle East does not have this connectivity.

"Practically speaking, we do not

have this infrastructure ready," El Dahdaah remarked. "We really need to go to that next step [and] have our IXs connected. Bandwidth is not a luxury. Connectivity is not a luxury. We need to have this understanding; it's a must. If we don't act fast, we'll always see Europe, USA, Canada and all those countries get ahead of us."

Is recommendation at its best?
Before diving in, Abou Habib clearly outlined the goal of personalised recommendation across the media realm: "When we talk about content personalisation and recommendations, we're talking about a personalised homepage where you can find whatever you wish to consume and immediately have that content."

People spend 8-23 minutes searching for content, said Saldanha, and ultimately the goal is to bring this down. Streaming platforms rely on Customer 360 views, collecting viewing history, viewing duration and preferred platform metadata to inform future recommendations.

Recommendation is yet another facet wherein AI can work wonders. Software could give companies the ability to create personalised trailers tailored to a viewer's preference after understanding their viewing habits, preferred genres and commonly used keywords. "If I could look through all pieces of content, identify each and every object, scene, cast and crew member and have that data onscreen, I can curate that to be used for my search recommendations for better content presentation," explained Saldanha.

Additionally, AI can facilitate the intricate breakdown of a title in terms of tags. For instance, a movie or TV show title can be broken down into percentages of the genres it falls into. "If you could put all of these ratings together, that'll help you build the best recommendation, because you're going finer," Saldanha continued.

Generative and super AI is going to give us all the tools that we need to build better recommendations. If I could get links into all of these feeds, I can build something more unique and personalised"

Melvin Saldanha,
Director of Technology, OSN

"If a story is written by AI, who owns the copyright? More importantly, if you recreate the voice of a dead actor for a programme, who then benefits from the revenue?"

Suhail Ahmed, Advisor of Technology and Strategy, International Media Investments

However, Abou Habib highlighted a caveat to recruiting AI in tagging – although it might be efficient in recognising actors, locations and genres, it cannot tap into what theme or morals a piece of content might be preaching. "Betrayal, for instance," she pointed out. "When there are human emotions and feelings, you will need human intervention."

Saldanha went on to outline the holy grail of collecting data to inform personalisation and recommendation software. Machine learning could be trained to analyse viewers'

content consumption based on time of day, day of the week and preferred form of content, depending on what platform the viewer uses – YouTube's short form or a streaming platform's long form, for example. Coupled with viewers' social media patterns and their affinity for certain genres, this information could inform AI models' output of recommended content.

However, he was resolute that these measures should adhere to GDPR regulations and guidelines. "If I can understand patterns through machine learning and deep learning, data collection sitting strictly within GDPR, I could serve customers exactly what they want to watch. Generative and super AI is going to give us all the tools that we need to build better recommendations. If I could get links into all of these feeds, I can build something more unique and personalised, which then can also be used for targeted advertising, content monetisation and performance improvement. Depending on where you're watching and on what device you're watching, I can give specific content in that format. It just opens up a plethora of opportunities if we have the tools in place."

Is FAST the future?
The FAST approach offers new monetisation opportunities for content-rich channels, production/streaming companies and hungry advertisers, said Abou Habib, describing FAST as win-win. "If you have content, a platform on which to publish that content and advertisers waiting for you to monetise this, why not? It's a perfect combination. I see FAST as cost-effective entertainment. That's why it's such a big hit right now."

Over the years, Saldanha has recognised three types of viewers: subscribers, hybrid customers who have subscriptions but still enjoy linear or alternative viewing, and customers who do not want to pay for subscriptions. The last one is where FAST shines.

El Dahdaah cautioned that the FAST business model should be reserved for larger players who already have huge content libraries and can have "50 or 60 aggregated channels", citing Zee and Rotana as examples. However, he asserted that FAST will not work for startups with little content.

Kapoor confirmed that Zee benefits from the FAST model and has taken a steady and

"AI cannot make the decision on your behalf. It can provide you different decisions whereby you choose one of them. It's just here to accelerate your job"

Salloum El Dahdaah,
CEO, White Peaks

structured approach to creating FAST channels. For instance, advertisements are being carefully and strategically placed to ensure dialogue and prominent scenes are not interrupted. Importantly, adopting FAST has cut Zee's costs while keeping things exciting for viewers.

"What we're using is a mixture of old and new content," he explained. "We try to create a different set of contents where the investment to bring the content to customers is far lower. We allow platforms to dictate taking it further and localising it based on how they can distribute the channel. That's the advantage we want to take." However, he pointed out that simply recycling old content for months on end may at some point bore viewers. To keep things dynamic, companies should continue to carefully curate content that invites genuine interest.

Comparing FAST in the region to FAST abroad, Abou Habib highlighted a key difference – those abroad are traditionally done by the bigger players like telcos or cable operators, whereas in the region, individual streaming services or networks have adopted it.

The panel concluded with agreement that a think tank is needed to optimise the regional implementation of AI. A recommendation was made to start an AI group, which *BroadcastPro* has now created on LinkedIn, with all industry professionals welcome to join.

"Creation of such a group may help us catch up or put us ahead of how AI is being used in other regions," Ahmed opined. Saldanha agreed, adding that discussions surrounding AI should adhere to the five Cs: clear vision, change management, communication, collaboration and continuous learning. **PRO**
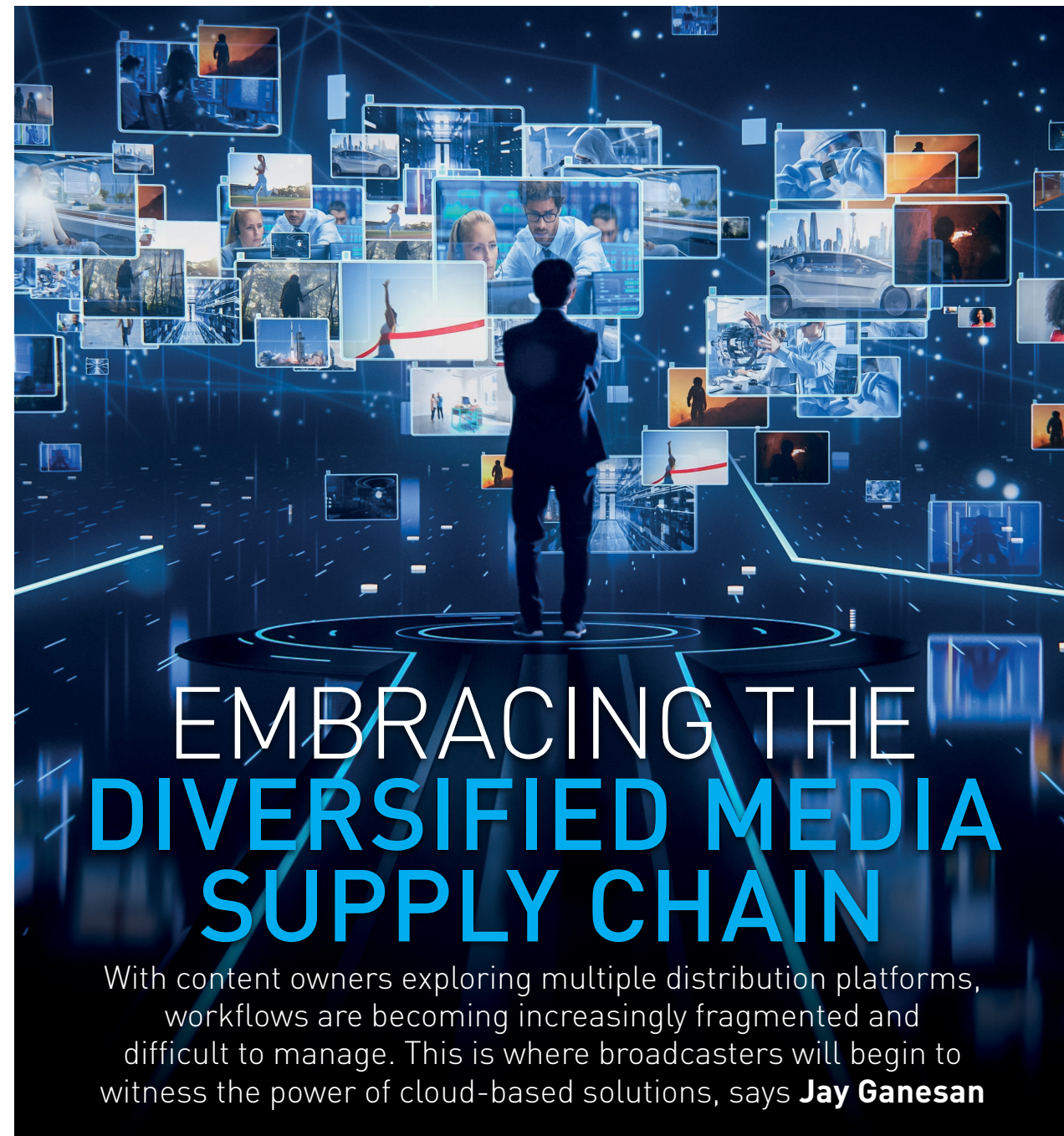
EMBRACING THE
DIVERSIFIED MEDIA SUPPLY CHAIN

With content owners exploring multiple distribution platforms, workflows are becoming increasingly fragmented and difficult to manage. This is where broadcasters will begin to witness the power of cloud-based solutions, says **Jay Ganesan**

The media landscape in Asia has undergone a major transformation in recent years, with content owners embracing a more diversified approach to reach their audiences. While traditional broadcast still has a presence in the region, content owners are now exploring monetisation opportunities across an array of channels, spanning linear, long-form and short-form formats. This shift presents promising revenue streams for organisations of all sizes.

However, as the media supply chain expands, fragmented workflows and dispersed content repositories have emerged, resulting in significant costs and operational inefficiencies. Recognising the need to adapt, forward-thinking content partners are consolidating their archives and workflows into the cloud, ushering in a new era of cost savings, operational efficiencies and maximised returns.

This article will look at the evolving landscape of the media supply chain, highlighting the transition from traditional broadcast to a diverse ecosystem, and delve into how it has fragmented workflows and dispersed content repositories. It will then explore the advantages of migrating archives and workflows to the cloud, including how content owners can leverage cloud-based systems to manage and monetise their content across different formats, distribution mechanisms and monetisation models.

The rise of a diversified, fragmented media supply chain

Exploring monetisation opportunities across these channels has become crucial for media organisations to maximise their revenue streams. The relentless evolution of the attention economy has made it ever more essential for content creators to diversify their distribution efforts. Modern viewers – especially younger demographics, now a significant portion of the population in Asia – seek out content through a multitude of devices, formats and lengths. By diversifying their offerings, companies can reach a broader audience and tap into different consumer preferences, ultimately enhancing their financial prospects.

This change in consumer preferences, coupled with the technological advancements that have been made to meet them, have resulted in the adoption of various formats, including free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST), advertising video on demand (AVoD), subscription video on demand (SVoD) and social media, even as broadcast continues to be a dominant player in most Asian markets. However, the simultaneous production and distribution of content across these multiple, diverse platforms has led to fragmented workflows, resulting in poor operational efficiencies and cost management.

To meet the demand, content creators face increasing pressure to coordinate and manage content across these various platforms. By selecting multiple technology partners and as a result disparate operational workflows to address various aspects of this diversified media supply chain – whether it's channel creation, asset storage, monetisation, distribution or others – content creators can face further complexities such as resource allocation, making them

> **"Cloud-based workflows enable enhanced collaboration,** content discovery and distribution through centralised repositories"
>
> Jay Ganesan, Senior VP of Sales for APAC, Amagi

slow to try out new formats given the additional investment required.

Moreover, duplicated content is another inherent risk of operating in a diversified media supply chain. Duplicating content across different platforms not only consumes additional resources but also diminishes the overall experience for the operations staff and in some cases the subscribers, due to workflow inconsistencies. Combined with fragmented workflows, these issues make it difficult to maintain content quality, accurately track performance metrics and execute targeted marketing strategies, thereby hindering optimal revenue generation.

Further complicating these matters is the need to localise content throughout Asia, where cultural diversity, language variations, various speeds of technological adoption and regulatory compliance all pose significant challenges. Tasks such as regionalising content libraries, providing subtitles and dubbing, adapting content to fit certain device requirements, and ensuring consumer protection and data privacy are more difficult when media supply chains are inefficient.

## Advantages of cloud-based workflows, and how they maximise returns

In response to the challenges posed by the diversified media supply chain, forward-thinking content partners are turning to cloud-based solutions as a streamlined approach to content management and distribution. These solutions play a crucial role in consolidating archives and workflows

by providing a centralised and scalable platform for managing and organising content.

Cloud-based workflows greatly maximise returns for several reasons. The cloud leverages the power of remote servers and internet connectivity to store, process and distribute data, eliminating the need for on-premises infrastructure. By using cloud-based workflows, organisations can streamline their operations, reduce reliance on physical storage and improve accessibility. And with data copied over multiple 'pools' or servers, content creators significantly improve the resiliency of their media supply chain, allowing them to recover almost immediately if software should fail or data be lost in one location.

Cloud migration also offers significant cost savings and scalability benefits for businesses, especially small enterprises, for whom the operating expenses, duplicated archives and workflows can be hugely costly. The cloud enables them to scale almost infinitely by sending data off-site for storage, backup and archiving. By moving operations to the cloud, they can eliminate the up-front costs of purchasing and maintaining hardware infrastructure; instead, they only pay for the resources and services they need and use.

Moreover, cloud-based workflows enable enhanced collaboration, content discovery and distribution through centralised repositories. With content stored in a cloud-based environment, teams can collaborate in real time, accessing and editing files from anywhere, anytime, on virtually any device. Centralised repositories facilitate easy content discovery, enabling users to search for and retrieve assets quickly. Additionally, the cloud offers robust distribution capabilities, allowing organisations to deliver content seamlessly to multiple channels and platforms in
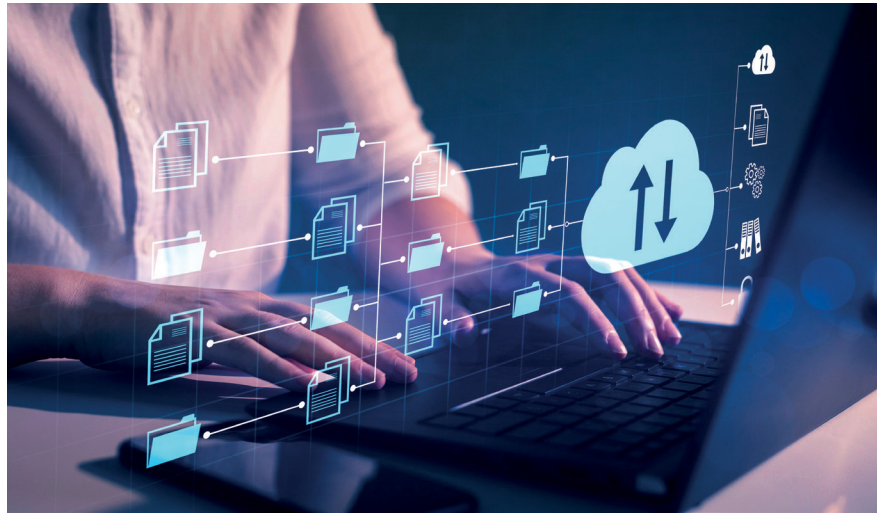
a variety of formats. It is also much easier to use the advancements in AI and machine learning that are natively available on the cloud for localisation, promo creation, etc. This streamlines workflows, eliminates version control issues and fosters efficient teamwork.

Overall, cloud-based workflows allow organisations to optimise their content for various platforms, ensuring compatibility and compliance. This automated process saves time and resources while maximising the reach and impact of the content. Additionally, with the valuable data, insights and analytics that only the cloud can gather, they can better understand audience preferences and behaviours, enabling them to target specific segments and deliver personalised content experiences. This cloud-based, data-driven approach empowers organisations to optimise their content strategies, identify new revenue streams and maximise return on content investment.

Considerations for transitioning to the cloud
In setting a cloud migration strategy, it's crucial to select the right cloud service provider and solutions partner. To ensure a successful transition, content creators should choose a partner that understands the end-to-end value chain of their organisation's content operations – content management, storage, security,

> **"To ensure a successful transition,** content creators should choose a partner that understands the end-to-end value chain of their organisation's content operations"

Jay Ganesan, Senior VP of Sales for APAC, Amagi

scalability, compliance – to transform the entire Make, Move and Monetise value chain. A knowledgeable and experienced partner provides guidance, support and tailored solutions that align with specific needs and business objectives.

Additionally, selecting a provider with a comprehensive, end-to-end cloud-based workflow solution further reduces fragmentation by consolidating all processes within one technology suite. It should also be able to help identify, anticipate and mitigate potential challenges, including data security and privacy concerns, compatibility issues with existing systems, potential downtime during the migration process, and data transfer and backup procedures.

Finally, content creators should also understand the true costs of running on-premises infrastructure, rather than just the cost of the hardware or software purchase. This evaluation should include factors such as hardware and software maintenance expenses, scalability

limitations, energy consumption, security upgrades and staffing requirements. Comparing these costs with the pricing models offered by cloud service providers will help determine the cost savings and benefits of transitioning to the cloud.

Conclusion
Today's diversified media supply chain is a double-edged sword. While it has opened new avenues of revenue generation for content owners, it has also hampered overall efficiency and profitability with fragmented workflows and dispersed content repositories for content owners who are not proactively unifying their content operations. The biggest cost for many of these content partners is the opportunity cost, given their inability to nimbly try out new formats. By embracing cloud-based systems, content partners can consolidate their archives, streamline workflows and unlock the full potential of the diversified media landscape. The transition to the cloud enables cost savings, operational efficiencies and the ability to manage multiple workflows, maximising returns across different content formats, distribution mechanisms and monetisation models. Embracing this paradigm shift will empower content owners to thrive in a dynamic and ever-expanding media ecosystem. **PRO**

Jay Ganesan is Senior VP of Sales for APAC at Amagi.

NEW LAUNCHES
AT IBC2023

Zero Density promises visual magic at IBC

Zero Density, a real-time graphics technology company, **will showcase the major updates to its Traxis tracking platform and the new Reality5 virtual production platform. It will host dynamic demos on both a virtual set and an XR stage, replicating a genuine multicam TV production.**

This immersive experience has been created in close collaboration with partners KST Moschkau, Viaplay Group, Leyard, Optitrack and Avid.

Featuring a three-camera virtual studio and a two-camera LED XR stage, the demos will seamlessly blend the physical and virtual worlds. Audiences will see the highest-quality virtual production graphics and get inspiration for swift and efficient workflows.

Every 30 minutes, Zero Density's experts will launch a show. Additionally, there will be sessions from guest speakers, including NVIDIA, Epic Games and Zero Density clients Al Masshad and Viaplay Group.

Stand 7.B01

Marshall turns its focus to new CV420Ne camera

Marshall Electronics will be showcasing its new CV420Ne, an NDI|HX3 version of its ultra-wide 100-degree angle-of-view streaming POV camera, at IBC2023. Making its European debut, the CV420Ne features a 9 ½ megapixel 4K sensor. Connectivity includes NDI, HDMI and USB outputs.

The CV420Ne offers digital pan, tilt and zoom at HD resolutions within the larger UHD (4K) sensor space. It uses the new NDI|HX3 codecs with access to NDI5.5 tools, plus USB3.0 connectivity and traditional HDMI for a diverse range of broadcast and AV applications.

The CV420Ne features a large 1/1.8" 4K sensor with 9 ½ megapixels, capable of crystal-clear 4K (UHD) up to 60fps with support of ultra-clean HD resolutions. The camera's 4.5mm lens features an ultra-wide 100-degree angle-of-view delivering high-quality video with no spherical distortion.

Stand 2.A47

Nixer Pro Audio to facilitate wireless audio streaming with WL64-4 launch

Professional AoIP solutions specialist Nixer Pro Audio is set to launch its new WL64-4 base unit at IBC. Ideal for monitoring and mixing of audio-over-IP (AoIP) sources from a Dante or Ravenna network, the WL64-4 connects wirelessly to four iPad tablets as standard, whereby each operator can select and listen to sources independently as well as create their own individual mixes.

"This solution makes it much easier and quicker to identify audio sources using pictures and text displayed on an iPad," explains Nick Fletcher, founder and CEO of Nixer Pro Audio. "And because up to four iPads can be simultaneously connected to a single WL64-4, it's a cost-effective solution when it comes to monitoring and mixing sources during live events or reality TV shows, as well as audio logging for post-production package creation."

Audio is wirelessly streamed to each iPad for local monitoring, freeing the director or producer from a dedicated hardware front panel display and equipment rack. The intuitive user interface also enables non-specialist operators to monitor and mix audio sources with minimal or no training.

Alongside the WL64-4, the enhanced Nixer Remote App will also be showcased at IBC, delivering new features added as a direct result of operational feedback during high-profile beta testing on customer productions during the summer.

Stand 8.9F3

Argosy to unveil new ULTRA suite of 12G products

Argosy will be launching its new ULTRA range of 12G solutions at IBC this year. Offering a cost-effective and simple solution for seamless integration, the ULTRA suite makes UHD/4K accessible to those working with traditional SDI workflows.

It provides an end-to-end solution comprising a range of 12G products, including the Image 360 ULTRA, Image 1000 ULTRA and Image 1500 ULTRA coax cables. Primarily used for in-rack wiring and OB trucks, these UHD SDI digital video cables are designed to deliver superior performance for UHD/4K SDI video applications.
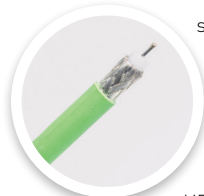
Additionally, the suite features the coax KORUS ULTRA HD 12G BNCs, tested to meet the requirements of SMPTE ST 2081-1 and ST 2082-1 at 6G and 12G systems for use with the Argosy Image ULTRA coax cable range. 12G ULTRA Termination and ULTRA Patch panels complete the range.

The ULTRA suite leverages the inherent advantages of copper cabling, boasting exceptional durability and cost-effectiveness.

Stand 10.C51

EditShare to demo NWMe capabilities at IBC

EditShare will launch a significant raft of technology upgrades and new functionality at IBC2023. In addition to the new user interface announced in July, EditShare One, the company is adding NVMe capabilities to provide ultimate performance in intensive workloads, and Swift Link, bringing up to 10x improvement in performance between remote workstations and EFS systems located on-prem or in FLEX cloud environments.

Large and busy facilities place heavy demands on storage systems, particularly when content is in demand by multiple users. To provide a very high-performance cache in this sort of environment, EditShare now offers the ability to use NVMe (non-volatile memory express) solid-state storage.
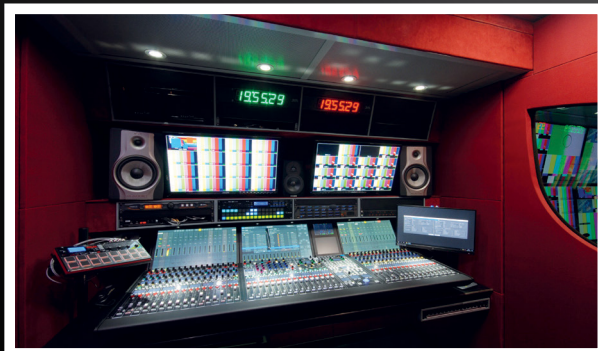
Based on the latest Gen11 platform from HPE, the NVMe module has 24 drives per node, with user-selectable capacities. EFS supports multiple nodes, so users are free to construct the storage architecture that best meets their business and productivity requirements.

Stand 7.A35

ARET to showcase Alamiya OB truck featuring Lawo solutions at IBC

IBC2023 attendees have the opportunity to experience Lawo's technology, showcased at booth B90 in Hall 8 and also in the outdoor exhibition area at 0.A07. ARET will be unveiling its new OB trailer for Saudi-based Alamiya Media, featuring seamless integration of Lawo IP technology. This configuration boasts a UHD-HDR video workflow at 12G and AES67 audio networking.

Umberto Asti, CEO ARET video and audio engineering, stated: "The Alamiya OB trailer represents a landmark in the OB van market for its quality of construction, the design and for the technology installed. We have combined the power of the Ross 12-G SDI hyperconverged solution with the flexibility and excellence of Lawo IP-based audio solutions. On top of everything, the workflow is controlled by the most powerful and reliable broadcast control system in the market: Lawo VSM."

Lawo's VSM (virtual studio manager) broadcast control system, serving as the nerve centre of the Alamiya OB truck, offers powerful and flexible IP-based control capabilities. Its seamless integration with a wide array of broadcast equipment, including video routers, audio consoles and intercoms, makes it an ideal choice for managing resources efficiently. It also keeps evolving as ever more lighthouse projects require increasingly refined control and flexibility options. With its intuitive touch-enabled interface, Lawo's VSM empowers producers with fast and accurate control over remote, distributed and facility-wide resources and OB production trucks for exacting streamlined operations.

The audio control room in the truck is equipped with Lawo's mc²56 audio production console, which features compact size, flexibility and versatile design for applications as diverse as broadcast trucks and studios, live performance and recording.

Stand 0.A07 OUTDOOR

"AI should be viewed as a powerful tool to aid software engineers, not a threat"

Generative AI Applications in OTT Development:
A Paradigm Shift

Just as the internet disrupted how we live and work, generative AI holds the same potential to change life as we know it. Generative AI uses neural networks to learn from extensive data and produce unique outputs, demonstrating its ability to mimic and even exceed human creativity. Use cases for generative AI span various domains, including music, art and written content.

But what does it mean for the video industry? From speeding up content creation and post-production to enabling content to be delivered to users with enhanced UX due to improved discoverability, personalisation and targeted advertising, the potential use cases for OTT are endless.

There are also promising signs that generative AI will transform the OTT engineering and software development process by playing an integral part in aspects such as code generation and review, refactoring, documentation writing and summarising, and writing unit tests, with the potential to have a profound impact on the industry.

How AI Will Transform Development
AI should be viewed as a powerful tool to aid software engineers, not a threat. Although AI-generated code can be inaccurate, it helps produce fitting code snippets and review code for errors. This assists a software engineer in coding, improving efficiency and saving time.

AI can also be used for another essential part of the engineering process, refactoring, which improves code efficiency, achieves faster load times, reduces bandwidth consumption and enhances UX. By proposing cleaner, more efficient ways to structure code, generative AI models could support the maintenance of a high-quality codebase.

Documenting code and software architectures is another fundamental part of software engineering, because it ensures developers have access to comprehensive resources for future reference and collaboration. Automating this task by employing AI to write detailed, accurate documentation would allow developers to spend more time coding and less time writing documentation.

AI can also help summarise existing documentation. In large-scale software development projects, teams often encounter lengthy documentation that can be overwhelming to review. With generative AI, developers can quickly obtain concise and coherent summaries of technical documents, making it easier to grasp complex concepts and identify key information, saving time and improving efficiency.

Writing unit tests is another critical aspect of software development, because it ensures the reliability and stability of code. AI could potentially generate tests to increase coverage and catch issues early on. This would lead to more efficient testing processes and faster deployment cycles.

There's little doubt that AI brings significant value in automating time-consuming yet necessary tasks, freeing developers and operational teams to focus their time and expertise on more complex tasks.

Looking Ahead: The Impact of AI
So, what impact will all of this have on the video industry? Two significant outcomes come to mind.

First, as the development process for video applications becomes more efficient, the time required for development will drastically reduce, possibly even to just a few days. This will likely lead to new apps, as brands and content owners rush to bring new services to the market.

Second, various operational tasks such as quality assurance, artwork, design, analysis, automation and analytics data for marketing campaigns will enhance market penetration and presentation layers, ensuring maximum user engagement at the opportune moment. Consequently, the quality of user experience and the level of personalisation will improve. AI-driven tools will enable video services to understand precisely what the user wants, and how.

Predicting AI's role in the OTT industry ten to twenty years from now is challenging. We may reach a point where AI creates bespoke content from beginning to end, tailored precisely to individual user preferences. While we are only scratching the surface of AI's capabilities, there is little doubt that it will genuinely transform the video industry. Exciting times lie ahead for us all. **PRO**

Markus Hejdenberg is Head of Product Sales & Marketing at Accedo

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