BROADCAST**PRO**

TECHNOLOGY INTELLIGENCE F̶ ̶R̶ ̶ ̶ RADIO

MIDDLE EAST

ADAPTING
TO DISRUPTION

*MENA M&E leaders on navigating change
and steering their organisations to positions of power*

WELCOME

Welcome to a brand-new edition of *BroadcastPro Middle East*. It just so happens that our new look and feel coincides with the inaugural edition of the BroadcastPro summit in Saudi Arabia. *BroadcastPro ME* has always embraced the demands of the new age, seized every opportunity that has come its way and adapted with the times, continuously reinventing ourselves in print, digital, social media, AV opportunities and even events.

Bringing changes to the print edition, however, has been slightly more challenging. But with the inclusion of QR codes in the magazine for our stories online, we are looking to integrate our platforms so our readers can seamlessly move between them, simultaneously reading the magazine as well as having the opportunity to view new posts and trending news online.

But back to our summit, scheduled for February 28 in Riyadh. With a market share of 30%, according to a January 2024 report from Statista, KSA dominates the MENA market. There are many figures out there from different research analysts and although the statistics may vary slightly, all unanimously point to the fact that Saudi Arabia is a lucrative market, still fairly virgin and akin to the Wild West, open for further exploration.

The sheer size of the market, its spending power, the fact that it opened up only recently and the Saudi Vision 2030 which is seeing all sectors move at breakneck speed has meant that KSA has all the juicy ingredients for international players to come and set up shop. With the market being so large and capable of holding its own, a dedicated B2B conference on the TV and OTT market in Saudi Arabia was essential to bring all the stakeholders together for a day of dialogue and networking. We hope you will join us in Riyadh on February 28. Registration is mandatory; attendance is free.

VIJAYA CHERIAN,
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

BROADCASTPROME.COM

LATEST NEWS

FILM
Short film *The Red Sea Makes Me Wanna Cry* continues European tour

SATELLITE
SpaceX launches 'Sharjah Sat 1' satellite

FILM
César Awards 2024 nominates Tunisian film *Four Daughters*

COMMS
Etisalat by e& announces 5G and 10G FTTH plans
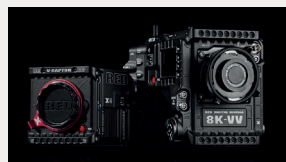
PRODUCTS
RED unveils RED V-RAPTOR [X] and RED Compact EVF

TECH FEATURES

PANEL: Signal shifts in broadcast

OPINION: AI in broadcast – Empowering creativity

TELEVISION: Blinx blazes bold digital trail

FEATURED NEWS

INTERVIEW
Nurturing growth in Dubai's dynamic media cluster
Majed Al Suwaidi, Senior Vice President of Dubai Media City, explains what attracts companies to its media ecosystems

FILM
Doha Film Institute reveals 44 projects in fall 2023 grants cycle
DFI's grants programme is one of the longest-running funding initiatives in the MENA region
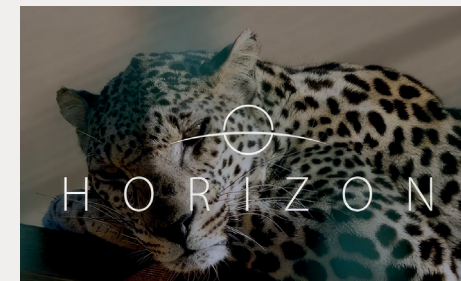
OTT
Saudi Ministry of Media launches documentary titled *Horizon* on Netflix
The documentary highlights the wildlife and natural resources in the Kingdom

FINANCIAL NEWS
MBC Group shares jump 30% in Saudi Exchange debut
MBC Group generated $222m in its initial public offering.
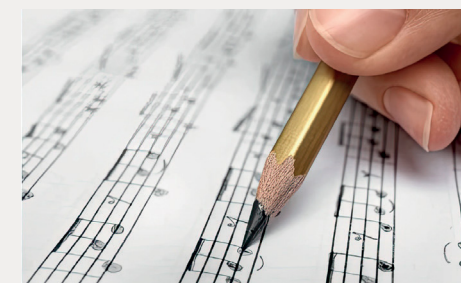
AV
Emaar Entertainment opens Arabic Music Institute in Dubai
The institute features state-of-the-art facilities, including recording studios, a performance majlis, a library and an immersive music museum

TRENDING

OTT
Netflix announces release date for season two of *AlRawabi School for Girls*

SATELLITE
Hellas Sat and Thales to develop optical comm payload for Hellas Sat 5

NEWS
ARRI becomes Official Lighting Provider for Sundance 2024

SATELLITE
Oracle and du to launch sovereign hyperscaler cloud services

COMMS
Lufthansa Group expands in-flight connectivity with Viasat

02/24
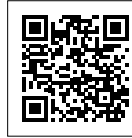
Sheikh Mohammed allocates $40.84m for content creator fund

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has directed the allocation of a fund worth $40.84m to support content creators and establish a permanent influencer headquarters providing year-round support. This announcement took place during the 1 Billion Followers Summit organised by the New Media Academy in Dubai. The summit witnessed the graduation of 90 content creators as part of the

Social Media Professional Programme and the fourth cohort of Faris Al Muhtawa.

Gathering more than 3,000 influencers and content creators and 195 speakers from 95 countries

at the Museum of the Future and Emirates Towers, Sheikh Mohammed emphasised the role of media as a true mirror of communities and people's aspirations. He also instructed the establishment

of a permanent influencer headquarters to provide ongoing support and contribute to the UAE's influential global media presence.

The permanent influencer headquarters, a collaboration between the UAE Government Media Office and the New Media Academy, will benefit media professionals and social media influencers, offering services such as a dedicated studio, storytelling courses, photography, broadcasting and platform management.

SHAHID EXPANDS AD OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Shahid, the Arabic streaming platform of MBC Group, has announced a raft of advertising models with the aim of offering personalised brands and targeted formats that capitalise on its premium Arabic content.

The announcement was made at an event in Dubai, hosted by

Shahid and MBC Media Solutions (MMS), the commercial arm of MBC Group.

During the event, Shahid disclosed that more than 86% of its content is now accessible for viewers to enjoy for free through its AVOD model. Additionally, Shahid revealed that a majority of

its Ramadan 2024 content will be available on AVOD without additional subscription costs.

MMS has introduced several new advertising solutions on Shahid, including a Ramadan Timer ad format. This feature enables brands to sponsor Iftar and Imsak timers on the platform's home and

show pages throughout the holy month.

It has also released the Branded Collection feature, enabling clients to sponsor curated content categories on Shahid's homepage.

A QR code feature also seamlessly directs audiences to brands' websites or online stores.

THMANYAH LAUNCHES ARABIC PODCAST APP

Saudi-based media company Thmanyah has launched Radio Thmanyah, a specialised platform for Arabic and international podcast programmes. It not only caters to podcast enthusiasts but also provides a hosting platform for creators to promote their podcast shows. Additionally, it offers monetisation opportunities for content creators.

This app introduces creator profiles and enhances user engagement through social interactions with the content. Users can import their podcast libraries from existing platforms or explore the extensive catalogue featuring both international and regional podcasts. It features a diverse range of content, including podcast shows like *Funjan*, *Socrates* and *Swalif Business*, along with newsletters and documentaries.

MBC shares jump 30% in Saudi Exchange debut

MBC Group has listed its shares on the Main Market of the Saudi Exchange, following the successful completion of its IPO. The company is now trading under MBC Group and is the first new listing in the Kingdom's Tadawul All Share Index in 2024.

The IPO involved a primary offering of 33,250,000 new ordinary shares, constituting 10% of the company's share capital post the issuance. Institutional investors secured 90% of the offered shares, while the remaining 10% went to individual investors. The institutional book-building process generated a substantial order book of $14.53bn, resulting in a subscription coverage of

approximately 66x. The final offering price was set at $6.67 per share, at the upper end of the initially announced price range. MBC Group successfully raised $222m, establishing an implied market capitalisation of $2.2bn at the time of listing.

Sam Barnett, CEO of MBC Group, said: "Through this IPO, we welcomed new shareholders to the company and raised the capital needed

to take us through our next phase of growth and innovation. We have a clear roadmap guiding us through what the next phase of growth looks like, including growing the number of subscribers on Shahid, increasing advertising sales across our platforms and expanding operations into exciting and promising sub-sectors including sports, music, gaming and events."

Sam Barnett, CEO of MBC Group.

ABU DHABI MEDIA NETWORK INTRODUCES WEB-BASED CONTENT ACQUISITION SYSTEM

Abu Dhabi Media Network (ADMN) has introduced a web-based content acquisition system to automate the content acquisition process and optimise workflow efficiency. It facilitates the seamless submission of proposals by production companies and content creators, marking a significant

step towards enhanced communication between ADMN and content providers. With integrated features such as self-registration, profile management, production status updates, content delivery, contracting process tracking and direct communication with relevant teams, the system streamlines the

entire content proposal submission process.

ADMN's new system strengthens its relationships with stakeholders and suppliers, serving the network's objectives in delivering impactful media content that caters to the aspirations of diverse segments in the UAE and the Arab world.

Es'hailSat and TMC to offer DSNG and OB services in MENA

The teams from Es'hailsat and Total Media Cast.

Es'hailSat has partnered with Total Media Cast (TMC) to offer DSNG and OB services in Qatar and across the MENA region. The partnership focuses on leasing DSNG vehicles and equipment to end users, with a specific emphasis on news agencies and journalists, catering to news gathering and related purposes.

TMC provides broadcast and operations consultation, digital media management, news gathering and media logistics services, as well as space segment lease services.

Ali Ahmed Al-Kuwari, President and CEO of Es'hailSat, said: "Es'hailSat is delighted to partner with Total Media Cast and add DSNG and OB services to complement our teleport and satellite hotspot. We believe that the growing number of live events in the Middle East need dedicated newsgathering services, together with teleport and satellite infrastructure."

Isam Ayyad, founder of TMC, added: "Qatar is ascending as a powerhouse in major sports and global events. Our DSNGS and OB van facility are steadfast guarantees, ensuring exceptional quality during these pivotal events."

MANOJ MATHEW JOINS DUBAI MEDIA AS DIRECTOR OF STUDIOS AND EVENTS

Manoj Abraham Mathew, who previously helmed Zee Entertainment Enterprises MENAPT as Executive VP & Territory Head, has now taken on a new role at Dubai Media as Director of Studios and Events. Dubai Media, previously known as Dubai Media Incorporated, is the official media organisation of the government of Dubai.

Mathew previously oversaw various content, business and product verticals at Zee Entertainment Enterprises for more than 19 years, with responsibilities covering MENA, Pakistan and Turkey. In his most recent role, he led the region across all verticals, encompassing content studio, product, distribution and revenue. In 2022, in addition to overseeing MENAPT, Mathew also assumed interim charge of the Americas region. In this capacity he led the region across various product and revenue verticals.

VIZRT PROMOTES DIPESH MAKWANA TO SPORTS KEY ACCOUNTS MANAGER

Dipesh Makwana, who joined Vizrt in October 2022 as Head of Sports for the APAC region, was promoted last month to the role of regional-based Key Accounts Manager in Sports. Before joining Vizrt, he was Head of Sales and Business Development at wTVision. He is now based in Dubai.

With an extensive career in technology, broadcast and sports, Makwana expressed enthusiasm for his new role: "I'm excited to steer the trajectory of growth and business development for Vizrt in 2024, simultaneously supporting its customers in achieving success in real-time graphics, virtual studios, telestration, sports analysis and cloud live production."

Fonn Group strengthens MENA presence with roadshow

Fonn Group held a roadshow with customers and partners last month in Dubai, where it demonstrated the capabilities of its Dina and Mimir solutions and how they can help content producers accelerate their workflows in the cloud.

"To be able to move to the digital world while still improving the impressive broadcast product that is produced in the region today, you have to start with workflow tools that give a viable path to cloud, AI and true SaaS - all at the same time," stated Vegard Elgesem,

Vegard Elgesem, CEO, Fonn Group.

CEO of Fonn Group.

The company's big success story in the Middle East is the successful deployment of its solutions at Dubai-based digital storytelling hub Blinx.

"We build the tools we think are needed in five years from now. To do this, there are a few key things that are essential, and turning theoretical technology trends into real products customers can use today is a key one. This is why we are super proud of the blinx project. The innovative team with so many young aspiring storytellers has been able to get the results they deserve using our tools and that is something we take great pride in. In addition to blinx, we see a lot of

interest in the region. Middle East media producers are actively engaging with and testing SaaS tools to not just incrementally change but fundamentally revolutionise how they create content and connect with their audience. We are at a crossroads for the industry where the new technologies can't be ignored. While this is not just our success, it's something we see as significant," he added.

The team is working closely with regional partners to get closer to clients and understand the unique challenges of this region.

IMAGINE COMMUNICATIONS ACQUIRES MARKETRON REV

Imagine Communications has finalised an agreement to acquire Marketron REV, a broadcast sales and order management platform. The strategic integration of this sales growth engine into Imagine's core ad tech portfolio results

in the introduction of CrossFlight, a comprehensive monetisation solution empowering broadcasters to revolutionise daily sales operations, maximise revenue and prepare for a future marked by converged orders and

expanded audience measurement.

Anticipated to launch in early 2024, CrossFlight, a cloud-based broadcast sales platform, will include key enhancements tailored for broadcast and be a catalyst for the automation of ad sales, proposals, pricing and audience forecasting. Seamlessly integrating with Imagine's OSI traffic and billing solution, it empowers sales teams to generate increased revenue with greater efficiency.
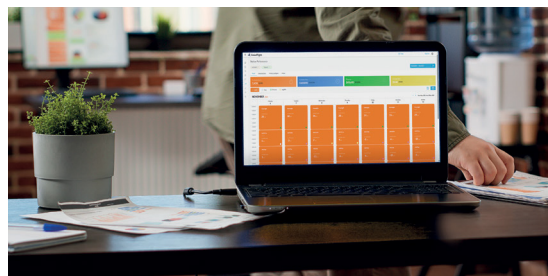
AMAZON PRIME VIDEO CUTS MENA FUNDING

Amazon Prime Video is restructuring its international business, leading to MENA content and staff reductions. The streamer will halt the greenlighting of new local originals in sub-Saharan Africa and MENA for the foreseeable future. Prime Video will maintain operations in these territories but there could be redundancies in the local teams.

Qvest and SRMG form JV to drive media and tech innovation in KSA

Qvest and Saudi Research and Media Group (SRMG) have established a joint venture (JV) aimed at elevating media, production and technology services in Saudi Arabia. The collaboration, based in Riyadh, brings together Qvest's extensive technology and project expertise with SRMG's influential media operations in the region.

The JV's focus encompasses foresight

From left: Peter Nöthen, CEO of Qvest Group, and Mohammed Nazer, CFO and CIO of SRMG.

and innovation, change management, cloud adoption, data and analytics, media supply chain technologies and content

distribution. The partners have already initiated collaboration on projects and anticipate being fully operational by H1 of 2024.

They have also identified potential projects spanning media and entertainment (M&E) , telecoms, tourism and sports among others.

The MENA M&E sector is projected to surpass $20bn by 2026, growing at a rate of 9%. Saudi Arabia, with nearly 30% of the regional market share, is a significant player. The annual growth rate of Saudi Arabia's media industry is expected to exceed 10% by 2030.

IMI STRENGTHENS EXECUTIVE TEAM WITH KEY APPOINTMENTS

International Media Investments (IMI), a privately-owned media investment group in Abu Dhabi, has appointed Rania Masri El Khatib as Chief Brand and Marcomms Officer, and Sharif Badreddine as Chief Revenue Officer. Both will report to CEO Rani R. Raad.

El Khatib, who was previously Chief Transformation Officer at Chalhoub

Group, will spearhead the Brand Strategy, Marcomms and Creative functions at IMI.

Badreddine brings over 25 years of experience in the media and advertising industry, with a notable stint as Group Director of Commercial at MBC Group. At IMI, he will lead the Commercial team, driving product innovation and revenue growth.

TRENDS AND CHINA MEDIA GROUP'S ME OFFICE INK DEAL

Trends Research and Advisory and China Media Group's Middle East Regional Office have signed a deal, marking the commencement of collaborative efforts in joint media and research projects. The agreement, signed at Trends headquarters in Abu Dhabi, aims to strengthen the bonds of cooperation, acknowledging the role of media and think tanks in fostering mutual understanding between the two nations. Dr Mohammed Abdullah Al Ali, CEO of Trends

Research and Advisory, and Xiang Li, Executive Director of China Media Group's Middle East Regional Office, were the signatories.

Dr Al-Ali emphasised that the extensive experience of the Chinese media group in media and publishing will contribute to achieving shared research and media goals. Xiang Li underscored that partnering with Trends Research and Advisory will elevate their collective efforts in research and publishing.

OSN and AFAC announce winners of Writers' Room programme

OSN and Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) have announced the winners of the Writers' Room mentorship programme, launched in May 2023. Designed to foster the development of compelling stories within the Arab region, the initiative garnered an overwhelming response, with 276 submissions to the open call. The jury panel, comprising writer Yam Machahdi and directors Hicham Lasri, Amin Dora and Mariam Abou Ouf,

faced the task of sifting through the entries to select the finest projects.

Out of this competitive field, the programme has unveiled six outstanding projects and their creators as the winners. The winning entries are *The Day of Your Meeting* by Rida Benazzouza; *The Art of Surviving* by Tamer Mohammad Abdulhamid and Noha Hassan Hussien; *Polaroid* by Basant Ghonimy; *Men Home La Hon (Plan B)* by Marie-Louise Elia, Julien

Polaroid by Basant Ghonimy is one of the winning entries.
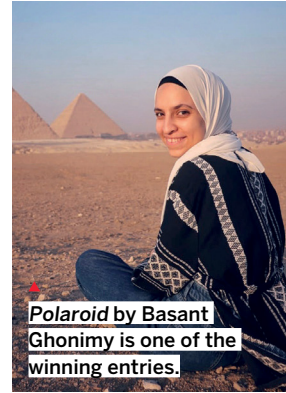
Kobersy and Jean-Claude Boulos; *Dyouf* by Saleh Saadi; and *How to Find Love in 10 Steps (Guide for Single Men)* by Mostafa Youssef and Fatma Abed.

The Writers' Room programme is set to incubate these projects until they evolve into fully-fledged limited series. It offers mentorship support, continuous follow-up and input from specialists and experts during and between residencies. Additionally, it aspires to establish a framework anchored in the writers' room method for series-writing in the region, fostering peer-to-peer learning and active participation in the creative process.

SFC'S NEW PROGRAMMES SUPPORT FILM COMMUNITY

The fourth edition of the Saudi Film Commission's Filmmakers Programme will train 4,000 individuals in 20 areas of the film value chain. This edition includes 150 training workshops and 10 master classes across 13 regions in KSA. Its new Kader Programme targets 50 aspirants in collaboration with 10 international cinema production houses.

SHEIKH AHMED BIN MOHAMMED APPROVES NEW DUBAI MEDIA STRATEGY

Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Second Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Chairman of the Dubai Media Council, announced a new strategy and action plan for Dubai Media (formerly Dubai Media Incorporated), in a recent session at the Dubai Design District. Key objectives include doubling the media sector's contribution to Dubai's GDP, increasing foreign direct investment, enhancing intellectual

property in local media, nurturing media competencies and talent, and elevating the participation of nationals in the sector. The Council also emphasised the imperative to broaden strategic partnerships by facilitating greater involvement from private sector companies, thereby supporting the broader development of the industry within Dubai.

Mona Al Marri, Vice Chairperson and Managing Director

of the Dubai Media Council, highlighted that the new strategy encompasses 21 projects tracked through 117 key indicators. The goals include upskilling media talent, forging partnerships, attracting foreign investment, developing cutting-edge infrastructure, and adopting the latest technologies. Legislative aspects will also be considered, to keep pace with sectoral changes.

CommScope and du team up to launch STB solution

CommScope, a major player in network connectivity, has joined forces with du to launch the latest advancement in du TV for the UAE market – the VIP7802 ultra-HD set-top box, featuring a fast quad-core CPU, a Vulkan 3D-capable GPU and dual-band Wi-Fi 6. This high-end box is designed with a compact footprint, offering users a superior viewing experience with support for 4K ultra-HD resolution and HDR formats that enhance colour, contrast and brightness.

Tailoring the platform to meet du's specific requirements, CommScope aims to efficiently deliver an extraordinary video experience to consumers, streamlining content discovery, search and access in one place. The intuitive entertainment experience introduces new features for TV, movies and apps, incorporating advanced search capabilities, cloud PVR for convenient content viewing and updated shortcut buttons for quick access to various streaming services and content.

Joe Chow, Senior VP Home Networks, CommScope, said: "The UAE market is extremely competitive, and CommScope is thrilled to partner with du to deliver an exceptional, high-quality set-top box solution that will enhance our collective presence and reach in the Middle East. CommScope consistently strives to deliver the best total cost of ownership model and to maintain our track record of being agile and flexible to meet the needs of our partners."

The VIP7802 STB is pre-integrated with technologies such as Microsoft PlayReady, Widevine and Verimatrix.

ROYA TV STARTS SHOOTING NEW SITCOM AT JORDAN'S OLIVEWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Jordan-based Roya TV has ordered a new sitcom titled My Sister & Her Kids, set to be filmed at the cutting-edge Olivewood Film Studios, a new purpose-built complex in the Kingdom.

This collaborative venture between Roya TV, owned by the Sayegh Group, and Olivewood Studios is a cutting-edge facility that spans two soundstages, each covering 1,500sqm, complemented by a 1,000sqm mill. It also boasts a sprawling levelled backlot covering 68,000sqm, a basecamp area spanning 4,000sqm, an on-site canteen, parking facilities for 95 cars and a dedicated space for technical vehicles.

A convenient 15-minute drive from Amman, it is set to elevate the standards of content production in Jordan and contribute to the flourishing entertainment industry.

MEDIABILITY APPOINTS SUHAIL AHMED AS MENA CEO

Mediability, a key player in transformative broadcast solutions, has named Suhail Ahmed CEO for the MENA region, entrusting him with the leadership of software-centric integration services. Ahmed brings extensive expertise in broadcast systems integration across the MENA region, with a notable track record from his previous roles at Sony, TSL and Diversified. His appointment comes during a period of expansion for Mediability, aligning with the growing demand for agile solutions in the region.

Mediability's team has helped deliver innovative projects and design consultancy across Europe. In his role, Ahmed will collaborate closely with Ole Johan Skogheim, CTO at Mediability and the architect of TV2's transformation into an agile technology stack.

ADVANCED MEDIA TRADING SHOWCASES COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AT CINETOMORROW EVENT

A workshop in progress at the CINETOMORROW event at Advanced Media's HQ in Dubai.

Advanced Media recently concluded CINETomorrow, the 2024 edition of its biannual digital cinema community event at its showroom in Dubai, with all workshops running at full capacity and the team welcoming around 300 guests each day January 11-13. Besides attendees from the UAE, this year's iteration also attracted digital cinema enthusiasts from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Algeria, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Kenya, Oman, Tajikistan and Lebanon.

As the distributor of more than 150 international brands, Advanced Media has routinely hosted workshops over the years to ensure that end users are able to maximise the potential of the kit they purchase. The CINE series, however, has raised the profile of the distributor as a company that has also nurtured the digital cinema community through networking and conducting bilingual workshops with a raft of reputed professionals including DoPs, gaffers, editors and sound experts operating in the region and cognisant of its unique challenges.

CINETomorrow was not just a showcase of various elements within digital cinema and virtual production; it also reflected the distributor's own CSR roadmap, which includes a robust sustainability element on multiple levels.

Three themed sets – two dedicated to cameras and lighting, and one focusing on virtual production with unique lighting and camera systems – were created at the showroom, reflecting the company's attachment to various projects in the UAE. The first showcased a rich green patch with soil created from the food waste produced by the distributor over the year. The second, a virtual production set titled Nation, themed around the UAE's fishing past, paid homage to the nation's heritage while also demonstrating a sustainable form of production that could realistically show the movement of talent between countries. The Knowledge set featured a library with shelves lined with books on Palestine. The sets were used throughout the event to demonstrate the capabilities of the RED and Sony camera ranges.

The 2022 edition of the CINE showcase included the MENA debut of the Sony Venice 2. This year saw the MENA launch of the Sony Burano, a more compact version of the Venice 2. Timothy Fare-Matthews, co-founder of First and Ten Productions in Dubai, as well as Sony ambassador for the MENA region, was at the event to show attendees some of the features of the Burano and take people through the Sony Cine Line.

Martin Munyua, a well-known director, cinematographer and producer from Kenya, commented: "This is a necessary event because even after all these years of being in the field, I need a refresher. I attended all the workshops."

Abdullah AlAtlas, a Saudi director and DoP, remarked: "I am really happy to be here because not only did I have the chance to meet many filmmakers and industry professionals from different backgrounds, but I also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from brands such as Sony and Easyrig."

Andrew Smith, Manager of the Raindance Film School

DoP Mark Hobson conducted two workshops focused on mastering cinematography and optics.

Dubai, added: "The students really enjoy the Cine events because they are engaging and interactive. This time they have gathered to make a documentary about the event, so thank you for giving them a platform to experiment and be creative."

One factor that stood out in this edition was how Advanced Media has taken sustainability to new heights, as part of the company lifestyle as well as in its operations and technologies. The event served as a platform to showcase some of the fruits of that effort. For instance, the fully immersive virtual production set, powered by Zero Density's graphics engine and running on Unreal Engine, enabled the team to make quick transitions from one landscape or country to the next. Mustafa Suphi Ünsal, Regional Sales Manager of Zero Density, was at hand to explain its role within the project.

The aim was to show how virtual production can help reduce the carbon footprint, explained Parnian Farnam, who helms Advanced Media's CSR department. The green patch of land used in the nature set, for instance, was covered with soil and compost created from food waste collected from the company daily over the last year.

"We have a partnership with The Waste Lab, which

FILIPE PEREIRA, SUSTAINABILITY ADVOCATE

My background is in film, but I have become a strong advocate for sustainability over the years. Film and TV productions usually leave a big mess behind. A tentpole film like a Hollywood film typically emits about 2,000 tons of CO_2. An average hour of TV can emit up to a hundred tons.

Just to give people an idea, each ton of CO_2 emitted above what our planet can absorb results in three square metres of ice melting in the Arctic.

It only takes one hour of TV production for the area where we're standing right now to disappear. The solution is to change behaviours. The biggest emitter in drama is usually travel and energy consumption. Small changes can make a significant impact. For instance, 80 out of the last 100 highest-grossing films were shot in only two countries. Is [lots of travel] really necessary?

Perhaps you can use virtual production, because it significantly decreases the footprint of filmmaking. There are now people who specialise in helping people on the development and preparation of a film. Prep helps to lower your footprint and save money, but if you do it right you can save a lot of money doing this and save the world at the same time. So it could be a win-win situation.

TIMOTHY FARE-MATTHEWS, CO-FOUNDER, FIRST AND TEN PRODUCTIONS

The Sony Burano comes with an 8.6K sensor. It's quite similar to the Venice 2 but is more cost-effective, with a better ergonomic form factor. The main difference between the Venice 2 and the Burano is that the former is designed for larger productions like dramas, OTT content and feature films, while the latter is ideal for high-end lean/solo shooting of documentaries, music videos and so on. It doesn't have all the functionality of the Venice 2, which comes with the full RAW codec. But it is more than enough for the majority of productions today. This is also the first full-frame 8K cinema camera with in-built auto functionality.

collects our food waste every week and converts it into compost. And then they deliver the compost to MyFarmDubai, from where we have brought the soil and created this green patch to showcase our set. Typically we produce around 12-15kg of waste every week."

The company has also gone big on e-waste collection in partnership with Emirati company Efate and has urged partners in the media industry to take a similar approach. The company collected 190kg of e-waste in 2022 and 450kg in 2023. With a warehouse in Jebel Ali and a raft of pick-up and deliveries each day, the distributor is also looking to transition to electric cars.

"We are part of several important alliances that enable us to raise awareness. This is why we have made sustainability a huge part of this event," said Farnam.

CEO Kaveh Farnam spoke about some of the

technologies that the distributor is touting specifically as part of its sustainability drive. One that caught our eye was the line of EcoFlow portable power stations, rechargeable portable batteries that charge via solar energy or power outlets and produce AC and DC power that lasts several hours.

"EcoFlow has a range of solar-powered battery chargers that can be used to light up your HMI lights and even your whole set," he explained. "This has several benefits. For one, there is no noise at the time of shooting.

If you want to go to the high-rise building, it's possible and you don't need to take a cable there. If you are going into the desert, you don't need gasoline. This is one of the key products that we would like to highlight among our accessories. It comes in a carry-on bag. There's a whole range, from the smallest size which you can take camping to the big one that is about 6,000 kilowatt-hours."

He added that EcoFlow also has a freezer section, an actual fridge that caters to the needs of a makeup artist to keep the cosmetic section cool in the desert. "EcoFlow's

AMT CEO Kaveh Farnam (white shirt) holds an informal discussion with CINETOMORROW attendees.

mission is to reinvent the way the world generates, stores and uses energy through creative, environmentally conscious innovation."

By hosting the event entirely at Advanced Media's purpose-built showroom in Dubai, the distributor has had the flexibility to showcase the technologies it represents as well as its sustainability efforts under one roof.

"We have done so many workshops, events and product launches," said Pooyan Farnam, Head of Marketing. "I'd say CINE events are our favourites, since it is hosted in our own premises, and we offer a different experience to our customers. It is always a pleasure to offer training and hands-on experience to people who are new in

The Advanced Media team with industry partners.

the world of filmmaking and content creation."

Alaa Al Rantisi, co-founder of Advanced Media, commented that the CINE series has raised the distributor's profile and helped the market see it not just as a seller of off-the-shelf products but as a more

integrated player in the media and entertainment (M&E) market.

"The success of CINETomorrow serves as a testament to our commitment to fostering a vibrant and collaborative community within the industry, showcasing

our dedication beyond conventional product sales. With this and the various CSR alliances we have undertaken with various bodies, we believe we have become an influential player within the dynamic landscape of the M&E market," he concluded. **PRO**

SIMON BATTENSBY, GAFFER

I conducted two workshops at CINETomorrow, one about lighting for drama and the other for XR. When lighting an XR set, people think they can just use the LED wall to light the whole scene because it's got colours and lights on it. That's

a myth. You can't really do that. You do need lighting as well as the wall behind, so the main job is to try to match the foreground lighting that you're adding to the background wall scene lighting. It's important to know how to do that.

You want to avoid shining lights towards the wall, unless it's a very large wall and you can be a long way away from it. Otherwise you'll get reflections or lower contrast, or you'll

wash out the colours of the LED wall. So it's important to use flags, cutters, grids and things like that to stop the light spilling onto the background wall.

The other thing that LED walls have a problem with is mimicking hard, hot sunlight, because by their nature they're a fairly soft source and the light spreads out. Typically, you rig lights from the ceiling, behind the wall, or

sometimes remove a few panels of the screen and shine a hard light through the wall itself through a hole, and then you can have the hard light falling on the actors should you need it. You're guided by the scene that you're shooting and the cinematographer's choices. You might want a warm, romantic feeling for a candlelit dinner, or you might want a cold, creepy look for a horror film.

CHANGING CHANNELS: HOW MENA CEOs ARE ADAPTING TO DISRUPTION

How do broadcasters chart a steady course as turbulence and disruption become the new normal? Streaming, in particular, has upended broadcast business models in the region. In a special CEO panel discussion hosted by BroadcastPro Middle East, MENA M&E leaders share insights on navigating rough waters and successfully steering their organisations to positions of power. **Keith J Fernandez** *sums up the discussion*

As streaming services continue to gain traction and gain an edge over linear services, broadcasters need to not only contend with this situation but also cater to the new consumption patterns behind the shift. The trend has added a new wrinkle to an already diverse market, not least because free ad-supported television (FAST) is emerging as the new free-to-air (FTA) model. As advertisers have more options than ever, how do linear platforms redefine their value proposition?

At the same time, more content is available than ever before. The tools to produce quality content have been widely available for some time now. Generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) is already democratising and accelerating that process, but with more content come demands for better quality across the board.

BroadcastPro ME recently brought together industry CEOs to tackle these questions, providing a compass for understanding the evolving media landscape ahead of what looks set to be another year of disruption.

Focused on *Managing Through Constant Disruption*, the panel brought together Khalifa AlShamsi, CEO of e& life; Joe Kawkabani, CEO of OSN; Paul Edwards, GM of Asharq Discovery; and Nadim Samara, Chief Commercial Officer of MBC Media Solutions. Karim Sarkis, Partner at Strategy&, served as moderator and asked some tough questions on a range of topics.

AlShamsi, who has been with the e& Group (formerly Etisalat) for more than three decades and its entertainment arm, evision, for the last 15, set the stage with an overview of the company and its reach across the MENA region, prefacing his comments with a description of the Middle East's diversity in terms of both content and infrastructure. Although the region is known for FTA, there has been a shift towards SVOD, with some audience segments understanding the value of paying for premium content.

"Our region is under-penetrated when it comes to paid subscription," AlShamsi acknowledged. "Whether it's pay TV in a traditional IPTV environment or other paid streaming services, I think a user on average in this region has access to around 2.8 OTT subscriptions."

Nevertheless, he emphasised the importance of complementing subscription-based models with AVOD, to cater to audience expectations for free content while providing an alternative avenue for monetising technology and content.

The group straddles both markets, he remarked, speaking of how its OTT free-to-watch streaming platform, STARZ ON, is broadening the offering for consumers. The FAST/AVOD platform launched in November 2023.

A diverse region requires multi-platform solutions

For Asharq News Network, the market is now multi-platform. Two new channels – Asharq Documentary and Asharq Discovery – launched in November last year, are available on TV, via streaming and through social media platforms.

"These channels are very much multi-platform," Edwards said. "We needed to launch them in those three ways because different markets in MENA require different approaches," he added.

"TV is still valuable and important in some of the markets in which we operate. But in some others, especially KSA, we are seeing large swathes of the audience rejecting TV at the moment. The challenge then is to bring them back within a FAST environment, because FAST offers a lean-back experience. It's TV … [but] they are somewhat alienated from that type of experience. So we're going to have quite a job addressing that. But TV is still very important and valuable in this marketplace."

Edwards also acknowledged the challenges around monetisation, but pointed to opportunities with enhanced ad sales offerings and programmatic advertising.

> **66** If you look at the price of the subscriptions today on streaming services, it's one fourth or one fifth of what we used to charge **99**
>
> **JOE KAWKABANI, CEO, OSN**

Monetisation depends on content quality

MBC's Samara brought the conversation around to content. Monetisation depends on it, he said. Regardless of the distribution method – linear, VOD, SVOD, AVOD, social clippings, subscription-based – content remains of paramount importance to the industry and is crucial to determining a platform's success.

"It's all about supply and demand. You supply great content and you demand the authority of the audience to actually enjoy that content," he said, adding that delivery channels are secondary. "It all comes down to the quality of the content."

An example is live events, whether sports or shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?,* which dominate viewership patterns.

Karim Sarkis elicited insightful responses by asking CEOs incisive questions about their business strategies.

For such events, a five-inch mobile screen isn't enough, he remarked. People prefer to watch them on larger screens, whether they are aired over connected TV, subscription models or linear broadcasting.

FAST channels must compete with this deeply ingrained behaviour, he pointed out. Broadcasters looking to attract advertisers to FAST can habituate audiences to smaller screens by distributing content shorts on social media, and advertisers will follow the audience. "Ultimately, it's about the demand that you can generate."

FAST comes with greater audience loyalty

Content remains king, but broadcasters can now reach audiences in new ways across different devices. That brings a whole new set of benefits, Edwards pointed out – FAST viewers spend more time on the platform and are more loyal than those accustomed to traditional TV.

"With normal TV, you'd be happy with a 20-minute duration. When you look at FAST, you're talking about two to three hours … Your advertisers know that your users are spending an inordinate amount of time watching that content. [With FAST], you've got a very loyal audience, which I don't think you had before with TV."

Depending on the kind of offering, advertisers also benefit from personalisation and targeting, though frictionless services offer fewer audience insights.

Advertising expands the funnel

Content is a particular differential for platforms that charge access fees. Pay-TV network OSN, for example, has traditionally provided a bouquet of premium local and international shows for a fee. The

Paul Edwards considers generative AI most valuable for content localisation.

formula works for the network and the business isn't looking to advertising, OSN's Kawkabani said.

"Our strategy has been initially about maintaining our position in the premium subscription space. And when you want to ask your clients to pay money to watch your service, they expect a certain quality of content. And this is what we're providing right now."

As decreasing streaming fees affect what viewers are willing to pay, however, even traditional subscription platforms may move to advertising-supported models, supporting the transition from a 'pay now' to a 'pay less' approach, he remarked. For now, where advertising does come into the picture for players such as OSN is in terms of expanding the funnel by enabling access to newer audiences and markets with

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>
> **PAUL EDWARDS, GM, ASHARQ DISCOVERY**

lower subscription penetration. OSN demonstrated this strategy to expand the funnel by announcing a tie-up with Anghami recently to serve their combined user base with ad-supported and paid content.

> 66 It's all about supply and demand. You supply great content and you demand the authority of the audience to actually enjoy that content 99
>
> **NADIM SAMARA, CCO, MBC MEDIA SOLUTIONS**

Nadim Samara stated that data is critical to tailoring content to attract advertisers and subscribers.

"If you look at the price of the subscriptions today on streaming services, it's one fourth or one fifth of what we used to charge. Now you don't think in terms of owning the whole wallet of a customer – you want to be one of the services that the customer has," he said. "But that also opened up the market. So while pay TV's penetration was actually minimal compared to the number of households in the region, I think SVOD would be much higher because of the affordability."

Balancing content investments for engagement and acquisitions
With content creating the differential, understanding where to invest can be difficult. As the market has shifted from linear TV to OTT services, content needs have changed in response, Kawkabani pointed out.

A deeper library is now required to meet the preferences of binge watchers, who look to full box sets and later-season episodes. But, as he pointed out, is having 18,000 hours of content necessary? Or should networks take a more focused approach around the top one hundred titles that garner over 90% of views?

OSN typically separates content investments into two types: content that drives acquisitions, and filler content that drives engagement. With streaming, customer acquisition becomes easier but maintaining engagement is harder, because of what he called the "washing machine effect" – a significant percentage of customers are lost annually due to the flexibility of streaming subscriptions.

"You can disconnect at the end of the month. We can no longer hide behind 12-month contracts, satellite, cable, dish and so on. Now we must earn the loyalty of our customers every single month. The best way to do that, and numbers prove it, is by engagement," he remarked.

Unlike traditional models, streaming platforms must consistently earn customer loyalty by offering engaging content and personalised services with easily discoverable content – crucial for combating high churn rates. Overall, determining the value and impact of content investments in the streaming landscape requires balancing the depth of the library, audience personalisation and the overarching goal of achieving profitability, Kawkabani said.

"When we look at a deal with any global schedule, we try to find enough balance in our platform between titles that we know will drive acquisitions, and we need enough of those and enough cadence throughout the year," he added.

The challenge lies in predicting the impact of each content deal and its potential halo effect on the platform.

Linear TV in a three-pronged market
Although lower barriers to entry are bringing new entrants to market and causing consumer behaviour to shift and fragment, the market remains three-pronged for now.

"Double-screening is a given now, especially for those aged 13 to 19, even though the purchasing power is with the older target audience," Samara said.

Speaking about the Saudi market in particular, he said: "In general, what we're seeing is that, whether it is Nielsen's data, Ipsos' or our own, people spend around 3-3.2 hours on linear, augmented by binge-watching on VOD, whether it's subscription or AVOD."

This three-pronged approach remains essential to serving diverse audiences, he stated, but hinted at the possibility of certain countries making the transition to a digital-first approach over the next few years – when that happens, advertising performance will become more important.

For Asharq, linear TV remains the key platform, despite having had the opportunity to innovate as a relatively recent market entrant. "The core audience and the value are still on linear for us," Edwards remarked. "We're obviously very new and are trying to build up that brand awareness of the channels. It's going to take some time, as we're building up credibility with a non-scripted network."

Scope for consolidation in

region's broadcast sector
The last part of the panel discussion focused on media consolidation in the region. With so many alternatives competing for advertising dollars, are we set to see platforms merge to create a viable alternative?

"There is room to consolidate," AlShamsi said, adding that it could be beneficial for survival in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Each local broadcaster has its own OTT app, with several alternatives available in each of the region's countries. "Moving forward, a lot of the investment will continue to be on content and rights [as well as] the technology and user experience. Not every player will be able to sustain that moving forward."

Consolidation could lead to better monetisation and broader regional reach, addressing both

geographical and technological challenges, he pointed out.

Such consolidation could take one of three forms, Kawkabani said: content sharing, bundling, or mergers and acquisitions. For example, bringing FAST channels onto AVOD platforms could be one way forward. Exploiting complementary aspects – such as combining one platform's content strengths with another's brand awareness – could offer mutual benefits.

However, the biggest business gains will come from mergers.

"When you consolidate properly, you consolidate your back end, your tech costs and your content acquisitions. And this is where you can drive profitability. That's undoubtedly the trend, not just in the region but globally," Kawkabani said.

There remains a challenge around consolidation, however, Samara pointed out. For him, the challenges come down to a reliance on different technologies and the desire of each platform to own its technology and data. Drawing on his agency experience, he highlighted the significance of understanding audience data and preferences, asserting that data is critical to tailoring content to attract advertisers and subscribers. Drawing a parallel with Chinese platforms, he suggested that compartmentalisation might be more effective for consumer familiarity.

Perhaps the way forward is testing. "You start with testing, and the data still shows that this is a good test. The data shows that there's benefit for audiences to jump from channel to channel within a platform rather than another platform. But in terms of scale, it's yet to be seen, as it's still early days. I think that's where the FAST

Joe Kawkabani highlighted that a successful merger can help consolidate different parts of a business and drive profitability.

> **❝ We can no longer hide behind 12-month contracts, satellite, cable, dish and so on. Now we must earn the loyalty of our customers every single month ❞**
>
> **JOE KAWKABANI, CEO, OSN**

channels have a role to play as well."

Feeling the impact of generative AI
Perhaps the most visible disruption over the past year has been generative AI. A much-discussed example at the summit was how broadcaster and biologist David Attenborough's voice, generated autonomously from keyboard inputs, has been used to narrate videos.

Mainstream AI-generated actors and voiceovers appear to be some distance away. However, the panel's consensus was that the industry is already seeing substantial tangible benefits from deploying the technology in practical applications such as natural language processing and recommendation engines.

The integration of gen AI into recommendation engines can help enhance content tagging,

enrich metadata and throw up deeper insights into user behaviour. As a result, algorithms can be further personalised.

"Gen AI is not a dream, it's a reality. With platforms like Vertex AI, we've integrated gen AI into our recommendation engine, significantly impacting churn rates," Kawkabani said. Vertex AI is a Google Cloud tool that can help developers build and fine tune gen AI models.

Similarly, MBC uses gen AI commercially in a self-serve application on its MBC Media Solutions (MMS) ad platform, commented Samara, where advertisers can script ads and refine campaigns. The solution was built using Microsoft's AI platform.

"If [an advertiser] is booking an audio campaign with radio stations in Saudi and they don't have an audio ad, they can actually script it out. And they can choose a certain dialect and have an ad up immediately. Those are two things that were massive barriers to entry," he said.

A future use case will be creating video advertisements. "Hopefully, [soon the] platform will be fully AI-enabled, which will allow people to not only select what sort of campaign they want to run but also ensure that they have the best content behind it."

At Asharq, gen AI could potentially help with localising content, Edwards said. However, he highlighted the need for continued development to match the quality of human work. "I don't like to necessarily envisage that my production team … are going to be gen AI bots. But I do see how the application can potentially impact us in a positive way."

Over at e&, the group soft-launched an AI consumer assistant at GITEX Technology Week

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>
> **KHALIFA ALSHAMSI, CEO, E& LIFE**

last October. Also built using Microsoft tools, it can join voice calls to verbally communicate with customers and help with tasks such as getting directions and weather or news updates. The group also uses a similar assistant to manage renewals and help cut costs.

Flashier use cases such as scripting are some distance away, AlShamsi said – the real impact of gen AI lies in cost reduction, content curation and engagement strategies, and a future use case could be using gen AI to combat piracy.

While fighting piracy continues to be a challenge, broadcasters will need to future-proof their operations to successfully combat the constant stream of disruptive forces affecting the industry. As the panellists agreed, both challenges and opportunities lie ahead. **PRO**

Khalifa AlShamsi remarked that at present, the real impact of generative AI lies in cost reduction, content curation and engagement strategies.

ELEVATING ESPORTS BROADCASTS WITH TECH

The BLAST Premier World Final, a global esports tournament held in Abu Dhabi in December, was produced not just for a live audience but for millions of viewers around the world. BroadcastPro ME caught up with Martin Smed Dietrichsen, BLAST Broadcast Director, for a quick chat about some unique elements of broadcasting an esports tournament

The tournament, organised by BLAST in partnership with ADGaming, was held at the Etihad Arena in Abu Dhabi.

What technology did you use for the BLAST Premier World Final for television and online audiences?
The technology used was similar to what is used for a sports production. We are using EVS for replays and other tools to give the best possible experience. At the same time, there is a lot of information feeding in from computers that needed to be fit tech-wise into the broadcast system, and this required a lot of knowledge and skills from technicians to get that to work efficiently.

What are the fundamentals when it comes to broadcasting esports, compared to traditional sports such as football or cricket?
In football, you can set up the camera at different points of the pitch and that doesn't require that much data to tell you what is happening. In esports, we require a lot of data to tell the story. For example, in Counter-Strike we get a lot of data from the game itself, and to tell the story the audience needs to know how many times a player has died or how many damages the player has had. This data is all from the game and then packaged into a graphic system which can then be part of the broadcast. The same applies to Formula One, where the audience wouldn't know who is leading or how many laps have been completed without the data and graphics.

Did you implement any new tech for the World Final?
Innovation is key to everything that we do, and for the World Final we installed a camera on the coach's headset so the audience could see what he was looking at when he was analysing the players during matches. This really puts the audience in the coach's shoes and
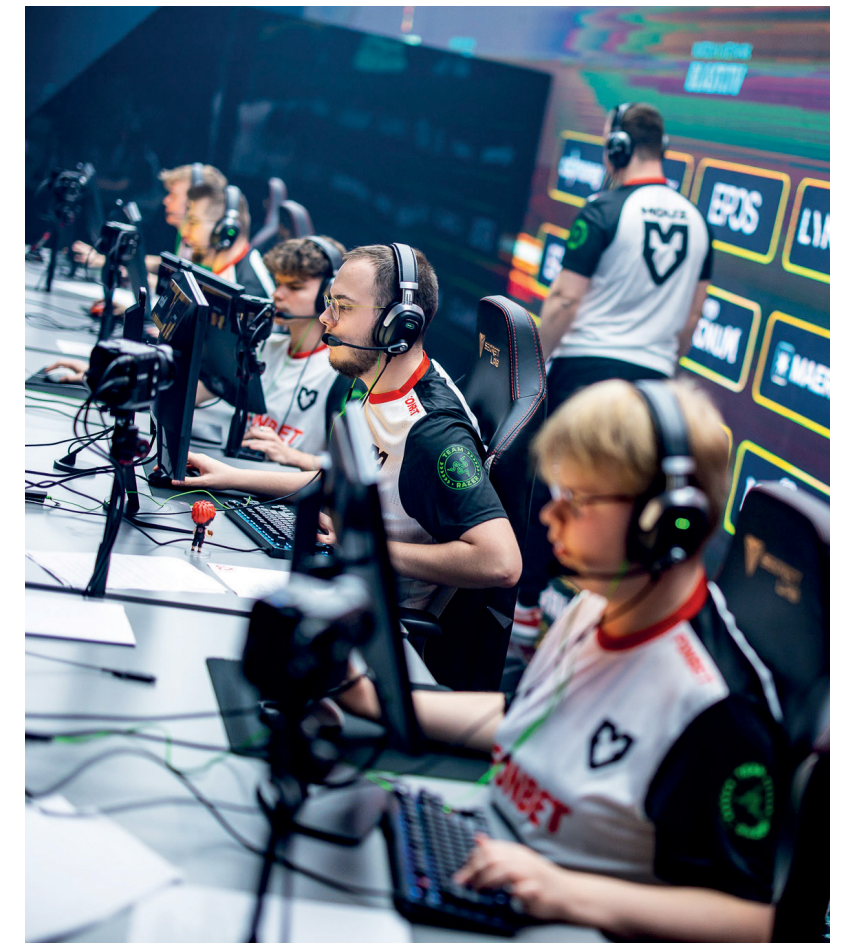
> 66 Innovation is key to everything that we do, and for the World Final we installed a camera on the coach's headset so the audience could see what he was looking at when he was analysing the players during matches 99

MARTIN SMED DIETRICHSEN, BLAST BROADCAST DIRECTOR

helps them see what it's like when they are playing on the stage.

What else allows the audience to get closer to the action?
As with any other sport, we try to focus on the emotions and expressions of the players on stage, as that is a key part of esports. The player cam gives a better view that captures these emotions, which are then played during intervals. This really adds a different dimension to the viewing experience.

What are the challenges in esports?
When you do a music show production, there is a lot more time to rehearse and practise. At the BLAST Premier World Final we had limited time, as we only had a couple of days to set up followed by five broadcast days. Therefore, the tech crew had to be very fast and highly skilled to prepare everything before we went into the Etihad Arena.

I also had to develop a comprehensive plan that included a camera plan and the set-up of the

Team Vitality beat Faze Clan in the Grand Final and won a slice of the $1m prize pool in the Tier One Counter-Strike competition.

Martin Smed Dietrichsen, BLAST Broadcast Director, at the event.

EVS and graphics systems. Everything was brought from Denmark to Abu Dhabi, and this was a challenge – to set up and test and go live.

Do you use AR/VR in your productions?
Not currently, but there is a big place for that in esports in the future. It can feel fake, but if done well it will be more believable. Having said that, utilising AR or VR would be a good fit for the player walk-ins on the stage. It could also be used for the stage, but using these features requires a lot of testing – for example, you would

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>
> **MARTIN SMED DIETRICHSEN, BLAST BROADCAST DIRECTOR**

need to analyse the cameras and what programmes would be sufficient to ensure you get the best result.

What about latency issues?
There is no delay at all at live arenas, whereas if they're watching on Twitch, they could possibly signal or call someone; but when you're in an arena, there's no chance that can be done. When we're doing online tournaments we delay the feed by four minutes, and we do this by having a system that the signal runs into which delays the feed when it is broadcast online. PRO

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2024

With the industry in a constant state of flux and big shifts on the horizon, we ask industry insiders to share their insights into what they think will be the upcoming trends for 2024

EVERGENT

Paolo Cuttorelli, SVP, APAC & EMEA

AI has been utilised in the subscription management space throughout the last decade. In 2024, we'll witness a shift as media businesses adopt advanced AI solutions to not only forecast reasons behind subscriber churn, but also to implement real-time engagement strategies to mitigate this churn as it happens. This includes intelligent payment retries and personalised offers to maximise retention. Ultimately, AI is nothing without high-quality data; streaming operators that can tap into proven expertise and massive data sets based on the behaviour of hundreds of millions of global subscribers will be in the best position to get ahead of the competition.

Globalisation will present increased complexity and growing opportunity in the live sports market in 2024. Sports organisations pursuing direct-to-consumer streaming strategies are building deeper relationships with their fans than ever before, moving beyond transactional engagement with subscribers and toward a community membership model that opens up new revenue streams. This necessitates highly flexible subscriber management systems. One of our major North American sports league clients' D2C streaming audience is two-thirds global. This international complexity requires a flexible approach to managing diverse pricing strategies and subscription models, accommodating unique regional viewing habits and economic factors.

Ongoing macroeconomic challenges will continue to make consumers think more carefully about their subscription choices. Streaming companies are consequently under constant pressure to both retain and monetise their existing subscribers. A growing trend in 2024 will be the emphasis on service aggregation and bundling as effective strategies to enhance customer retention and establish stickier revenue streams. We'll see a lot more streaming businesses re-evaluating their subscriber management strategies, focusing on whether their existing tools for billing, monetisation and retention are capable of offering the flexibility their customers need and the scale required to support their company's next phase of subscriber growth.

> **"** In 2024, we'll witness a shift as media businesses adopt advanced AI solutions to not only forecast reasons behind subscriber churn, but also to implement real-time engagement strategies **"**

LTN GLOBAL

Brad Wall, CTO

The move to IP-based video distribution will be a central focus for the global media industry in 2024. Business leaders no longer need convincing of the benefits of embracing IP-first technologies, including enabling greater flexibility, scale and monetisation opportunities. There's no more time for analysis paralysis – media companies need to act now to future-proof their workflows, secure their long-term future and keep them ahead of their competitors.

Technology companies have been experimenting with automation and AI for years, but the rise of generative AI pushed the trend front and centre last year. The hardest part of any automation project is typically the translation layer between different teams, tools, services and business logic. Fuelled by new developments in AI, we'll see an increased ability to tie together disparate technologies and complex ecosystems via automated workflows, driving new levels of efficiency and simplifying processes like never before.

The sports broadcasting market is becoming increasingly competitive and complex. Over the last few years, we've seen new market entrants and digital-native tech giants dip

their toes in the water of the live sports game, but now live sports rights are becoming a real tug-of-war. Rights holders that until now have primarily delivered on-demand video content will need to re-imagine their workflows and architecture to deliver high-value live content at a global scale. For traditional sports broadcasting giants, it's never been more important to harness future-ready IP-based technologies to keep up with digital-first competitors.

TELESTREAM

Lee Balinger – VP, Sales EMEA
The push among media businesses to remain competitive in regions of growth is leading to increased adoption of SMPTE ST2110 standards, strategic cloud and hybrid workflows, and UHD content with the shift from SDR to HDR. These three trends have greatly impacted production technology infrastructure configuration, operational flexibility, cost efficiency and innovation.

The shift to IP-based workflows is opening up innovation opportunities for broadcasters, and as part of

this we are seeing the provision of specialised solutions that can process and produce UHD and HDR content in a more cost-effective way. There is a new confidence among broadcasters to experiment with more interactive forms of content delivery, and we will see this continue into 2024.

The integration of AI and machine learning (AIML) in various applications this year will pave the way for further exploration of broadcast content production and delivery next year. This exploration will be a notable focus for broadcasters who want to gain real insights into audience behaviour in order to craft more customised, meaningful and engaging viewing experiences. The combination of cloud infrastructure with AIML capabilities holds the promise of scaling production capabilities while concurrently streamlining operations and reducing costs. As user needs evolve, the rise of AI-driven customer service will pre-empt issues, thereby mitigating potential production bottlenecks and ensuring swift resolution of customer concerns.

> ❝ Fuelled by new developments in AI, we'll see an increased ability to tie together disparate technologies ❞

VIEWNEXA

Greg Morrow, GM

> With major streaming services raising their prices and clamping down on subscriptions, more customers, especially millennials, are turning to FAST channels

Individualised content and tailored viewing experiences have been a key trend in the media industry, whether through mobile, CTV hardware or web. Free ad-supported streaming television (FAST) channels have gained significant traction over the past year due to their flexibility and ability to provide a wide array of content cost-effectively. Remarkably versatile, FAST channels offer something for every viewer, curating and consolidating diverse content into a linear-style channel that relies on advertising revenue. These niche channels, alongside traditional mainstream programming, encourage like-minded communities and collaborative interactions among viewers who share similar interests. Demand for diverse programming also allows content creators to engage in cross-promotion, broadening audience reach and boosting engagement.

With major streaming services raising their prices and clamping down on subscriptions, more customers, especially millennials, are turning to FAST channels to enjoy their content, as this removes the financial commitment and constraints for the consumer, a trend set to continue into next year.

This year, the dominance of connected TVs (CTVs) and CTV hardware like Roku and Apple TV is persisting. These devices are playing a crucial role in reshaping the advertising landscape by facilitating the growth of FAST channels and enabling precise audience targeting. Advertisers are now hand-picking desired audiences and getting real-time, comprehensive reporting and metrics, offering them the ability to measure the campaign's impact with unparalleled accuracy. Thanks to the benefits of gathering instant data on ad spend and outcomes, we will see more advertisers adopting CTV hardware moving forward, to leverage agility and data-driven insights in a constantly evolving industry.

VIEWLIFT

Rick Allen, CEO

Sports organisations may feature ultra-wealthy owners, but they are not immune to budget pressures, especially from macroeconomic conditions. What's more, the overall economic slowdown has led to a surge in borrowing costs. Ripples are felt throughout the sports and media sectors, impacting sponsors, suppliers and partners – the entire ecosystem.

In 2024, broadcasters and direct-to-consumer (DTC) services will continue to battle for sports rights that can anchor programming and fuel growth. DTC services already complement (and occasionally challenge) traditional TV providers in sports markets worldwide, and will become an even more critical part of the future media mix for many sports leagues. LIV Golf brought its upstart approach not just to the links but to distribution, pivoting to ubiquitous global streaming and linear tie-ups with aggressive networks looking to fuel their own growth.

The trend toward more media fragmentation, combined with the increasing involvement of institutional investors and sovereign wealth funds in sports, will fuel rising rights valuations, requiring rights holders to find ways to monetise both live and accompanying content fully while engaging viewers in new, compelling ways in 2024. 2024 will also see the acceleration of players becoming their own brands, with teams and leagues buoyed by big-name global stars such as Neymar, Karim Benzema and Riyad Mahrez, who recently followed Cristiano Ronaldo into the Saudi Pro League. We expect traditional leagues in all sports to find new ways beyond head-snapping salaries to tie talent to clubs and leagues and mutually leverage their star appeal.

> Broadcasters and direct-to-consumer (DTC) services will continue to battle for sports rights that can anchor programming and fuel growth

ST ENGINEERING IDIRECT

Don Claussen, President and CEO

We expect to see more consolidation within the industry as it continues its evolution. There's no way to build the future of satellite communications without integrating our technologies into a shared digital ecosystem. Moving forward, we can expect more debate around the adoption of standards, which must happen if we are to succeed with our seamless multi-orbit future. The most significant opportunities to provide worldwide connectivity are achievable only if they interoperate in a global, multi-domain, cloud-enabled, standards-based telecom model.

We'll also continue to see the obsession over speed and efficiency in our sector transition to completely new challenges – ones of virtualisation, standardisation, orchestration, interoperability and the unification of technologies to establish one cohesive connectivity landscape.

ST Engineering iDirect's focus is on pioneering interoperable solutions that integrate space- and terrestrial-based communications systems, abstracting network transitions for the end user while allowing operators to manage networks at scale.

APPEAR

Andy Rayner, CTO, Appear

The Middle East is becoming an increasingly important region for major global live sporting events, and in 2024 we're likely to see broadcasters continue to use managed networks for live contributions at World Cup-sized events. However, we will increasingly see high-value content being delivered over the public internet thanks to new high-capacity solutions that utilise protocols such as SRT and RIST – now enabling sports video to be distributed at scale, robustly and at high quality and low latency.

In 2024, sports broadcasters will continue to embrace remote production techniques to cut costs and maintain the highest possible quality. Remote approaches also align with sustainability goals, reducing emissions by requiring less on-site crew and utilising less energy-intense live contribution solutions. With the value of sports rights escalating, robust fan engagement and cost-efficient production remain paramount, which both streaming giants and traditional broadcasters recognise.

> 66 Sports broadcasters will continue to embrace remote production techniques to cut costs and maintain the highest possible quality 99

OPERATIVE

Ben Tatta, Chief Commercial Officer, Operative

In the coming year, connected TV (CTV) will become a dominant advertising channel in more countries around the world. Consumers love the ability to select shows on-demand on any screen they choose. Advertisers love that they can combine the ad formats of TV with the targeting and measurement of digital media. This growth will create new revenue opportunities for media companies if they are able to package and deliver effectively for their advertiser clients. This means that they must provide their sales team with ready access to the entire product catalogue so that CTV can be easily combined with linear, digital and other offerings for a multichannel offering. Ad operations teams will need an automated platform that can help them quickly deliver campaigns across these channels and optimise as necessary based on advertiser goals. This means that a flexible, centralised advertising technology stack must be in place to connect different media channels.

In the coming year, more media companies will focus on their work – centralising product data, supporting ad operations with technology and putting together the ability to optimise and deliver reporting for multichannel advertisers. **PRO**

THOMAS GATEFF

" As future generations join millennials in buying power and influence, a desire for experiences is only likely to increase "

Building Brand Advocacy through Impactful Digital and VR Experiences

As consumers' purchasing behaviour keeps evolving and their attention span keeps reducing, digital and virtual reality (VR) experiences have emerged as powerful tools in shaping brand advocacy. With a growing emphasis on experiential purchases, especially among millennials who prioritise experiences over products, these technological advancements offer brands a unique opportunity to connect with their audience. This shift is profoundly influenced by the experience economy, a concept introduced in the late 1990s which underscores the significance of customer-centric experiences in gaining a competitive edge.

Digital Transformation in Branding
The digital revolution has fundamentally altered branding strategies. It's no longer just about the product or service; the broader impact lies in creating experiences that resonate with consumers on a deeper level. Studies, including those by the World Economic Forum, have highlighted that organisations must focus on human-centric experiences to thrive. This is particularly relevant considering that millennials, who make up a significant portion of the global workforce, heavily influence the experience economy. Remarkably, 78% of millennials value

experiential purchases more highly than material ones. As future generations join millennials in buying power and influence, a desire for experiences is only likely to increase. As the global VR advertising market is projected to achieve revenue of $166.7m in 2023, brands have a unique opportunity to leverage digital platforms to create immersive and memorable experiences.

Shaping Consumer Preferences
The pandemic significantly altered social interactions and tangible experiences, leading to a heightened demand for activities that have interaction at the centre. Fear of missing out, aka FOMO, in people worldwide, caused by social pressure, exclusivity and limited-time opportunities, also adds to the expansion in experiential appetite. For example, the leisure and tourism industries are now more focused on selling experiences rather than just services. Their appeal and amenities are being redesigned to cater to the modern consumer. In the Middle East, environmental conditions and cultural preferences play a significant role in consumer behaviour. Interestingly, high internet penetration in the region is also an experience economy driver, with mobile internet penetration expected to reach 8.8bn people by 2025.

VR in Brand Advocacy
VR offers a unique platform for immersive and interactive experiences that redefine consumer engagement. Far surpassing traditional marketing methods, VR allows consumers to become active participants in a brand's narrative, deepening their connection and leaving a lasting impact.

These VR experiences transcend mere entertainment, serving as powerful engagement tools. Harnessing VR, brands can craft visually stunning, interactive experiences that not only amplify their message but also deeply engage customers. Through participatory experiential marketing, customers immerse themselves in the brand's world, making it stand out in a saturated market. These campaigns encourage brand advocacy, as customers are likely to share their engaging experiences, extending the brand's reach. By leveraging VR, brands can enhance storytelling, create memorable interactions and position themselves as leaders in a technology-driven branding era. **PRO**

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