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Optical Fiber and HD-SDI Connections
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Talkback and Tally
The Blackmagic Studio Camera features built in talkback using general aviation headsets, so you get better noise cancelling and comfort at a much lower cost! You also get built in tally lights that illuminate automatically when your camera is live so your cast and crew can easily see which camera are on air! Talkback and tally signals are embedded in the return video connection to the camera, so you don’t have to run separate cables!

Micro Four Thirds Lens Mount
The active Micro Four Thirds lens mount is compatible with an incredibly wide range of lenses and adapters. You can use your existing photo lenses for smaller setups and fixed focal lenses, or connect incredible broadcast ENS lenses via a B4 lens adapter. You can even use third party adapters for high end feature film FS mount lenses, so it’s easy to customize your camera to suit your production needs!

They say Middle East broadcasters don’t actually make any money but I think they may have cracked it – finally! The secret seems to be good, high-quality Arab drama productions that follow the Indian serial route and run like stripped programmes, five times a week on a channel.

Arab audiences seem to have warmed up to the idea of serials not just during Ramadan but round the year. And broadcasters, who have been hungry for viewership, thus far, are scrambling to cater to this requirement.

The secret, of course, does not just lie in Arab drama productions but how broadcasters and producers have evolved in the way they work with and amongst each other.

For one, broadcasters seem to have realized that the key to their survival is to collaborate rather than compete. As a result, pay TV operators and free-to-air broadcasters are new partnering to acquire the first and second windows to different drama series.

If they went to negotiate individually, those investments might have those audiences seem to have warmed up to the idea of serials not just during Ramadan but round the year. And broadcasters, who have been hungry for viewership, thus far, are scrambling to cater to this requirement.

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PROCONTENTS
MBC has launched four new sports channels on the back of a landmark $960m deal, which gives it the broadcast rights to the Saudi football league matches. The network is now eyeing the European football leagues as part of its expansion plans.

Al Arabiya News Channel quoted MBC chairman Sheikh Waleed Al-Ibrahim as saying that the group is considering leagues that “have no commitments at this stage”.

“There is nothing stopping us from bidding for other leagues once their current broadcasting rights contracts expire,” Sheikh Waleed said.

He added that MBC’s vision is to transform the overall experience of how football is watched and enjoyed in the region.

“We want to introduce the concept of sports entertainment to Saudi viewers and to the whole region.”

BroadcastPro ME official media partner for CABSAT

BroadcastPro Middle East is pleased to announce that it is the official media partner for CABSAT, the Middle East’s largest broadcast exhibition, which is held in Dubai annually in March. The partnership was sealed last month. CABSAT revisited its strategy last year and included new features that were well received by both exhibitors and attendees.

Speaking about the event, Andrew Pert, Show Director of CABSAT, said: “CABSAT is globally regarded as a provider of ‘must-have content’ for industry professionals within the broadcast, satellite, content delivery and digital media sectors. As we embark on our third decade, we remain committed to launching new features, and improving the size and activity in existing platforms.”

“For 2015, our focus continues to be on fostering opportunities for regional companies in the creation, management, distribution and monetisation of filmed entertainment, and radio and digital media content; connecting the region’s content owners, operators and distributors; and encouraging collaborative cross-industry partnerships to accelerate the reach and viewing experiences across the MENASA region.”

Speaking about the partnership, Raz Islam, Publishing Director of CPI Media Group, the publisher of BroadcastPro ME, added: “This partnership is indeed a huge recognition of the work BroadcastPro ME has done since it was launched four years ago. We have constantly sought through our print magazines, our online and social media efforts as well as our annual Summit and Awards, which is hosted in November in conjunction with the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), to create a vibrant production and broadcast community in the region.”

News Flash: Vizrt secures $297,000 broadcast graphics deal in Middle East; Paul Hennessy exits MGI

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Anti-piracy alliance shuts down 15 channels

The newly formed Broadcast Satellite Anti-Piracy Coalition has taken some important steps in its battle against the region’s vast number of pirate TV channels.

Earlier this year, key industry players combined forces to raise awareness about the impact of piracy on the region’s burgeoning television industry. The alliance has closed down at least 15 rogue channels including Al-Mamnou, Ahl Masar, CDC Cinema, CBT Cinema, Home TV, I-Movies, Hollywood Stars, Kit Kat, Majestic 2, Mega Cinema, Nessma Al Khadra, QTV, Scope TV Movies, Time Movies and Top Movies. These channels alone were responsible for more than 700 infringements of intellectual property rights for studio owned movies since January of 2014.

The members of the anti-piracy coalition include Arabsat, ART, du, Egyptian Chamber of Cinema, Eutelsat, IAA, JMC, MBC Group, Motion Picture Association of America (MPA), Nilesat, Noorsat, OSN, Rotana, STN, Viewsat and WWE.

Sam Barnett, MBC Group CEO, commented: “We are collectively trying to combat thousands of hours of pirated content broadcast to millions of viewers in the region. “Pirate channels damage all legitimate producers, actors, production companies and broadcasters. It’s essential for the health of the sector across the region, that the pirates are challenged.”

Oman TV to build new OB vans

Oman TV has contracted BFE and Dubai-based company UBMS to build two OB vans for the state broadcaster. The first OB van, equipped with 10 cameras, is a trailer with an extension and will be stationed at the broadcaster’s headquarters in Muscat. The second one is an eight-camera compact vehicle OB van on a Mercedes Actros 2532 chassis. This vehicle will be used at Salalah, the second largest city in the Sultanate, located in the south of Oman. A support van on a Mercedes Actros 1222 chassis belongs to each unit.

The project is being executed in co-operation with Dutch OB van supplier Carrosserie Akkermans. BFE has also been awarded a contract to build a flight case studio for Oman TV.

The entire central technique is integrated in six vibration-damped 19” flight case racks. Part of this production unit is a support van on a Mercedes Actros 1522 chassis designed for the transport of the flight cases and any additional production equipment.

The OB vans are scheduled for delivery in April 2015 while the flight case studio is expected to be delivered next month.

Speaking about the project, BFE Project Manager Detlef Eckert commented: “We are proud to realise such an extensive project for Oman TV. Throughout the project implementation, we are also pleased to enjoy a smooth and professional collaboration with our partner UBMS.”

Persian channel takes Wimbledon Studios site on 15-year lease

Persian broadcaster Marjan TV has agreed to a 15-year lease for the Wimbledon Studios site in the UK. Marjan will pay an annual rent of USD 1.6m to Panther Securities, which holds a 25% stake in the studio and owns the freehold of the 220,000 sq ft facility.

By October this year, around 150 of Marjan TV’s employees are expected to move into the new facility. Marjan operates Persian language channel Manoto 1, which is distributed via satellite across EMEA and Iran. It is presently based at Capital Studios in Wandsworth.

Jordan amends Press Association law

Recent amendments to the Jordan Press Association (JPA) Law allows those working at news websites, radio stations and private satellite channels also to become members of the association. The JPA has 1,100 members at present. The new law will help increase the number of members and introduce major changes to the way the syndicate’s President is elected.

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Beecell and Kooora tie for sport

Beecell, a value-added service (VAS) provider in the MENA region, has announced its partnership with Kooora.com to deliver sports content over mobile. The latter is a sports portal operating in the Arab world to deliver sports content and alerts for mobile users in the region.
ADM moves pay TV channels as part of new carriage deal

A new agreement between Abu Dhabi Media and OSN will see the state broadcaster’s subscription-based channels shown exclusively on the pay TV operator’s network from September 1, 2014. With this partnership, Abu Dhabi Media has moved away from the pay TV platform business to focus on content development.

ADM will migrate its high-definition subscription-based sports channels to OSN, followed by the brand-new Abu Dhabi Drama+, an HD channel that will feature regional Arabic productions months before they airs on the free-to-view Abu Dhabi Drama.

Speaking about the shift, H.E. Mohamed Rashed Al Mahmood, Chairman and Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Media, said: “Our sports and entertainment channels are the result of large investments over the past six years – content development and enhancing our programmes and reach have always been part of our core strategy.”

Abdul Hadi Al Sheikh, Executive Director of Television at Abu Dhabi Media, seconded this by adding that the media entity’s mandate is to develop more content and reach have always been part of our core strategy.”

Arabic news channel has announced a multi-year deal with DurAlpha Group, a Riyadh-based media company, as part of its efforts to deliver high-quality news coverage to its viewers when it launches later this year. Fahad Al Suqit, CEO of DurAlpha TV (pic above), said: “Our goal is to change the way people in the Arab world think about news. Our staff, our studios and this deal all point the way to fulfilling that goal.”

DurAlpha is a major media production firm in Saudi Arabia with a long track record of producing outstanding programmes. “We are excited that we can help shine a light on the issues that matter the most to Saudi Arabian viewers,” commented Bandar Abdul Salam, CEO of DurAlpha Group.

**AROUND IMPROVES WITH TWO NEW FM STUDIOS**

Dubai-based Arab Radio Network (ARN) added two brand new FM studios to its facility last month. The new FM studios were designed and installed by Abu Dhabi based systems integrator Tek Signals.

“With the OnAir 2500, the control surface, I/O breakout, DSP Core and power supply are all integrated within a single compact chassis,” explained Eissa Darwish, Executive Director Engineer of the project.

“The systems have been installed to operate totally independent of each studio. At the same time, Studio A can control the microphone of Studio B and vice versa. Both are capable of running normal broadcast operations, and in extreme cases, Studio B can also serve as the control room for Studio A,” he added.

“The Production Room utilises a Yamaha DM1000 mixer, which is integrated to the Pro Tools editing software through the interface. The edit room is equipped with Onyx 16.0.1 for minimal editing jobs.

Both have been designed to be capable of work independently or control each other. Both are designed to be capable of running broadcast operations.

We required two additional FM studios as we are constantly upgrading our Arabic programming,” Mahmoud Al Rasheed, General Manager of ARN, said.

At the heart of the new solution lies several Studer systems. The Studer 18-fader On Air 2500 consoles have been deployed for on-air broadcast and serve as a self-contained system.

“We have exclusive broadcast rights to several games like the Arabian Gulf League and the Ultimate 5 Championship among others and we want to focus on content development and acquisition. Our deal with OSN is a carriage deal. We wanted to partner with a player that has the know-how in the pay TV business to take our pay offerings to a wider subscriber base and OSN has that.”

Abu Dhabi Media’s customers will be able to view their Abu Dhabi Sports subsidised for channels through the OSN network on Abu Dhabi Media receivers until their current contracts expire. After that, they will have to use an OSN box to watch ADM’s premium channels.

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twofour54 invests in ‘Falafel Games’

twofour54 is investing in Falafel Games, a designer and producer of Arabic Massive Multiplier Online (MMO) games targeting the MENA audience.

The current investment was concluded alongside MBC Ventures and Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP), bringing the total cash invested in the company to around $2m. This is the latest move by twofour54 to invest in early stage growth companies in the media and entertainment sector, bringing its venture portfolio to 13 companies.

Commenting on the investment, twofour54’s Chief Executive Officer, Noura Al Kaabi, said: “Our investment in Falafel Games provides further evidence of our commitment to create a thriving entrepreneurship ecosystem at twofour54. We want to support local talent and help startups fulfil their creative potential, which is vital to building and sustaining our media and entertainment industries.”

Twofour54 enters into partnership with First Gulf Bank Arena (FGBA) to promote and utilise the venue for TV and film projects in Abu Dhabi. The FGBA 6,000 seat multipurpose indoor stadium is the size of three basketball courts and is located at Zayed Sports City, Abu Dhabi. As part of the agreement, twofour54 intaj will provide full production services for the venue including the use of nine HD cameras, mobile studio equipment, post production facilities and crew on an on-going basis.

Jamal Al Awadhi, Head of Commercial, twofour54 intaj, said: “There are tremendous opportunities for production companies and support services to benefit from having this venue as a filming location. For this event, our team along with MBC’s production team will work closely to manage all aspects of the production including lighting, audio and filming in the best high definition quality.”

ARABSAT selects GMV satellite monitoring for satellite fleet

ARABSAT has contracted GMV to provide a complete Satellite Control Center (SCC) for its existing and upcoming fleet of satellites. ARABSAT has been using a heterogeneous SCC solution for the last ten years to operate its satellite fleet but has recently decided to establish a more direct and long partnership with a specialised SCC vendor and move to a homogenous, flexible and robust system that enables seamless operations of various satellite platforms with an increased level of operational reliability.

The agreement calls for procurement of a turnkey solution comprising RTS (Real Time System based on GMV hifly product) and FDS (Flight Dynamics System based on GMV focusgeo product) along with all auxiliary and support applications that incorporate ARABSAT’s existing fleet of six satellites with the option to include two more satellites before the end of 2014. The agreement also includes provisions for the addition of more satellites from different known platforms in the long term.

“This partnership with GMV further highlights ARABSAT’s drive to remain a global leader in Telecom satellite operations. The GMV solution will increase reliability of our monitoring and control operations through system homogeneity and automation. It will also enable us to better optimise our operations and engineering resources in order to deliver the best service to our customers,” Khalid Balkheyour, President and CEO of ARABSAT, said.
The Middle East and Africa’s audiovisual market, among the fastest-growing in the world, is set to reach USD 4.63bn by 2016, according to trade association InfoComm International.

Driven by large infrastructure developments such as the World Expo 2020 in Dubai and the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar, the MEA audiovisual market is projected to grow from USD 2.79bn in 2012 to USD 4.63bn by 2016, an annual growth rate of 13%, according to the recently released InfoComm 2014 Global AV Market Definition and Strategy Study.

The UAE’s audiovisual market is projected to grow from USD 700m in 2012 to USD 1.24bn in 2016.

“Boosted by Dubai, the Middle East and Africa region offers strong audiovisual market potential, thanks to strong investment, a young online population, and a low penetration of audiovisual adoption,” said Richard Tan, Executive Director, InfoCommAsia Pte Ltd.

InfoComm MEA 2014, held under the theme of “See. Hear. Touch. The Future of Your Business” returns for the fourth year, from October 3-16, 2014, and will be co-located at GITEX Technology Week 2014 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

The forthcoming InfoComm MEA 2014 will showcase more than 200 exhibitors from 30 countries.
Egyptian media entity chooses Imagine Communications

Egyptian Media and Production City (EMPC) has selected Imagine Communications’ Nexio AMP video servers to update six of its studios. Replacing EMPC’s existing bank of video tape recorders, the new installation is a key facet of the company’s initiative to upgrade its studios to high definition, file-based operations. The servers are being supplied in conjunction with Cairo-based dealer Systems Design.

EMPC has a number of production studios and is a major hub for satellite channels in the region. Following the installation, each of the six modernised studios will have a dedicated Nexio AMP server with integrated storage, which will provide recording functionality as well as playback into EMPC’s production environment.

“For a busy studio complex like EMPC, recording and playback is a mission-critical application, and Nexio AMP servers are designed to provide the reliability and operational flexibility such users require,” said Paul Wallis, Middle East Sales Director for Imagine Communications.

“We’re pleased to have been selected by EMPC for this important project. This is a model installation for the way that all studios will soon be configured, with multi-channel recording straight into the server network,”

Ahmad Gamal, Managing Director at Systems Design, added: “Moving the studios away from VTRs is an important new step for EMPC, and they very carefully evaluated all the possible offerings on the market and accordingly EMPC issued a tender for EMPC, and they very carefully evaluated all the possible

EMPC’s production environment.

“EMPC also valued the strong local support offered by our combined teams, giving the media entity the confidence to take the next step towards a tapeless environment with Imagine Communications.”

Prime Focus Technologies (PFT), the technology arm of Prime Focus, a media and entertainment service provider, has appointed Yuval Tori as Executive VP for EMEA. Based in London, Tori will be responsible for business operations in the region including business development, sales and client relationships.

MGI opens training academy in Dubai

Media Group International has opened a new training academy for broadcast professionals in Dubai Studio City. Headed by Training Manager Joe MacQuarrie, the academy will offer courses to train media personnel to bridge the gap between traditional broadcast infrastructure and IT and use new technology efficiently.

Yahoo Maktob and Mazika in exclusive content deal

Yahoo Maktob has tied with music streaming service Mazika to provide premium Arabic video content as well as archived and new music releases on Yahoo Maktob Celebrity and Yahoo Maktob Screen.

Mazika owns 14 music labels including works of regional stars such as Tamer Hosny, Amr Diab and Ragheb Alama. The partnership will ensure that all new music videos and artist releases from Mazika will become available to view first on Yahoo Maktob, prior to their official launches. Music fans will also have access to unpublished content including behind-the-scenes videos and exclusive interviews with some of the most famous Arab stars in the region on Yahoo Maktob.

“Our partnership with Mazika is a step forward in enhancing the overall music offering on our entertainment sites and providing entertaining and inspiring content to enrich people’s online daily habits,” commented Amira Rashad, Head of Media at Yahoo Maktob.

Reem Raouf, Marketing Director at Maktia Group, added: “We are delighted to partner with Yahoo Maktob to bring some of the best content from the music industry online to its wide audience in the region.”

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In the Middle East, Yahoo has more than 8 million monthly unique visitors and 10% of all new user sign-ups are from the region. A native app is also available.

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The dust has settled and the final whistle has gone, so who won?

No, this isn’t about the World Cup – it’s about Ramadan, now that we’ve had some time to look at the whole period and the viewing figures.

As always, research and analysis is something where five people can draw six conflicting views so feel free to disagree, but I think there were some new and interesting trends this year.

Ramadan 2014 will go down as the year of the repeats. The top three shows for the all Arab audience each had afternoon repeats that were highly ranked in their own right, with nearly as many viewers as the first showing on some days (Table 1).

The later the show, the more viewers watched the repeat, with Ramez Qersh Al Bahr’s repeat episode the best of the reruns, reaching an astonishing sixth among all programmes. It was a clever way to get more viewers and perhaps, pick up on word of mouth overnight, as well as negate the effects of local channels having the rights to also screen programmes.

We can also see a slightly different audience. Not surprising, perhaps, but the repeat audience tended to be slightly more female, and slightly more Arab Expat; whereas the prime-time audience was more male and more Emirati. The differences were a few percentage points, not vast, but noticeable and thereby, confirming what people may suspect about different behaviours.

It was interesting too that Bab Al Hara, a relative veteran now in Season 6, topped the rankings, rather than the new, much-hyped and very expensive Saraya Abdeen. Ramez Qersh Al Bahr in third place is a simple, and I guess, relatively cheap, comedy sketch show. On the basis of cost per viewer, this may raise eyebrows, but of course, there are other factors like overall image and keeping people on the channel which may add to the value.

The final score

So who got to enjoy their post-Ramadan holidays in well-earned comfort, and who should have been working by the pool? Here are the top 10 channels for All Arabs and Emiratis, with 2013 for comparison.

(Note that channels not monitored in both periods are excluded.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Main Time</th>
<th>Avg Viewers</th>
<th>Repeat Time</th>
<th>Repeat Rank</th>
<th>Avg Viewers</th>
<th>Combined Viewers</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Bab Al Hara</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>209,000</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73,000</td>
<td>282,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Saraya Abdeen</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>189,000</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>274,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ramez Qersh Al Bahr</td>
<td>0200</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98,000</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>All Arabs 2013</th>
<th>Emiratis 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MBC 1</td>
<td>AD Al Emarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AD Al Emarat</td>
<td>MBC 10</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sama Dubai</td>
<td>MBC 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AD Al Oula</td>
<td>MBC 3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>MBC 3</td>
<td>Dubai TV 3</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Dubai TV 5</td>
<td>AD Drama 10</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>MBC Action 13</td>
<td>MBC Drama 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sharjah TV 14</td>
<td>Baraem 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As always, research and analysis is something where five people can draw six conflicting views so feel free to disagree, but I think there were some new and interesting trends this year.

THURSDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2014
THE ADDRESS MONTGOMERIE DUBAI

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DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

The dust has settled and the final whistle has gone, so who won?
No, this isn’t about the World Cup – it’s about Ramadan, now that we’ve had some time to look at the whole period and the viewing figures.

As always, research and analysis is something where five people can draw six conflicting views so feel free to disagree, but I think there were some new and interesting trends this year.

Ramadan 2014 will go down as the year of the repeats. The top three shows for the all Arab audience each had afternoon repeats that were highly ranked in their own right, with nearly as many viewers as the first showing on some days (Table 1).

The later the show, the more viewers watched the repeat, with Ramez Qersh Al Bahr’s repeat episode the best of the reruns, reaching an astonishing sixth among all programmes. It was a clever way to get more viewers and perhaps, pick up on word of mouth overnight, as well as negate the effects of local channels having the rights to also screen programmes.

We can also see a slightly different audience. Not surprising, perhaps, but the repeat audience tended to be slightly more female, and slightly more Arab Expat; whereas the prime-time audience was more male and more Emirati. The differences were a few percentage points, not vast, but noticeable and thereby, confirming what people may suspect about different behaviours.

It was interesting too that Bab Al Hara, a relative veteran now in Season 6, topped the rankings, rather than the new, much-hyped and very expensive Saraya Abdeen. Ramez Qersh Al Bahr in third place is a simple, and I guess, relatively cheap, comedy sketch show. On the basis of cost per viewer, this may raise eyebrows, but of course, there are other factors like overall image and keeping people on the channel which may add to the value.

The final score

So who got to enjoy their post-Ramadan holidays in well-earned comfort, and who should have been working by the pool? Here are the top 10 channels for All Arabs and Emiratis, with 2013 for comparison.

(Note that channels not monitored in both periods are excluded.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Main Time</th>
<th>Avg Viewers</th>
<th>Repeat Time</th>
<th>Repeat Rank</th>
<th>Avg Viewers</th>
<th>Combined Viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bab Al Hara</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>209,000</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73,000</td>
<td>282,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Saraya Abdeen</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>189,000</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>274,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ramez Qersh Al Bahr</td>
<td>0200</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>268,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Winners
The big winners in my opinion were local channels Abu Dhabi Al Emarat and Sama Dubai, with Al Emarat being the standout success. In All Arabs, Al Emarat has gone from scraping into the top 10 to being a strong second, not bad for a channel targeted at locals, while Sama has moved from eighth to third and Sharjah TV has made it into the top 10.

The picture is even more stark in the Emirates target group. Last year, MBC 1 was the runaway winner among Emiratis, with two more MBC channels in the top 5. MBC 1 alone had more ratings points than the next two combined. This year, it’s a very different story. Al Emarat scooped the top slot for Emiratis, with Sama in second place and MBC 1 trailing some distance behind in third, followed by Dubai TV and Al Oula. So, four of the top five channels are local.

On that basis, I’m going to go even further and say that while MBC might not be awarded the biggest loser category, it wasn’t a vintage performance. How can I say that about a network whose leading channel topped the rankings and took more than a quarter of all the ratings points gathered by the top 20?

Well, that’s exactly the problem.

MBC 1 did brilliantly, but the rest of the network was less than stellar. MBC Drama slipped from second to seventh, and MBC Max from ninth to nineteenth, while MBC 4 fell off the radar. Overall, MBC’s top seven channels took nearly the same share of the overall ratings points in the top 20 – 49% in 2014 compared to 51% in 2013 – but that’s much more about MBC 1 this year.

Look at the lopsided distribution in Table 3, which shows how the ratings won by the MBC network were shared among their channels.

I don’t know how MBC priced their airtime, but it seems to make sense that having more channels of closer stature in terms of performance is going to deliver a better return than having one giant and a bunch of pygmies. Only so many eggs will fit into the basket of airtime. You can’t make the basket bigger, and fewer channels delivering viewers means less basket choice for the advertisers who lay the golden eggs.

Advertisers
Looking at some channels, gives a possible insight on an average, what a spot on a top channel will get you in terms of ratings points. Value here very much depends on how much you paid. A spot on MBC 1 on an average delivers three times as many ratings points as on Al Emarat… but does it cost three times as much, or more? We won’t know, but I think we can say that anyone who planned their campaign on Al Emarat or Sama had a much better return than they probably bargained for, and should have enjoyed their Eid break with the knowledge of a job well done.

Christopher O’Hearn is GM of Emirates Media Measurement Company, which has rolled out tview, the UAE’s television ratings and audience measurement system and the first in the Middle East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>GRPs</th>
<th>Insertions</th>
<th>GRP/Insertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>3568</td>
<td>5877</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zain</td>
<td>2849</td>
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<td>8227</td>
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<td>Mobly</td>
<td>1799</td>
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<td>Masr Wahashtona</td>
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<td>1835</td>
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<td>Sedar Sonfy</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>5428</td>
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</tr>
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| Table 4: Top Advertisers in Ramadan, All Arabs |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MBC 1</th>
<th>MBC Drama</th>
<th>MBC 3</th>
<th>MBC 2</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>MBC 4</th>
<th>MBC Mars</th>
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<th>2014 Share %</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 3: Share of captured ratings among MBC channels in Top 20
TV drama is a fast-evolving genre in the MENA region and increasingly viewed as a major revenue generator. With their eye on a larger share of the pie, leading broadcasters are now investing more to produce international-standard drama series. Vibhuti Arora and Vijaya Cherian explore the rise of TV drama in the Arab world.
Arab television drama, often also referred to as musalsal, took centre stage in the Arab world this year, with 41 new shows airing during Ramadan. Traditionally, the holy month has been high season for TV viewing, and Arab drama has maintained its lead as the highest grosser over the years. Broadcasters, however, are now looking to replicate that success across the year by investing more heavily in dramas that can be viewed daily and for a longer period of time, as Arab viewers seem to have developed an appetite for stripped programming.

Fadi Ismail, Group Director of Drama Production and Distribution at MBC, and one of the most respected figures on the regional production scene, says TV drama is "a crucial offering on any screen that seeks high ratings and audience loyalty". "Arab drama is witnessing a renaissance in quality and its appeal is now stronger than even Turkish or Western drama. Two years ago, we produced Omara, which set a new benchmark for drama in the region, and we continue to achieve more production milestones with new series," says Ismail, who is also the General Manager of O3 Productions, the production arm of MBC.

Game changers

The ratings of MBC's latest offering, Saraya Abdeen or The Palace, a period drama set in 18th-century Cairo, made it one of the top three Ramadan series in the Gulf and Egypt this year. The USD 20 million series upped the stakes in terms of scale, quality and production value, making it a game changer for Arab television. MBC claims that the drama, written by Hiba Mshare Hamade, a young but established Kuwaiti writer, and directed by leading Egyptian cinematographer Amr Arafa, is the first in the region to make such extensive use of VFX and 3D graphics, thanks to its partnership with Hollywood's Stargate Studios.

"We used 3D sets extensively with VBl (Virtual Backlot) technology to allow seamless filming virtually that appeared as real palace indoor sets, wings and hallways. The end result was absolutely stunning. What's noteworthy is that we produced all the special effects in Stargate Studios in Dubai, which is a 50/50 joint venture between Stargate Los Angeles and MBC," explains Ismail.

With a cast of more than 120, The Palace was primarily shot in...

On the sets of MBC's megadrama The Palace.
Collaboration ensures survival

While this approach might seem bureaucratic, production houses and broadcasters are increasingly seeing huge value in this collaboration. The input of broadcasters is invaluable, as they know which actors and stories drive up the ratings. Collaboration is the key word here. OSN, for instance, now works with a number of FTA players to ensure it has the first window for premium dramas, even if they are commissioned by these broadcasters.

“We tend to buy most of the premium dramas that come to the market because they will have a pay window. Sometimes we partner with free-to-air broadcasters such as Dubai TV, Abu Dhabi TV, Saudi TV, MBC, CBC and so on,” explains Abu Homos.

OSN recently partnered with Egyptian broadcaster CBC to broadcast Al Isheq Al Aswad, a hit series shot in Istanbul and Rome. OSN has the first window for this series, and CBC has the second. Reliable industry sources say that an average of USD 600,000 was invested in each episode of this series.

Risk assessment

Pay TV operator OSN has invested just as heavily in TV soap operas in recent years, although its approach is slightly different. It does not produce Arab soaps the way MBC does, but rather dictates various elements of the production, all the way from who will direct the show to who will star in it. Khulud Abu Homos, Executive VP of Programming and Creative Services at OSN, who plays a key role in leading the acquisition of such content, justifies this approach as a crucial element in risk assessment.

“We may not produce the drama, but we are involved in the production right from when the script has been written. We have a team of directors and producers that read and assess the scripts. At present, we are assessing 40 different scripts. If we like the script, we go further to pre-define the actors, the directors, the art directors and even the technology that should be used to the production company. If they are willing to take our requests on board, do we then move forward with that project. This is important to safeguard our investment,” she says.
Abu Dhabi is one of the rising centres for TV drama with its 30% cash rebate incentive and support from twofour54 intaj. It was recently home to two mega Syrian drama productions, Hammam Al Shami and Al Ikhwa; the latter premiered on OSN in April before being aired on other FTA channels. Filming for its next season is underway in Abu Dhabi.

Gulf productions
For 2014, OSN has commissioned nine Gulf or Khaleeji productions and five Arabic dramas, while for 2015, it has already invested in 12 Gulf series and nine Arabic dramas. Clearly, the numbers show greater investment in Gulf productions, though these are yet to have the pan-Arab appeal of Egyptian, Turkish and Syrian dramas.

Jeff Youssef, Associate Partner at Oliver Wyman, which recently brought out a report on local Arabic content production in the MENA region, says the development of Arabic film and TV content is significantly below par. However, with better understanding of consumer preferences, the market share of Khaleeji content is set to double in five years. It presently accounts for 11% of broadcaster spend, and is likely to reach 22% by 2019. The broadcaster spend on other Arabic content is expected to grow from 22% to 32% in the same period.

One important player in the mix is Dubai-based Sabbah Pictures, which specialises in producing Khaleeji content for pay TV and FTA networks across the MENA region. "Around 90% of Khaleeji productions take place in Kuwait,” explains Suzy Karajian.
Assistant General Manager at Sabbah Pictures.

“We work with Kuwaiti writers and directors for our drama series. This year our production Thuraya, which aired on MBC 1, was among the top five series during Ramadan.”

According to Karajian, cultural nuance sets Khaleeji productions apart from other Arabic content. “The body language of the actors, the dialogue, their dialect and their general demeanour define Khaleeji shows. Nowadays, a lot of productions have a mix of Khaleeji and Turkish or Syrian elements to attract bigger audiences.”

Saudi TV has entered this mix with a new Saudi soap titled Endama Youzhir Al Kareef, which will premiere on OSN on September 9. “We have partnered with Saudi TV for this so we have the first window,” says OSN’s Abu Homos. “We believe this drama will be the turning point in what we have seen in Saudi and Gulf productions. It has been written by two Turkish writers, Sama Tansi and Irfan Sarokhan, who have scripted some very successful dramas. They spent eight months in Jeddah. “The language, the script and the writing are all Saudi Arabian but it has the quality and tempo of a Turkish drama. The look and feel of a Turkish drama is very premium and those production values have now been adopted to create a slick-looking Saudi drama series,” explains Abu Homos. This trend towards big-budget, larger-than-life television productions with better storylines and technical finesse has also seen a significant contribution from MBC. In addition to home productions such as The Palace, O3 Productions has produced two big-budget drama series this year, Cactus Alliance and Matrimonio. The broadcaster has acquired and aired several other Arabic dramas in recent years and plans to create more local content. Cactus Alliance, a thriller,

“Around 90% of Khaleeji productions are shot in Kuwait. We work with Kuwaiti writers and directors on our drama series. This year our production Thuraya was among the top five series during Ramadan”

Suzy Karajian, Assistant General Manager, Sabbah Pictures
PROCOVER is a large production shot in three cities – Dubai, Cairo and Beirut – with a large international crew. All 15 48-minute episodes have already aired on MBC 4.

Matrimonio, on the other hand, is a 120-episode telenovela that looks at the lives of six couples. “Matrimonio is a long format, first-of-its-kind telenovela produced in Dubai, using the very resourceful telenovela production workflow that makes it possible to do almost one episode each day. It will be aired on MBC 4 before the end of 2014,” explains MBC’s Ismail.

Cinema versus drama
Arab soaps received a huge boost when some of the talent migrated from cinema to drama. This has enhanced its quality, adding a cinematic dimension. “With drama, there is more money, more continuity and less seasonality compared to cinema, as a result of which a lot of good actors and directors have moved into drama,” explains Abu Homos. “The Arab world produces under 20 movies a year… out of that, two or three may do well at the box office and that determines their success. With drama, there are more windows to generate revenue. You have the pay window, free-to-air, online, second screen, the possibility of re-selling, dubbing and subtitling, and even the ability to sell that content to other countries where there is a shortage of content. Also, with drama, our expectations are lesser than cinema as people are used to seeing it on smaller and smaller screens, not necessarily HD. The hook is the quality of the story and the actors. Therefore, it has a lot of advantages,” adds Abu Homos.

Perhaps another important side to Arabic drama production has been producers exploring calmer shores than Egypt and Syria to film their dramas in peace. This is where the UAE and Saudi Arabia have stepped up their game. In the UAE especially, we have seen both twofour54 intaj and Dubai Studio City aggressively pushing their locations by building state-of-the-art infrastructure and offering attractive incentives.

Multiple powerful factors have driven up supply and demand for high-quality Arab dramas. The increasing appetite for Arab soaps as stripped pieces, collaboration between producers and broadcasters, co-operation between pay TV and free-to-air players, and the availability of cinema talent in drama are some of the key ingredients that have helped make Arab dramas a more viable commercial proposition for all the stakeholders involved. Arab dramas now mean more work, more formats, more production – and therefore, more money.

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MBC’s The Palace was shot entirely on three Sony PMW-F55 cameras, using pre-visualization techniques and technology that enabled the director to view the filmed scenes complete with the 3D set backdrops composited in real time.

“The Palace is truly a milestone in visual technology,” says Rehan Malik, GM of Stargate Middle East. With one of the biggest green screens in the world, the soundstage has made the impossible possible from a production point of view, claims Malik.

“This is the first time live compositing is being used to this extent in a TV series. MBC wants to produce world-class shows. The writers and directors can think bigger. And the cost stays the same, it doesn’t cost more but it improves the scale of production.

“We have used workflows developed over years in international productions… that are more efficient and give directors more room for creativity. The majority of work is being done here in Dubai but any overflow goes to Los Angeles or Malta,” he says.

“Although some clean-up is required in post, most of it is ready for the director to view as soon as it is filmed. We’re working towards achieving most of it in camera. The F.55 is extremely well suited to this workflow.”

The VFX production team in Cairo operates the pre-visualization system and sends it to Dubai for any clean-up, recompositing and additional VFX. The footage is managed by Stargate’s patented VOS system. The footage then be accessed and worked on from Stargate locations across the world. This is useful for any overflow or specialised work. The processed footage is then sent back to Cairo for editing on Adobe Premiere Pro.

VFX Supervisor Ragui Hanna, who oversees the post-production for this series along with four other compositors and two 3D artists, says that the VFX team working out of the Stargate Middle East office in Dubai has about two weeks to complete each episode and the new workflow streamlines the process substantially.

“We have to create about 45 minutes of footage per episode and work on more than 2600 charts of visual effects, which translates to 70 terabytes of files for the VFX part alone. Simply put, you can get very close to the finished product on location complete with VFX and 3D. This kind of set-up is used traditionally in news, but to use it in a series means using the technology on a much larger scale. The workflow of a series is very different from that of films,” says Hanna, adding that the secret is to customise the software for each workflow.

“For each production, we tailor-make the software to make it a perfect fit for the story. The 3D sets for The Palace, for instance, were created in the pre-production stage two years ago but required more fine tuning in post.

“The workflow gives us the foreground and background separately. The background is created entirely in 3D and doesn’t require further work. For the foreground, if we require to adjust sets, we use specific VFX shots that need 3D rendering.”

“The Palace is truly a milestone in visual technology ... This is the first time live compositing is being used to this extent in a TV series.”

Rehan Malik, GM, Stargate Middle East
Our world. Welcoming you on board. Your world.
BATELCO EXTENDS WORLDWIDE FOOTPRINT

Bahrain’s telco operator recently signed a new bilateral supply agreement with Riedel Networks. BroadcastPro ME takes a look at what the agreement entails.

In recent years, Batelco has been actively increasing its presence in the Middle East telecommunications industry and promoting Bahrain as a gateway for global providers that require connectivity into and out of the Middle East and the Gulf region. The growing size and reach of the telecommunications provider has made it a valuable partner, as the group evolved into a major communications company with direct and indirect investments across 14 geographies including Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man, the Maldives, Diego Garcia, St. Helena, the Ascension Islands and the Falklands.

Batelco was looking for a partner to further expand its presence and connectivity. Riedel Networks, which serves customers in more than 70 countries and has seen increasing demand for global connectivity solutions for the Middle East, grabbed the opportunity.

During International Telecoms Week (ITW) 2014 in Chicago, Riedel Networks and Batelco inked an agreement that enables the latter to expand its network into new areas, boosting both its global presence and its ability to provide its customers with much greater connectivity in the Middle East and the Gulf region. The agreement enables both companies to extend their reach through the other’s network.

Batelco has 21 active points-of-presence in the Middle East region and Europe, which enables it to extend its portfolio of global services of MPLS, MPLS and Ethernet to Riedel Networks.

Riedel Networks already has a presence across several countries in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. With nearly 200 network partners connected worldwide, the company was able to give Batelco better access to reliable networks in Europe, the Americas and Asia.

Batelco’s growing global business will build on the already managed 24/7 MPLS VPN service by Riedel Networks, which handles the provision and operation of the network connectivity solution from the Riedel Networks end directly to the client locations.

Its solutions rely on an integrated Cisco network, as well as on Cisco routers situated at customer premises. Clients can monitor the performance of their dedicated networks at any time, using an intuitive performance-monitoring tool.

Whether for data, voice or multimedia applications, the resulting MPLS cloud can connect multiple sites or multiple corporate locations, nationally and internationally, to a WAN based on an intelligent and private IP network. Internal personnel and departments, as well as satellite offices and affiliates, thus can access and exchange data and/or media from any location. Along with this worldwide availability comes six quality of service (QoS) classes and service level agreements (SLAs) on latency/bandwidth, packet loss, mean time to repair and availability.

Riedel Networks was able to make this bilateral deal as the company had already worked with Batelco to establish connectivity for high-profile broadcast events – namely the Formula One races including the 2013 Formula One Gulf Air Grand Prix, held in April 2013 at the Bahrain International Circuit, and the 2013 Formula One Bahrain Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, held in November 2013 at Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi.

For its part, Riedel Networks deployed its RiLink Global Fibre Service to connect live broadcast signals from each remote event location to the appropriate studio or home facility as required. Based on its own global MPLS backbone, the RiLink Global Fibre Service transports more than just the HD/SD-SDI video signals that would be furnished by satellite links in a conventional production.

By providing additional features such as voice communication and internet access, it significantly reduces the complexity and cost of planning and operating remote event productions such as Formula One races.

The RiLink is a full-service end-to-end solution, participants in the broadcast event simply choose the locations and the signals that need to be transported, and the Riedel solution enabled a plug-and-play installation. As RiLink’s guaranteed bandwidth can also be allocated dynamically, broadcasters were able to use non-broadcast time for high-bandwidth file transfers for digital archives and other applications.

Riedel Networks and Batelco continue to collaborate in supporting major broadcast events, as well as giving multinational corporations access to MPLS networks across the Middle East and Gulf region. Going forward, the companies’ networks and services will support further premium broadcast events including the Formula 1 races in the Middle East and Gulf region.

Batelco’s growing global business will build on the fully managed 24x7 MPLS VPN service by Riedel Networks, which handles the provision and operation of the network connectivity solution from the Riedel Networks end directly to the client locations.

During each of these events, connections provided by Batelco to Riedel Networks enabled live HD signal transmission via H.264 for several European broadcasters, including Germany’s RTL Television, as well as mission-critical connectivity, including intercom via MPLS, for Formula One racing teams such as Sauber and Ferrari, to the race control centres at their home facilities.

Riedel Networks also supplied on-site connectivity to the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA), the sport’s sanctioning body. For its part, Riedel Networks deployed its RiLink Global Fibre Service to connect live broadcast signals from each remote event location to the appropriate studio or home facility as required.

Based on its own global MPLS network, the RiLink Local Fibre Service transports more than just the HD/SD-SDI video signals that would be furnished by satellite links in a conventional production. By providing additional features such as voice communication and internet access, it significantly reduces the complexity and cost of planning and operating remote event productions such as Formula One races.

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PROLIBYA

Systems integrators INC System Integrations and United Media Company worked together with Libya’s Al Wataniyah to deliver a five-channel playout system last month. We take a look at the system.

Al Wataniyah TV, a broadcaster based in Libya, recently contracted Dubai-based INC System Integrations and local systems integrator United Media Company to create five automated playout channels along with an archive system for its facility.

The broadcaster wanted a system that would support both standard and high-definition formats.

The entire solution was fully assembled last month at INC’s warehouse in Jebel Ali, Dubai, although shipment of the system to the broadcaster’s main office in Tripoli has been deferred until the situation in the country stabilises. Adeeb Abed, General Manager of INC System Integrations, is proud of this deal as it is the company’s first project in Libya.

“This is the first project we secured in Libya and we’re exploring more such options to take our...
expertise outside the GCC to North Africa," says Abed.

"The system was entirely designed, installed and commissioned by us with assistance from other vendors involved in this project such as Pebble Beach Systems, Front Porch Digital, Ialan and Evertz, who joined us for the final commissioning."

At the heart of this system lies Pebble Beach Systems' new generation Marina automation solution, which was primarily chosen for its ability to support a full Unicode interface.

"It is presently the only product that has the full user interface in Arabic," says Aazam Salahat, Project Manager at INC.

"You can easily switch between languages as well. Marina has a fully localised interface that can support any language."

While Marina has been designed to function with any industry standard server, the client opted for Pebble Beach Systems' Dolphin integrated channel device, which includes built-in video players, video mixers, graphics, keysers and all of the elements required by a broadcaster to play out multiple channels.

Samir Isbaih, Regional Manager for the Middle East at Pebble Beach Systems, adds that this “software allows you to see all of the channels on one user interface or one monitor.”

This means one operator can handle all of them. This is one of the reasons we have seen more and more broadcasters opting for our solutions. We recently sold 70 channels to a client."

For Al Wataniyah setup, Pebble Beach Systems provided the overall transmission solution, which includes ingest, fully redundant playout, media management, low-res browsing integration and archive control. As with all such systems, this setup is also fully redundant with no single point of failure.

“The setup is fairly traditional, with content ingested locally onto the Dolphin servers or directly onto the Isilon X400 nearline storage for editing after it has been quality checked. A high-res file and a low-res file are simultaneously created at this stage so they can be accessed on free FCP systems. The low-res suffices for segmentation, metadata entry, editing and so on,” explains Salahat.

“At the nearline storage system has only a certain amount of capacity, the content is automatically transferred to the DIVA archiving system from Front Porch Digital by the Marina automation system, based on pre-defined rules. All the signals go through a Xserver video router from Evertz. After transmission, the content is recorded using Volicon compliance recorders, which can store data for 68 days," he adds.

When the content is to be played out or is scheduled for playout, Marina automatically checks both the nearline and archive systems for the content. If the content is not available, the automation system will flag the missing media to ensure that the operator is able to retrieve it manually if it is not on the system.

The project was planned three months ago and the installation was completed in two months. Last month, a team from Libya was at the INC warehouse in Dubai to train on the various systems.

"This is the first project we secured in Libya and we’re exploring more such options to take our expertise outside the GCC to North Africa”
Adeeb Abed, General Manager, INC System Integrations

ARGOSY “IMAGE” EQUIPMENT RACK

Designed specifically for the broadcast industry, the new Argosy IMAGE equipment rack incorporates a variety of features to help simplify installation and maintenance whilst minimizing roll-out costs. These include:

- A full range of accessories
- Flat pack option available for easy shipment
- Standard colour “Argosy Black” – other colours available on request
- Available in standard heights: 42RU, 45RU & 47RU and depths: 800mm, 900mm, 1000mm
- Knock outs in lid for easy cable entry
- Flexible design allows easy customization
- Fast turnaround

INC has used its warehouses to build systems for broadcasters and companies that do not have an in-house facility, explains General Manager Abed:

“We have warehouses in Kuwait and Dubai, as well as Qatar. Our facilities are secured with CCTV and 24/7 patrolled security along with AC for executing and building systems. We have the capability at present to execute and manage three to six concurrent projects depending on the scale of the project at our Dubai warehouse facility.”

A team of 10 from INC including a project manager, engineers and technicians were on-site to build the system. One of the big challenges of this project has been the indefinite wait to ship the system to Libya owing to the political turmoil in the country.

“This is why the project was entirely designed, executed and delivered in Dubai, with the option to shift the system to Libya for installation, testing and training,” explains Abed. But there are other challenges that can only be addressed once the system has been reassembled on site. For instance, the cables are cut based on estimated distances between locations.

Likewise, the team worked with an off-air signal from Tehran because a dish has to be in place to check the feeds. Abdul Moneim, CEO of United Media Company, the Libyan contractor who secured the project and worked with INC to ensure its completion, says this partnership was “successful for all parties.”

“INC made a smooth transition from the design phase to implementation and project closure despite the many challenges in our country”
Abdul Moneim, CEO of United Media Company

INC’s CEO went on to say that the final delivery of the project left him “very satisfied” as well. INC’s Alban Salahat, Project Manager at INC, says the project was “successful for all parties” and “completed on time.”

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Traditional pay-TV and telco companies are losing subscribers and revenue to the open internet and OTT players. They need to adapt quickly to stay in the game, says Ben Kinealy

YouTube channel AwesomenessTV was purchased for $33m by DreamWorks Animation. For $1bn, Google just acquired a live game video streaming site called twitch.tv, which already captures 1.5% of all internet traffic. Netflix has crossed the 50m subscriber mark, and is still growing. For the first time ever, in Q2 of 2014, the four top cable companies in the USA had more broadband subscribers than cable TV subscribers. According to some research reports, 32% of global operators expect approximately 10% of revenues to be impacted by over-the-top (OTT) services, with 4.4% expecting more than 11%. Ovum’s research indicates that the telecom industry lost a combined $386bn between 2012 and 2018 due to OTT voice applications such as Skype and Lync. Moreover, evidence suggests that in some regions, popular and leading OTT applications such as Skype (owned by Microsoft), WhatsApp (Facebook), YouTube (Google) and Netflix are cannibalising service provider revenues at an even more alarming rate than originally estimated.

To bring this home, today uncontrolled and unmanaged video accounts for 60% of all traffic on the internet, set to grow to 90% in the next two years. That’s content that the network is not making direct money from, despite having to constantly invest in its infrastructure to meet demand without pushing up the prices.

These headlines and stats paint the picture – both traditional pay-TV and telco companies are slowly but surely losing subscribers and revenue to the open internet and OTT players. Some are acting to turn this around, but others are frozen like a
Traditional pay TV companies and broadcasters around the world are coming to terms with the fact that consumers no longer want to be constrained in terms of when and where they can watch content, or even having to pay for it (I’m not talking about piracy here, which is a separate but big issue). The youth of today are growing up without the concept of programming; they probably can’t even imagine a world where you can’t pause live TV. For them, platforms such as YouTube, gaming, or just watching other people game online provide everything they need, when they want it, where they want it and on any device they like. "Telcos have long enjoyed double-digit growth rates, fuelled by the rise of new handheld and portable devices and the proliferation of multi-device customer behaviour. While the growing subscriber base has positively impacted industry revenues, which have risen consistently over the past few years, operating margins have shrunk. What is interesting is that in the majority of cases, this loss is being masked by an increase in revenues from broadband usage; importantly, broadband is being used not by customers accessing telco products and services, but rather for free online content and other OTT products. This is not a sustainable business model. It is commonly known as dumb pipe syndrome, where the telco bears the majority of the costs for providing the broadband service, from actual data to infrastructure, but gets back none of the profit from the content being consumed. This has become a flashpoint between ISPs and OTTs. Take Netflix, for example. They do not believe they should have to pay an ISP to deliver its video content, because those ISP’s customers are already paying for internet access -- a point which also gets mixed up with the wider net neutrality debate. That aside, a fix has been implemented. Netflix agreed to a caching deal with ISP Comcast, and subsequently Verizon and AT&T and Time Warner."

"Today uncontrolled and unmanaged video accounts for 60% of all traffic on the internet, set to grow to 90% in the next two years"
Ben Kinealy, CEO, Intigral
PROTEL COS and STC's myInVision applications appeal as well as addressable market existing subscribers. This limits both with controlled distribution to their (VOD) services to OTT platforms streaming and Video-on-Demand with operators extending their IPTV taken forward in a defensive manner, though the exclusivity is lost. associated returns can be higher the original content providers, the compared to simply partnering with and requires a higher risk appetite developing such services is tedious a tough fight. Although the process of directly against OTT providers, a services pits telcos and broadcasters to develop a profitable business model around online content. On the whole, main regional providers are taking a two-pronged approach. They have set up digital communities and incubation houses to foster application development and content localisation; and they are trying to either emulate OTT services or partner with popular OTT service providers. Emulating successful OTT services pits telcos and broadcasters directly against OTT providers, a tough fight. Although the process of developing such services in telcos is tedious and requires a higher risk appetite compared to simply partnering with the original content providers, the associated returns can be higher though the exclusivity is lost.

So far, this has only really been taken forward in a defensive manner, with operators extending their IPTV streaming and Video-on-Demand (VOD) services to OTT platforms with controlled distribution to their existing subscribers. This limits both appeal as well as addressable market for these services. Ritsal's eLife and STC's myiVision applications are examples of such services by the region’s two biggest telcos, while OSN and MBC have been offering access to their subscribers on a multitude of devices, through OSN Play and Shahid.net services respectively.

With increasing competition from both global OTT providers and the rise of pure-play OTT services such as Jot and tiktoka in the region, pay TV providers and telcos need to realise that offering an interoperable and ubiquitous OTT experience remains essential to driving service engagement.

Towards this aim, Zain (KSA) was the first operator in the region to launch its own IP messaging service, Hala Messenger, while Mobily launched independent OTT video service mView. Both these services are accessible to all customers in Saudi Arabia.

One area that currently remains firmly implanted within the traditional actors’ remit is sports content. Sport cannot and will not ever be as valuable as a commodity if it is not live. Therefore, owning the rights to deliver live sport such as the EPL across your network is an essential factor in adding value to subscribers, gaining new customers and reducing churn.

Here we also see broadcasters providing their own OTT services on top of telco-provided broadband services, for example, beIN Sports Connect.

Now we have a situation where OTT and open internet content is taking subscribers from broadcasters and telcos, and to rub salt in the telco wound, broadcasters moving into the OTT space are now also riding along on their broadband infrastructure. On top of it all, the next generation of internet users are spending 90% of their time consuming free user-generated content online, and shunning the traditional content providers altogether. But what can be done about this, and how can the traditional players change in order to protect and then grow their shrinking margins?

As I see it, there are a few options. Firstly, a partnership between telcos and pay TV providers is an obvious move, especially when you combine that with a plug- and-play OTT service. Secondly, telcos could move to restrict the quality of some of the OTT products their customers receive, leading to a Netflix-style paid caching deal as mentioned earlier.

Given the regulation and government ownership within the telco and broadcast sector, some OTT services could be targeted for regulation, but as we have seen with VoIP this has not proven successful in the past, as customers either find a way around it, or worse, churn it.

It is for these reasons that both traditional pay TV providers and telcos urgently need to change their business model. It is oftensaid but has never been truer that content is king, and content delivered over the open internet is set to rule us all.
We hear there are new developments in the MENA for Eutelsat?

Yes, Eutelsat has made a long-term commitment to the MENA region. Together with Nilesat, we have established fantastic reach from 7/8° West, which represents a strong and powerful hotspot in the region. More than 50 million homes or two-thirds of all homes in the region are served through this neighborhood.

We are constantly looking for ways to expand our reach and service in those territories and are now embarking on a new initiative with the relocation of a DTH broadcast satellite named Eutelsat 7B to the MENA region. Launched last year, the new satellite is co-located with Eutelsat 7A (which is used by Diigiturk) at 7° East to expand the Turkish, Farsi, and Kurdish neighborhoods. This redeployment complements our Hot Bird neighborhood at 13° East, which is the second most-watched position in the Middle East after 7/8° West.

As a result of this deployment, a single consumer DTH antenna equipped with a dual LNB can have access to five satellites: three HOT BIRD satellites at 13°E and two satellites at 7°E (Eutelsat 7A, Eutelsat 7B). This expands more than 400 free-to-air channels already broadcasting at 13° East (of which 100 are regional channels) with 220 channels on Eutelsat 7A and an upcoming 180 channels on Eutelsat 7B, resulting in a neighborhood of close to 1500 channels that can be received in the region.

Do you need a new satellite, given that Hot Bird has a strong footprint in this region?

As Eutelsat 7A is already an established and popular satellite for the region, we decided to bring additional resources to 7° East for the Turkish market but the offerings were not limited to that. We see a lot of demand from the Kurdish regions in Iran and Iraq and Eutelsat 7B has an optimised footprint over these regions. Hot Bird is a pan-European satellite system with coverage extending across North Africa and the Middle East. A lot of channels that select to broadcast from this neighborhood deliver regional content into the Middle East and North Africa. We have a strong lineup of Farsi and Kurdish channels already broadcasting from this neighborhood. With increasing demand for home programming, a dedicated satellite for the region will serve its needs even better.

How is the new satellite helping consumers and broadcasters?

Christoph Limmer, Director Commercial Development Broadcasting and Video at Eutelsat, who was in Dubai recently, spoke to BroadcastPro ME exclusively about Eutelsat 7B, Eutelsat’s latest addition to the MENA region.
Eutelsat 7B brings dedicated capacity for the region, which means smaller dish sizes, better signal quality, and more channels. We have 12 transponders on the satellite’s MENA beam that can immediately fulfil market demand. Depending on where the broadcaster wants to start its business, it can reach into more than six million homes, mainly in Turkey, with a spillover to Kurdish regions. The new satellite offers opportunities for broadcasters to build their business from scratch without relying on existing platforms and to gain an edge over the competition. It’s a gateway to new territories for broadcasters, particularly northern areas, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, that are less served by other satellites. We are targeting better reach to 60 million households with the new launch. The advantage for consumers is more content, more channels and better reception. Hot Bird is at a very strategic position in this region, watched in at least 10 million homes in Iran and three million in Iraq. All that these viewers need to do is change the LNB to dual feed or just clip for a clipsat. Consumers will benefit from hundreds of new channels now.

Which broadcasters will be using the new satellite? We are in advanced discussions with major broadcasters of Farsi, Kurdish and Azerbaijani content. Along with these, we have seen a greater demand from broadcasters offering HD and pay-TV content.

Where do you see scope for growth in these territories? If you compare HD penetration in MENA to other regions of the world, you can see significant scope for HD growth. HD adoption is fairly less in the region. The number of households equipped with HD-ready sets in the region is constantly growing and we anticipate that channels will take advantage of this increased penetration of higher quality consumer equipment.

The region presently has 200 or more HD channels, which is less than 10% of the number of channels beamed here. This offers scope for growth.

Broadcasters and pay-TV operators in the UAE have formed an anti-piracy consortium to fight illegal transmission of content. As a satellite operator, what is your role in that? Eutelsat is a member of the new anti-piracy coalition set up in March this year and we are committed to contributing our know-how and experience from other markets to support this issue.

The coalition has outlined a voluntary code of conduct and will monitor piracy on satellite TV to ensure information about pirate channels is shared among legitimate industry players. The consortium’s efforts would be directed to act jointly

“Eutelsat 7B is a gateway to new territories for broadcasters, particularly northern areas, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, that are less served by other satellites”

Christoph Limmer, Director Commercial Development Broadcasting and Video, Eutelsat
against illegitimate players. Piracy of microwave and satellite systems is an issue in many regions and is not unique to the Middle East. Legislation and media authorities also have to be very strict in checking if proper practices are followed. Eutelsat mainly operates indirectly through partners in the MENA. Our partners check that the channels they are uplinking have passed through proper legal channels. These challenges are part and parcel of broadcasting and should be handled by strong media regulations.

Infrastructure providers – whether IP, cable, microwave or satellite – need to ensure two things. Firstly, that a channel has a licence; and secondly, that it has the rights to the content that it is showing.

When we sell satellite capacity to broadcasters, we ensure that their broadcasting licences are valid. If they don’t have content rights, we can take steps only on a legal foundation. Once we have confirmation that they are broadcasting content illegally, their operations can be switched off.

How is satellite keeping in step with the changing ways of content consumption?

With the changing content consumption habits of viewers, the satellite industry has developed solutions for in-home distribution. We have developed an interactive LNB, that we call the ‘smart LNB’, which allows consumers to receive satellite and IP in one box. This way, the consumer combines the best of both worlds.

We offer satellite for broadcast distribution and IP for individual needs, thereby creating bundles that help broadcasters to optimise their relationship with viewers.

Satellite also represents a solid redundancy platform for broadcasters. We, for example, a big customer in Kenya, an IP and pay-TV provider, that has opted for a satellite backup so that if an IP stream breaks, the channel goes via satellite. New developments in broadcasting are giving rise to new business models but the value of satellite remains. Digital migration, for example, works most efficiently as a combination of terrestrial and satellite.

For instance, France spent USD 800 million to upgrade to digital but could manage only 50% of the area. The country, therefore, still needs satellite to extend reach of channels to the 5% of homes not reached by the terrestrial network. Italy spent €500 million to cover 70% of the country. It used satellite to bridge the gap for the remaining 30%. Satellite is not dispensable despite breakthroughs in other infrastructure.

Africa has been slow for digital migration uptake. By 2016, more than half of the countries in Africa will have not achieved digital migration. However, we are in close talks with infrastructure providers and governments in the continent to present solutions that will work best for these countries.

What, according to you, is the future of satellite?

Satellite is an unbeatable technology where terrestrial infrastructure is a challenge. IP is promising but it has its own set of challenges; for example, you cannot receive HD programming at peak times. This is when the bandwidth dips and HD down-converts to SD, and that too is a problem at times.

For example, when HBO showed the first episode of season 4 of Game of Thrones, they gave IP users a window of advantage before the episode was beamed on satellite and cable. More than 12 million users tried to watch the series but the network completely crashed and it took HBO several hours to fix it.

I see TV consumption in the future as a hybrid, a combination of infrastructures where each will play a role. Satellite will continue to have its advantage of beaming from one to many and we are committed to continuing to devise ways that will help broadcasters build and expand their relationship with viewers.
You can’t miss the sparkle in Jac Mulder’s eyes when he speaks of any of the productions he has worked on thus far — whether it’s a simple TVC about a battery, or a feature film he’s been scripting. He infuses so much passion into each of his projects that it comes as no surprise to hear that he approached Blackmagic Design to correct just one problematic shot in his most recent production, Bordering on Bad Behaviour,

But that’s only one of the many unique things about Mulder. When the South African filmmaker set up Muddville in Dubai a few years ago, he believed he was made for bigger things than the local market offered. He often spoke of his dream of becoming a filmmaker one day, and scripted his own stories while doing TVCs on the side. However, when the options in the local market lacked promise, he approached international clients. And that’s where the fun began.

Bordering on Bad Behaviour is Mulder’s most recent feature film. In this quirky, sometimes philosophical exposé on the tragedies of war, three unlikely candidates — Bob (Tom Sizemore), Ari (Oz Zehavi) and Baz (Bernard Curry) — are thrown together and forced to evaluate their lives, their alliances, their perspectives and, ultimately, each other. As with all of Mulder’s past projects, the film has been developed only for international distribution and has already won several awards.

“Festival submissions were not a major priority for us, but we explored this avenue and received our first laurels from The Indie Gathering in Ohio,” explains Mulder.

“With us winning Best Feature Comedy and runner-up for Best Feature Film at the festival, our excitement peaked. I received a nomination for Best Director and my lead, Tom, and supporting actor, Oz, were nominated for best roles in those categories. Further to this, our film was selected in Sydney and was screened there last month.”

The film has been shot with three Red Epic cameras using Master Primes for a truly cinematic look. It was while wrapping up the final online for the DCP of the feature and making last-minute corrections that Mulder discovered a problematic shot that needed more attention.

“I screen-captured the corrections I made to the sequence, broke them down with roto-scoping and tracking Tom’s face, matched the background and sent the clip off to Blackmagic Design. My intention was to request some interface changes to speed up my workflow. However, the local distributor linked me with the London branch, where (hopefully) they were impressed with what I had done. Within a few days I received a contract from BMD and I opted to finalise the grade on the pre-release of DaVinci Resolve 11. He shares his feedback with BroadcastPro ME exclusively

When Dubai-based editor, director and filmmaker Jac Mulder needed to correct a specific shot in his film Bordering on Bad Behaviour, he contacted Blackmagic Design to help build an interface that would speed up his workflow. In the process, he was invited to test the pre-release of DaVinci Resolve 11. He shares his feedback with BroadcastPro ME exclusively
the latest release. The entire film, therefore, was graded on Resolve, running the native resolution of the Red Epic 5K images. The picture looked fantastic as a result.” Mulder, who trained as an animator and visual effects supervisor, has over the years become very familiar with Resolve.

“Fortunately, Muddville has an extremely powerful system to handle the resolution of this format and we find it beneficial to work with the native power of the r3D metadata. With this in mind, I made the creative decision to run final pass through the new release and prep it for DCP delivery,” he explains.

“I've been using DaVinci for many years, both in South Africa and here, especially the old system using traditional film stock. So I guess I have always had an affinity towards the product, and when it became more available to the film community, I jumped on board. I built up a grading suite with an 85-inch broadcast monitor, ordered the panels and set up a fibre-optic network for speed. Before long, I was comfortable grading the TVCs, music videos, short films and, ultimately, the big feature. As an interface, it has become way more intuitive. I find myself comfortably getting involved with the footage; I've explored all the aspects of the software and applied a more compositing approach to my colour corrections. To say it has come on in leaps and bounds since the good old film days is an understatement,” says Mulder.

One of the key features in the new release that struck Mulder as impressive is the two screens option. “It is aesthetically perfect, with huge Waveform monitors and the Parade forever in the corner of my eye,” he points out. “The general layout of the interface features four main buttons and moves the artist quickly between menus. As an ex-animator, the larger Keyframes panel is a welcome change. I find myself getting a little more creative with my looks and don't fear adjusting exposure as light changes in the clip. Grading in log mode has been my desired source for my files. I was able to clip the blacks and whites and control the midtones and highlights. I gained even more control with the specular highlights and rolloffs,” he says.

Continuing further, he adds that the matte finesse feature has been greatly improved. “This is especially useful if one needs to separate skin tones from the backgrounds. I think this may be my favourite feature. I find I'm quickly able to explore that teal/orange look, and on the feature film it came in handy, matching specific colours without worrying...
about the noise of soft banding.”

While the release has several positives, Mulder points out that the interaction element could have been better.

“Being efficient in other compositing applications, I find the split screen needs more work, a way for one to rotate the separation line, even offering a transparency element in there. The other aspect to the software that needs improving is the Alpha Channel aspect. Being able to slip it, or even pull it in separately, would be a welcome improvement.”

Blackmagic seems to have taken Mulder’s feedback on board, since he has been invited to test more releases.

Over the years, Muddville has traditionally worked with Premiere over FCP.

“For obvious reasons,” says Mulder. However, when there was concern over being able to edit the new RED Dragon Monochrome 6K footage in those applications, Resolve became a crucial choice.

“Since shooting with the Red Epic Dragon, I have noticed a far cleaner image, especially in log mode. We recently graded the Toyota 4D commercial and some of the shots were taken late afternoon. In a rush to catch the perfect light, we opted to not have any reflectors or bounce in the shots and would see where we could push in Resolve. To be fair, the picture on an 85-inch broadcast monitor was astounding. The client was fascinated!”

“Dropping all the rushes into DaVinci and doing the entire edit in the Edit timeline resulted in the simplest and most basic process of going from offline to online, using only one piece of software. I even spent a few moments adjusting the audio and treating the software as if it were Premiere.

“As an editor, I feel it’s on the right track and am certain I will be doing a lot more of the smaller edits on Resolve.”

It is ideal for RED footage.
as well, Mulder explains. “I’m a firm believer in never transcoding Red Epic footage and have to confess I have no clue as to why people still do this, especially since Resolve handles the image so beautifully. As part of our process, we are always linking files between our Nuke Compositing software and they too, in turn, use the native resolution. Here, we are able to shift data between the systems seamlessly with detailed .exr files that update if any corrections are made. Somehow, Blackmagic has intuitively created a piece of software that takes the hassle and worry out of linking files and making corrections to specific shots.”

To summarise, there are lots of little things that impress Mulder, including the two screen options, the layout for delivery, the four-button menu options, the finer level of control with the grading, the longer timeline for the keyframes, the highlight difference button, the overall speed enhance, the highlight control, the matte finesse and the dragon monochrome 6K footage that comes in easily. There are other features that took more time to figure out, but worked eventually. “For instance, the Edit Index was a little confusing at first but I now understand the relevance. The two-screen mode took a bit of getting used to, and likewise the scale and colour being separated, but I got around those quickly as well.” RedRocket issues remain a challenge though. “It works on some projects but doesn’t on some others. I also struggled initially with getting the panels to work but it magically worked after a couple of days.

“The split screen needs help. Perhaps a line that could rotate would be most useful. The Alpha Mask needs to be revisited, especially in terms of slipping, separate import and working independent of being associated with a clip. The undo on RotoMask jumps back three to four steps if pressed twice and that was very frustrating. The lightbox thumbnails need to be at least double the size, and I didn’t see a ‘confirm overwrite’ on delivery.”

But all in all, Mulder feels the Resolve is heading even further into every post production suite. “The big excitement came when we processed the Digital Cinema Print. Vox Cinemas let us use their projectors to test the quality and the 4K and 2K prints we processed from DaVinci Resolve were absolutely exquisite. We sat there in amazement at how pristine the image was,” explains Mulder.

The filmmaker himself has had a lot of joy with his recent film. In fact, Mulder secured both sales agents and distribution opportunities at the first unofficial screening of the film. He has now been contacted to direct a film in Vancouver. “I’m hoping this film gives the UAE the recognition it deserves. Having landed international distribution and world-wide release, and raised funds in this city for a film that has been produced, directed and posted by a local production company, I believe we make the UAE proud.”
Over the last ten years, an industry that was mostly hardware-based has been successfully transitioning to an IT world, bringing about huge change to technical workflows and business practices, and thereby enabling content owners to transition from tape to digital. As we’ve seen in the past five years, it doesn’t stop there. In a multi-screen, multi-channel world, where viewers can watch their favourite shows at home in HD on the TV, or via the internet, or anywhere they like on a second or even third screen device, technology needs to continue to keep up with the trends.

A broadcast technology that has seen significant change and progress during this time is the MAM system. Traditionally designed as a multimedia database, the role of the MAM was to simply store and browse media, together with some associated metadata, without the use of a VTR. This often meant that the archive – or HSM system – was used by operators as a MAM and was mistakenly put at the centre of daily workflow.

Because of changing market demands and the evolution of technology in terms of computer processing, programming languages and network interconnectivity, the concept of the MAM has changed significantly. Now it’s quite challenging to find a precise definition of what a MAM is, with growing confusion between DAM, MAM and PAM.

In today’s digital world, MAM offers much more than a database and has transitioned to a content management system that’s fully integrated with the entire business, says Julián Fernández-Campón, Head of Pre-Sales, Tedial.
way that we consume content has changed dramatically. Traditional linear playout and viewing on-demand content has evolved very quickly into the concept of “content everywhere” via smart TVs, tablets, smartphones and PCs. This has an impact on the preparation and delivery of programming content.

Different variations of the same content have to be generated for each destination, made easy to discover and attractive for the viewer with specific languages for each region all while trying to minimise costs.

To help solve these problems, MAM systems have evolved to manage users as well as large amounts of content and related metadata and audiences, e.g. audio languages, subtitles and EPG information. MAM now also provides efficient tools to simplify operations and maximise efficiency.

As such, when selecting a MAM, broadcasters and content owners have to consider a number of requirements: integration, improved workflows, access to content throughout the business, increased user experience, reporting processes, scalability and flexibility.

Let’s take these points and look at them in more detail. As we’ve already learnt, integration is key. The MAM needs full integration with different areas of the business for workflow management and content preparation, as well as the web-based user interface.

The Head of Pre-Sales at Tedial, Julián Fernández-Campón, explains, “MAM needs full integration with different areas of the business for workflow management and content preparation, as well as the web-based user interface”.

Julián Fernández-Campón, Head of Pre-Sales, Tedial

provides low-cost browsing of related media, removing the complexity for the user that resides in terms of wrappers and codecs, etc. For some companies the number of files in terms of audio languages, subtitles, scripts and other related information is huge. By providing high-level tools as part of the MAM, this complexity remains hidden and is replaced with a logical view of the content, with direct access to the different components for validation, forms to easily select audio and delivery of content in the correct format, etc.

With these tools comes far greater user experience. It’s important that the user interfaces are simple and intuitive to optimise operation, using low-res files when possible to reduce latency. In today’s broadcast environment the user just wants the tools that they need to get their job done, not a lot of complex options that they will never use.

Reporting is another important factor. Users need a version of the aural/metramal “black box”, which collates information about everything that’s going on in the system. This provides a solution for a number of reasons. It identifies and solves problems, interacts with the system to prioritise tasks when required, detects bottlenecks and provides a system that acts and reacts as required by the user. It means the user is no longer the slave of the MAM.

Scalability is also crucial. In 2014, customers don’t want the “big bang”, they want operational change. This type of change is usually gradual, starting with specific media processing needs that will decrease in some areas and expand in others without affecting the production process. The MAM also needs to be flexible, allowing business needs to evolve without each change involving costly and complex investment, particularly now when companies have to be agile to adapt to new business needs and new content preparation.

Multi-site deployment is yet another area that’s often overlooked. Very few customers actually operate on a single site, instead working with many partners in production and distribution. Multiple scenarios can be applied to multi-site deployment, such as cost reduction and operational efficiency to implement a distributed content production chain. Customers might have a central hub to produce their content and other distributed sites to enrich them by adding languages, subtitles, promos, etc., with efficient content transfer and management between them.

Using multi-site deployment, customers can also have a secondary site where part of the operation is replicated and where selected content is automatically transferred for access in the event of a failure at the first site, thereby creating a disaster recovery scenario.

As we can see, the role of the MAM has changed dramatically over the years and Tedial’s solution delivers a system that answers all of these requirements by providing a combination of features to optimise operations and content management at all levels.

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Lifting the Curtain: World Class Goes Digital.
We’ve all heard the phrase Disaster Recovery (DR), but what does it actually mean for broadcasters and content owners, and what constitutes a disaster?

DR is a broad term that encompasses a range of scenarios, from catastrophic disaster (for instance, the complete destruction of a whole facility) to operational disaster, such as a transmission server failing. The ideal strategy in the event of a disaster is the seamless continuity of business under all circumstances with no assets being lost.

In the past, DR strategies have involved staff picking up boxes of tapes and equipment, jumping in a car, driving to another facility and getting back on air as quickly as possible. These days being off-air for longer than a few seconds, or a minute at most, is a disaster in itself and with content now being delivered globally, broadcasters have even greater responsibility to ensure that channels stay on air. They often also face 99.999% contracts with their channel partners with reference to airtime, and there are rules on compensation for lost or clipped ads. So there are also strong financial drivers for staying on air. If a catastrophe occurs at a facility in one part of the world, a DR strategy that will automatically kick in from another needs to be in place. With increased availability of wide area bandwidth and dark fibre, it’s much easier to share content globally but it is still not cheap.

So how do broadcasters ensure their DR strategies are secure enough to continue broadcasting in any situation? The DR utopia includes multi-layered safeguards against the unexpected, using automated content replication systems to provide synchronised, mirrored or like-for-like asset duplication, across the same site or at geographically disparate locations. At its most straightforward, this can be accomplished by duplicating tapes in the main archive and then moving those tapes to remote DR storage. LTFS works well in this environment, as any LTFS-capable system can read a tape created by any other, and can identify and retrieve the files stored on it. This means there is no requirement for a second archive system to simply read those files.

At the other end of the functionality scale, a fully automated DR-configured archive can be connected to a remote facility with either a robotic tape or disk storage. In this configuration, media assets can be automatically copied across the network and synchronised with the remote site. This model is ideal for broadcasters whose main and DR archives are separated by many hundreds of kilometres. As we can see, automated site-redundancy is an important factor for broadcasters and can be achieved by using rules-based implementations, providing fully automated data duplication across multiple storage layers and locations. Disaster Recovery systems enable multi-site operations to be mirrored and data synchronised across the globe. If one site becomes inoperable, it can be rebuilt entirely from data that has been replicated to other sites.

The more sophisticated archive management systems are able to offer completely customisable rules-based data duplication, through which content can be automatically copied as it is archived across disk and tape layers and, where required, different locations. In single-site scenarios, duplicate tapes can be easily externalised from the storage system, singly or in content-based groups, and removed to safe locations. Once a DR strategy is in place, it’s also important to periodically practise scenarios and test equipment.

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It has been a few years since I last reviewed Autodesk Flame. Since then a great deal has happened in terms of functionality, pricing and product availability. Pricing on Flame Premium, Flame and Smoke has been slashed with regards to subscription, a couple of new products have been added to the Flame/Smoke family, and Smoke Advanced on Linux has been placed into retirement with all Smoke Advanced Subscription holders receiving a free upgrade to Flame 2015.

I can’t deny that I was disappointed with the 2014 product range that was released last year. Flame and Smoke Advanced both received a substantial makeover in the 2014 version, with a completely new interface to boot. The new interface looked fantastic, years ahead of the previous release, and it really felt that Flame/Smoke had moved forward in leaps and bounds. The only problem was the software had been released way too early, was full of bugs and crashed a great deal. Now, with the arrival of the 2015 version of Flame, I truly believe that the software is back on track and keeping its head high above its competitors.

The new 2015 Product line is certainly the most advanced line-up yet. Since the release of the Flame Premium 20th Anniversary Edition, both Smoke and Flame have made use of the Flame Reactor render engine. What this essentially does is allow the software to work in conjunction with accelerated GPU via the NVIDIA Graphics card, giving the user an extremely fast system with real-time timeline effects as well as advanced rendering for both Timeline and Desktop Batch. This has now been taken one step further, with Flame 2015 allowing even faster processing and a more advanced workflow for 4K formats.

This includes real-time playback and monitoring via SDI of 4CUHD material at 50P and 60P, optimised node performance for Timeline and Batch Effects, and 16GB fibre-channel controllers for people with fast storage, allowing real-time throughput of high-resolution images. 4CUHD colour management supports ACES and REC-2020 colour spaces, and it is also now possible to create 4K resolution element using Substance Texture, Substance Noise/Splatter and Materialize.

Another addition is Background Reactor. This requires a second GPU card to be fitted to your system and allows artists to render their work in the background while they continue to work, giving a totally interactive workflow directly on the systems on hardware. In the future, we may also see the second GPU being used for other tasks, such as conforming in the background.

With the arrival of the 2015 version of Flame, Autodesk seems to have brought the software back on track, says Alistair Rankine.
Flame 2015
The interface itself looks very similar to the 2014 version but
the Library, Desktop and Timeline workflows have been redesigned.
The 2014 library was problematic.
With the new workflow we now have a Library area and a Desktop area.
The Library is the final place where everything is saved and the
Desktop is the area where the Reels, Batch, Batch Snapshots and Batch Sources are saved.
This, in turn, is then saved to the main Library.
This may give Smoke Advanced users a headache until they get
used to it. I personally have chosen to work out of the Library and use
the Desktop as a Scratch Pad for any work I am doing, not as a Save destination.
There is a line of thought that says this way of working is much simpler, more easily understood
and more organised. It also helps
to give a more modern feel to the workflow.
It is up to the artist how they work, as long as everything gets
saved to the Library at the end of the session in an appropriate manner.
The re-introduction of large
thumbnails in Library is of great benefit, as are the full-width and
dual views, all allowing for extra organisation. The new Library
and Desktop appeal to long-term
users and new users alike.
New additions to the Creative
toolset are 3D shapes and Replica.
Multiple Gmasks can be added to
a singular 3D shape, and it also
makes use of the existing Ellipse
and Rectangle Gmask Nodes. Extra
functionality has also been added
to help enhance the creation of 3D
shapes. The new Replica Node in
Action basically functions in the same
way as the old cascade and duplicate
trick, all contained within one Node.
“With the arrival of the 2015 version of Flame, I truly believe that the software is back on track and keeping its head high above its competitors”

Alistair Rankine, editor/VFX specialist and workflow consultant

Matchbox shaders were introduced to the software a few versions back and come in the form of a Matchbox Node, a Scriptable Node built around OpenGL Shader language.

As many people didn’t upgrade to the previous version of Flame due to its early release, they may have missed out on Flame’s Tracking improvements. Basically, the point tracker has been given a complete overhaul. One of the most interesting things is the fact that the Vertices and the UV trackers are now separate. This is confusing at first, but once you start using it correctly, it starts to make sense and opens up a whole new world of tracking ability.

Further enhancements
As well as new additions to the creative toolbox, there are also many more new enhancements and “under the hood” additions. One is the ability to work with a second monitor. Flame has always only used one monitor to work with the software, but it is now possible to have your library set up on one monitor and your work on another. When I first saw this, I thought it was an unnecessary addition. After working on it, I found it difficult to return to one monitor. A good addition but not essential.

Conforming has been improved with the ability to relink content to multi-channel clips such as OpenEXR and PSD formats. It is also now possible to use RHIB files within a conform which automatically promotes the file into a convenient Matte Container.

Smoke 2015
With the introduction of Smoke 2015 we now find that Smoke is only available through a Cloud-based Desktop Subscription. If you are an existing Smoke on Mac user with an active subscription, you will be offered the chance to either move over to a Desktop Subscription or to have a perpetual 2015 licence.

There are many welcome new features in Smoke 2015. The timeline FX infrastructure has been re-designed and works in the same way as the timeline FX on Flame. It is now possible to re-order timeline effects using the FX ribbon. This is basically a hidden Batch/CFX tree, which can be directly accessed in

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the timeline without entering Batch/CFX. This gives you the option of working directly in the timeline on your FX work. If at any time you decide you need to promote your work to CFX or Batch, you can easily promote your timeline FX into CFX/Batch and continue working on them in their Node-based format, offering you even more control and versatility on your final composition.

The Axis effect on the timeline has been replaced with a single Layer Action effect, which can be used either as a segment effect or as a Transition effect. This offers a whole host of extra features in the timeline, such as 3D Lens Flares and customisable preset Action transitions between clips.

It has been a long time coming for Smoke users but there is now a 3D Camera Tracker available inside Smoke. This offers a great deal of scope for both compositing and Motion Graphics. This is also available in Action in the timeline FX, allowing for 3D camera solving to be carried out directly in the timeline.

Other major improvements include support for Blackmagic DesignLink card and UltraStudio for Thunderbolt devices, as well as video IO support for AJA Video Systems offering dual stream stereoscopic output.

Integration between Smoke and PFC has improved vastly, as Smoke now supports more timeline effects and metadata from PFC as well as being able to output XML files with accompanying Quicktime files to make for a more seamless round trip between the software.

In terms of improved performance, Smoke 2015 has been specifically designed to work hand in hand with the new Mac Pro running Mavericks. When combined with Thunderbolt Storage, the speed and responsiveness is unbelievable, leaps and bounds ahead of the previous version, making the system a joy to work on. Conforming has been vastly improved on both Smoke and Flame and increased support for native files has also been implemented.

A few things, however, are missing from the new version of Smoke. Gone is the support for third party plugins. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, as Smoke still has access to the previous arsenal of Flame FX nodes inside CFX and also has access to Matchbox Shaders, so there are plenty of...
options directly inside the software. One of the main problems was the cost of third party plug-ins, more than the software in many cases.

One big issue, though, is that Smoke and Flame are no longer compatible with each other. This may have huge implications for freelancers who originally purchased Smoke so that they could share projects and setups with the facilities that they were doing the work for. I imagine this may cause many original Smoke users who work in this way to move away from the software altogether and look towards other ways of working closely with Facility Houses.

Personally I think this a bad move on Autodesk's part. I already hear a lot of people saying that they are looking at the prospect of changing to Nuke Studio from the Foundry in order to have affordable compatible software that they can use to share their work and projects. That said, Smoke 2015 is a fantastic finishing tool and although compatibility with Flame is restricted it still offers first-class Keying, Tracking and Grading tools and in my opinion still has one of the best interfaces of any finishing system available.

Flame Assist and Flame Premium
Presently Flame Assist is virtually the same as the Smoke 2015 perpetual licence, with an almost identical toolbox. As with the Smoke 2015 perpetual licence, Flame Assist can share projects and can be networked together with other Flame systems. Flame Premium consists of Flame alongside Lime, allowing for a seamless round trip of Finishing and Grading.

Conclusion
Many people were initially surprised with the new updated line of products available. There was a lot of hype before the products were launched, with many people like myself hoping to see something very different from what was actually released. I had envisaged a new product line-up consisting of two products only: Flame/Flame Assist for Mac and Flame Premium on Linux. Flame on Mac could have been a little brother to Flame in the same way Smoke Advanced has always been a little brother to Flame. I didn’t imagine that there would be any restriction on purchasing products, and I certainly didn’t imagine there would be functionality removed from existing products.

It looks like Smoke on Mac is now being targeted at FCP and Premiere users who want to be able to add that extra magic to their projects, and put in the hands of the eight person it remains a high-end finishing tool. The Flame family has now become a more exclusive set of software aimed at high-end finishing and PX work. It still boasts some of the best tools on the market and will continue to be a favourite of designers and compositors alike. Unlike other compositing software like Nuke the Flame interface allows for something more than straight A, B compositing; it is a limitless creative environment which allows the user to take a project in any direction they choose.

Flame still has no direct competition on the market. It is still the best standalone Creative Finishing, Compositing, Grading and Editing system. This may change with the release of Nuke Studio. As I said earlier, Nuke is a great A, B compositor and certainly has a few more advanced compositing tools in its arsenal. However, up until now it has seemed like a very mechanical process compared to Flame’s unlimited creative workflows. Also, most Nuke artists have to work across a variety of programmes in order to complete the job. Perhaps Nuke Studio will become a challenger in the near future. As we know, the Foundry is a very proactive forward-thinking company that takes on both client and user comment.

Other competition may come from Mystika, which seems to have cornered the stereoscopic 3D market at the moment. Mystika’s big issue is lack of customer support, which is a major issue. It doesn’t matter how good your product is, if it breaks in a client session it is imperative that support be on hand. This is an area where Autodesk excels, with 24-hour support via the helpdesk and in any support via the local reseller. There seems to be no way around this.

The good
Dual Monitor support, Background Reactor, Matchbox enhancements, 3D shapes, enhanced performance.

The bad
Flame and Smoke still suffer to some extent from the lack of a true 3D contextual menu as used in 3D modelling software.

The ugly
I was extremely disappointed with the loss of interaction between Flame and Smoke on Mac. Many customers bought a piece of software to be used for a specific purpose and are now being told that functionality no longer exists, and unless you own a Flame there seems to be no way around this.

Review at a glance

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Alistair Rankine is an editor/VFX specialist and workflow consultant with more than 25 years of post production and broadcast experience.

Tek Signals "the expert choice" of Customers

Tek Signals would like to dedicate this award to the sincerity and dedication of all the staff at Tek Signals. Many thanks also to all our customers and suppliers for their support for achieving this award.

Tek Signals provides complete turnkey solutions in the fields of its activities from conception stage to handling over and long-term support and free consultancy.
ERTU covered the 2014 presidential elections in Egypt for the first time, using 3D graphics solutions from WASP3D. BroadcastPro ME goes behind the scenes to see how the broadcaster achieved this.
tools, virtual set controllers, chroma keyers, Moses mini jib cranes, Vinten cameras, ENPS for newsroom, Harris automation and switches from Grass Valley, among other equipment.

The existing ERTU studio was upgraded with four new tracking cameras, new graphic servers and playout controllers to control the virtual set graphics. The virtual set was also selected as the control application for the election graphics and for presenting live data in augmented reality. This solution was integrated with the newsroom and made scalable, for future functionality.

“The 3D virtual studio project is considered a significant development for ERTU. Since it is the first-of-its-kind for our organisation, we’re very proud to implement that new technology for one of the most important presidential elections in the history of Egypt. We achieved our goal in record time and successfully covered the elections, thanks to interim solutions provided by WASP3D,” explains Wash.

The Presidential Elections
This was the first time ERTU was broadcasting the national elections. The event had to be covered 24/7 live and enriched with real-time 3D graphics and analysis. While technical expertise and experience were critical, the broadcaster had to be sensitive to how much information the viewers could handle. The viewers in Egypt were not accustomed to a deluge of live information, graphics and analysis. As time was a major constraint for this project, ERTU had to be ready for live coverage of the elections in less than four weeks after finalising the tender. WASP3D provided a custom application development for processing election data and further integration with real-time on-air election graphics for both 3D and HD output.

“All of the graphics templates were designed and developed in India based on ERTU’s requirements. But our design team also provided on-site support to ERTU and trained its technical heads and designers to create a new design style for the elections,” explains Rathi.

Live coverage of an event of this scale meant handling very large volumes of data and analysing it to derive meaningful information. It was a complex production with a mix of studio discussions, off-studio broadcasts and feeds from single camera locations. Once the information reached the ERTU studios, the presentations had to be created on the channel with accurate data and analysis, packaged with infographics. Packaging live video and data with interactive and augmented graphics was a challenging task, as it was to be aired in real-time with absolutely no room for error. Moreover, the content had to get out ahead of rival broadcasters, according to Wash.

The project engineers needed to have a thorough understanding of the electoral process in order to provide the end user with optimum solutions. “For us, understanding the electoral process of Egypt was a bit of a task because it is very different from other electoral systems,” WASP3D’s Rathi points out.

“For example, unlike any other electoral system, in Egypt, three candidates, and not one, are chosen from each constituency. Hence the calculation of vote share and other figures was rather complicated. The template had to be designed with these elements in mind. The broadcaster was dealing with massive volumes of data coming live. This had to be analysed and integrated with the graphics and sent on air, live. All of these were...
The solution
ERTU had the option to use the touchscreen module, WASP Mimosa, which allows for an analysis-driven, user-interactive presentation.

The graphic templates were designed in Drone Designer module for live automated data feeds. These could also integrate manual data using the Comb Builder application.

The user has the flexibility to either present the content directly on the touchscreen using WASP Mimosa or trigger the graphics via the production control room.

The modules were deployed on the election programme of ERTU for full-frame graphics, pie charts, name bands, key constituencies and maps, swings, vote tally, channel logo and so on. They were also used for the Master Control Room (MCR) graphics for analysis and presentation of the elections. These graphics included lower thirds, tally bugs and tickers. As real-time data came in from each constituency, it was immediately picked up by the software and analysed to convert the data into three-dimensional pie charts.

The graphics were then made ready to be sent on air when the anchor required them. Full-frame 3D graphics depicting various scenarios were generated all through the polling day and the day the votes were counted. The graphics illustrated up-to-the-second developments of elections across Egypt, including top candidates, top leading contender, vote share comparison with the previous elections and vote swing for or against a particular alliance. On polling day, graphics depicting voter turnout were also generated live.

Besides the full-frame graphics, ERTU also aired continuous live results by means of the lower third graphics running in an automated mode, 24/7. The lower third ran without any manual intervention, showing information on each constituency, covering leading candidates, national tally, top alliances and candidates likely to become President.

The coverage of the presidential elections affirmed ERTU’s credentials as the biggest public network in Egypt. Viewership saw a significant upward trend and viewer feedback was extremely positive. “We’re studying to apply combinations of many new projects such as 3D virtual studios, multi-touch screens and 3D object recognition tables in different fields such as economics and political analysis, sports analysis, traffic crisis, weather forecast, talk show programmes, advertisements and so on. These also play a significant role in news gathering and collating feeds from different TV studios. We’re looking to improve our presentations through innovative graphics and virtual sets to cover the upcoming parliamentary elections,” concludes Wasfi.

For us, understanding the electoral process of Egypt was a bit of a task because it is very different from other electoral systems. For example, unlike any other electoral system, in Egypt, three candidates, and not one, are chosen from each constituency. Hence the calculation of vote share and other figures was relatively more complicated.”

Deependra Rathi, Vice President, WASP3D EMEA
The global progress of digital terrestrial broadcasting has many sides to explore, but no recent development has made a more significant mark than the DVB-T2 standard, according to Martyn Horspool.

The arrival of DVB-T2 and its powerful capabilities signalled the birth of new broadcast models that broadcasters worldwide are beginning to enjoy. Notably, the standard enables deployment of more over-the-air programmes, while laying the foundation for new or future services from mobile channels to interactive opportunities. A review of the capabilities of this digital modulation demonstrates both its higher efficiency – including better utilisation of available wireless spectrum – as well as its many configurations available to the broadcaster.

Both DVB-T and DVB-T2 (as well as other digital terrestrial standards) provide dramatic advantages over traditional analogue services. The critical improvements include multiple programmes per RF channel, improved signal quality and robustness, adaptability to single frequency networks, and the capability of transmission of high-definition video and other digital signals.

The planning and developing for the DVB-T2 standard started to take shape eight years ago, with 2008 marking the release of the standard. Technically speaking, DVB-T2 provides far superior performance compared to traditional DVB-T, as well as other digital terrestrial standards such as ATSC, a standard employed in North America, Canada and Mexico; and ISDB-T, used in various configurations within Japan, Brazil and Argentina.

Converting Technical Benefits to Commercial Benefits

Because of these and other technical capabilities, DVB-T2 has the potential to generate significant benefits for the consumer, the broadcaster and government entities. The DVB-T2 standard has many “handles” or modes that can be used in many different ways. This wide array of transmission options and uses can be tailored for specific business purposes. As an example, DVB-T2 can be used to provide single or multiple SDTV programmes, or various combinations of HDTV and SDTV programmes, all simultaneously transmitted in one existing RF channel. Elsewhere in the data stream, advanced pay-TV opportunities like VOD and conditional access service are made possible through its expansive bandwidth throughput.

Perhaps most enticing is the presence of multiple PLPs, which provide a convenient way to optimise different programmes and applications for the best coverage/robustness combination. This includes optimised transmission for mobile and handheld services. For example, the PLP architecture can accommodate a high bit-rate programme for an HD service, a medium bit-rate programme for one or more SD services and a low bit-rate (very high robustness) signal for mobile/portable reception. Such a system could use different PLPs, assigned as follows:

Many broadcasters must service multiple languages/cultures, as well as difficult
PROTECH

For the broadcaster. Among the or individual services with the PLPs to create customised services. To the DVB-T2 transmitters. Transport stream and distributing developing the desired MPEG services. The implementation spectrum and using that for HD or adding a second frequency either dropping some SD channels a straightforward implementation modulation to allow 18 SD channels compressed work in concert with the. Certainly the advances in video compression work in concert with the modulation to allow 18 SD channels where previously, in analogue, there was one programme in the 8MHz spectrum channel. This is a straightforward implementation of third generation DVB-T2 and the fastest way to provide a wide variety of content to viewers. As audiences become accustomed to digital services and purchase higher capability HDTVs, demand rises for improved signal quality and more viewing options. Broadcasters can then add HD channels by either dropping some SD channels or adding a second frequency spectrum and using that for HD services. The implementation of these services is a matter of developing the desired MPEG transport stream and distributing to the DVB-T2 transmitters. At this point, the broadcaster may look at the use of multiple PLPs to create customised services. The capability to create groups or individual services with the optimised transmission parameters can be a powerful and flexible tool for the broadcaster. Among the many options a broadcaster can consider are conditional access or pay-TV services, 3D TV, mobile TV, audio services and data delivery. For conditional access systems (CAS), a broadcaster can choose all or a portion of their T2 channel to be also encrypted so that only users with authorised devices can receive content. Perhaps a SD channel is free but the same channel in HD is a pay service. Or certain premium content can be part of a CAS PLP. Other potential applications in DVB-T2 are the provisioning of audio data services. Data services hold enormous potential to deliver content, advertising, emergency notifications and other information to users. Business models, user devices with storage memory and broadcaster equipment are in the early stages and will be available for future implementations.

Mobile Services and the Dawn of T2 Lite

One of the more commonly cited use of multiple PLPs is to use the capability to optimise the modulation parameters for mobile TV. By increasing error correction for high robustness and selecting modulation and coverage planning for either indoor or low antenna height coverage, a PLP can be constructed to deliver a suite of mobile services within an RF channel containing other services. The broadcaster can even choose to implement CAS if the market will accept mobile as a paid service. Perhaps the biggest benefit for broadcasters choosing the DVB-T2 Lite standard is its inclusion of Future Extension Frames (FEFs) – a feature not present in the DVB-T standard. FEFs exist almost solely to enable a path to advanced modulations as they appear. Using these frames, a DVB-T2 broadcaster can essentially transmit over-the-air content based on another standard within the DVB-T2 framework. Importantly, this includes several options to support mobile broadcasting. Therefore, broadcasters transitioning to DVB-T2 can take advantage of FEFs to launch digital terrestrial services and mobile services simultaneously, taking two steps at once – a clear “greenfield” opportunity to establish multiple DTV services out of the gate through implementation of the DVB-T2 Lite standard – or T2 Lite – represents one of these options. T2 Lite is actually a subset of DVB-T2, and can be deployed in two ways: as a T2-Lite transmission only, or as a mix of T2 Basic and T2 Lite. Within the DVB-T2 Basic multiplex, T2 Lite signals can be taken advantage of within FEFs. This is an ideal way to take advantage of T2 Lite’s mobile broadcasting benefits, as T2 Lite includes specific coding parameters to enhance mobile performance. These coding rates, identified as 1/3 and 2/5, also contribute to T2 Lite’s efficiency advantage. Several other features, including low bitrate encoding (at 4Mbps) and short forward error correction frames (148s), co-exist with these coding rates to collectively offer a sharp reduction in receiver power use. The end use benefits are longer battery life and lower receiver costs, making T2 Lite-driven mobile broadcasting within the DVB-T2 standard a more attractive proposition than launching mobile services with DVB-T2 alone. The significance of T2 Lite for broadcasters is that its profiles can remove the hurdles to commercial success with mobile DTV broadcasting upon widespread availability of consumer receivers. It represents a robust hybrid broadcast for both standard and mobile services without compromising either one, while reducing complexity and power in the receiver. It can also be accomplished with minimal additional infrastructure equipment and at a far lower cost than building a dedicated network for each service. Comprehensively, the DVB-T2 standard provides the broadcaster with a powerful suite of tools which include a combination of advanced error correction schemes, modulation formats and other unique features that enable the broadcaster to optimise transmission capability and performance. As future needs and commercial requirements evolve, the parameters chosen initially can easily be updated later. This enables broadcasters to be prepared for future services, be able to meet the widest audiences and add revenue-generating programmes and capabilities as needed.

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Table 1: Division of channels based on bandwidth

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<td>32 k</td>
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<td>5/6</td>
<td>64 QAM</td>
<td>16 k</td>
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<td>1/2</td>
<td>QPSK</td>
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Table 1: Division of channels based on bandwidth

Table 2: Demand for higher signal quality rises with more HDTV capability

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SHARJAH TV REDEFINED

Sharjah TV recently completed its migration to HD and revamped three of its channels to support the new format and subsequent workflow.

BroadcastPro ME takes a closer look at the project.

State broadcaster Sharjah TV marked its 25th anniversary with a complete switch to High Definition. The migration was achieved in conjunction with systems integrator Media Group International (MGI) and Avid, which served as one of the key suppliers in this project. This project also saw the installation of the first ISIS 7500 in the region, with 768 TB total storage.

The switch to HD was much easier said than done. One of Sharjah TV's key concerns was its relatively small storage capacity, which required an immediate upgrade from 48TB to 768TB, before switching to a higher resolution. In addition to that, the broadcaster lacked a consolidated interface and relied on a complicated workflow that was also due for a revamp. Owing to its tiny storage, the state broadcaster's production and editorial teams were traditionally compelled to delete excess content on a daily basis. In addition, the complexity of the metadata system and the workflow consumed employee time that could be better channelled to more important tasks.

The broadcaster needed a system where more users could work simultaneously without having an impact on the network bandwidth. It also needed to increase the content storage period to accommodate the current production work load. Part of the mandate was to go completely tapeless. Since the facility was based on an Avid workflow, which the staff were comfortable with, the broadcaster called in the same manufacturer to design an upgrade. Avid partnered with MGI to provide an end-to-end solution that fulfilled the broadcaster's multi-pronged objectives.

MGI's expertise with Avid systems and its ability to provide Avid-trained and in-house engineers were the main reasons why Sharjah TV chose the SI to proceed with the upgrade, according to Aisha Alzareef, Head of Broadcast IT at Sharjah Media Corporation, the parent company of Sharjah TV. The three entities channelled to more important tasks. A key requirement of the project was to incorporate third-party software from companies such as Vizrt, FlipFactory and DIVA Archive that had to be upgraded in line with the channels' requirements. MGI Business Development Manager Mohamad Othman liaised between the end user and the key vendors. According to him, the requirements of this project extended beyond broadcast solutions and required a high degree of IT knowledge as well. “The project required a high level of technical skills, especially in Avid solutions, and a general broadcast and IT knowledge of non-linear and tapeless broadcast workflows. Sharjah TV’s operators conducted several meetings and workshops with us and Avid to agree on the best workflow, in which work performance would be improved for both operators and engineers, and to organize the system functionality,” points out Othman.

The project began with the installation of MediaCentral | UX, ISIS 7500, Interplay Archive and Capture, Airecipe and ENews Command upgrades to Media Composer and NewsCutter licences in order to provide a comprehensive and efficient system to help staff store and access media with ease. A key requirement of the project was to smoothly manage processes in a tight timeframe. “We worked closely with MGI and Avid to ensure the project progressed without any snags. We were able to seamlessly manage processes in a tight timeframe, whilst avoiding interruptions to our broadcasting schedule,” she explains.

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PROSHARJAH

The station stayed on air and production continued whilst we did the installation, so the pressure was high. We needed to increase the storage capacity and upgrade the interplay system under strict time constraints with no room for error.

Ammar Fawzy, Territory Account Manager, Avid

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relative ease. It targeted two important goals – to lower facility overheads and to ensure that Sharjah TV HD kept pace with the high acceleration of media ingest requirements in media worldwide.

The first step was to provide Sharjah TV with a comprehensive and efficient system to help their team both store and access their media with ease. They faced several challenges, which had to be taken into account before taking up a revamp, according to Ammar Fawzy, Territory Account Manager, Avid Middle East.

“The absence of a consolidated interface, allowing the team to access and verify media and new approvals, as well as a complicated workflow, were major hurdles. It was vital to find a means to ensure easier access to media and metadata to speed up delivery times. The channel’s management team was searching for ways to optimise talent utilisation and improve workforce productivity. Production capacity had to rise and content repurposing costs had to fall. An intelligent orchestration, including process automation as well as operational integration, was vital. All these were addressed in the upgrade,” says Fawzy.

Avid’s MediaCentral | UX improved internal teamwork, incorporating a system for remote collaboration between the station’s offsite journalists and the channel’s headquarters. The web front-end platform meant journalists could access and work on projects from any device at any location. Production assets, metadata and other materials are now easily accessible whenever and wherever required, and multiple contributions can be tied in together with ease.

Avid also installed six ISIS 7500 units, vastly improving and increasing Sharjah TV’s storage capacity, providing higher I/O and user density for managing more media files. The scalability of the system, used by over 2,000 broadcast and post-production customers worldwide, means that capacity – and as a result workflow efficiency – can be further increased in the future to adapt to changing storage needs. The Media Composer and NewsCutter licences were upgraded to the latest versions, designed to handle high volumes of disparate file-based media, delivering accelerated high-res-to-HD workflows, real-time collaboration and powerful media management, thus eliminating time-consuming tasks so the editing team can focus on getting the latest stories out. Sharjah TV no longer needs to consistently clear its system of excess content, and future generations of journalists at the station can benefit from all their predecessors’ hard work. This also means fewer errors as a result of manual content deletion, leading to more efficiency and greater productivity. The improved process efficiency has resulted in lower costs, enhanced workforce productivity and a reduction in overall workflow complexity.

The station stayed on air and production continued whilst we did the installation, so the pressure was high. We needed to increase the storage capacity and upgrade the interplay system under strict time constraints with no room for error.”

Ammar Fawzy, Territory Account Manager, Avid
Workflow at a glance

- File-based ingest via Vantage
- Transcode pushed to ISIS 7500
- Interplay Central introduced to gradually replace Avid Interplay Assist
- Production using Media Composer and using Web Interplay Central
- Chief editors and editors are able to edit and manage material remotely
- News ingest and edit using News Cutter
- Archiving to Diva FPD

The project involved installing third-party equipment alongside Avid.

The station had to stay on air throughout. "This project was very interesting for Avid. The station stayed on air and production continued whilst we did the installation, so the pressure was high. We needed to increase the storage capacity and upgrade the interplay system under strict time constraints with no room for error. Alongside our partner MGI, we leveraged our close relationship with the team at Sharjah TV to deliver the project on time, with no delays or glitches. The mutual collaboration across the three fronts was a key factor in the success of the project," says Fawzy.

The multi-million dollar project entailed various installation phases that involved installing third-party equipment alongside Avid. Also installed were Telestream Vantage, Front Porch Digital/8VDA, Cisco switches, HP workstations and Marshall monitors. While the Avid solutions handle the ingest, edit and playout, Telestream Vantage transcodes all ingested media for a unified format. Front Porch Diva is the HSM that manages the archive tape library.

This solution catered to SMC’s three channels, Sharjah Main Channel, Sports Channel and CH22. "While the revamp was important, equally critical was the data migration," says Othman.

"We undertook data migration of the station and completed it overnight using a newly designed workflow. The metadata was also transferred to the new server in the process. We follow DV50 format. "The upgrade covered the post production area, which includes news, programmes, sports and the ingest unit section. This project will allow SMC to broadcast with higher quality in the future, as well as providing them with an expandable system," comments Othman.

The task was tackled in two phases to ensure that there was no downtime, and the project stayed within the specified timeframe and budget. The project was awarded to Avid and MGI in March, 2014. The work on the project began in April 2014, and the upgrade was fully implemented in a span of eight weeks. SMC went on air with the new system on 31 May, 2014. Following this, MGI and Avid imparted the necessary training to SMC’s engineering and operations staff. The two entities are presently planning additional training schedules for the broadcaster.

ProSharjah
City of Life Director Ali Mostafa, who recently wrapped up the filming and post production work on his second film, From A to B, speaks exclusively to Vibhuti Arora about his latest project.

Ali Mostafa’s debut feature film, City of Life, not only won him recognition as a director and filmmaker but also drew attention to Dubai as a creative centre. When Mostafa decided to make another film, he thought of drawing attention to Abu Dhabi, the UAE’s capital city. His latest film is a travelogue entitled From A to B, where A refers to Abu Dhabi and B stands for Beirut. From A to B is about three childhood friends on a road trip from Abu Dhabi to Beirut, passing through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. Each country offers a different landscape and culture and a different set of people that the trio encounters, and the film portrays these interactions.

From A to B began with a story idea, as all films do. Mostafa had already made a drama and this time around, he wanted to experiment with another genre. He chose comedy for his second project.

When he took the idea of a travelogue to twofour54’s CEO, Noura Al Kaabi, she was quick to offer support. Twofour54 is the commercial arm of the Media Zone Authority – Abu Dhabi, that facilitates the development of Arabic media and entertainment content in the region.

While twofour54 offered infrastructural and post production assistance, another Abu Dhabi film entity, Image Nation, got
involved as executive producers and agreed to fund the film.

“It was the first time that two Abu Dhabi entities were joining forces to work on a project. What’s more, I was given complete creative freedom on the project and there was no restraint, whatsoever, from those studios,” Mostafa comments.

“I got a lot of support from Image Nation’s Michael Garin, Mohammed Al Mubarak, Ben Ross and fellow director Majid Al Ansari, who now works with Image Nation.

“We shot most of the film in Abu Dhabi and shot some parts in Beirut and Jordan as well. With the situation in Syria, we obviously couldn’t shoot there and I did not see the need to shoot in Saudi Arabia either. The shots showing Syria were filmed in Jordan and we created a set to show the Saudi border,” informs Mostafa.

Besides the three main leads, a Range Rover Evoque plays key role in the film. The protagonists use the same car throughout the film and it is quite interesting to see what the car undergoes in the process.

“We have termed this genre a ‘dramedy’ as it has generous doses of comedy as well as drama. Being a travelogue, it has a sprinkling of adventure as well. We have been careful to capture the cultural nuances and the dialects of each region, as the film travels from Abu Dhabi to Beirut,” comments Mostafa.

Each of the three protagonists comes from a different country, though they all went to the same American school in the UAE. The film has a fair degree of Western influence. In fact, at least 30% of the film’s dialogue is in English, with the rest in Arabic.

**Snapshot**

A product of the London Film School, Ali Mostafa set up his own production company, AFM Films, in 2006. The Emirati director shot to fame with big-budget production City of Life, which set a precedent for Emirati cinema and proved to the world that Emirati films were capable of achieving commercial success. He is presently working on his second project, a travelogue entitled From A to B.

- **Film:** From A to B
- **Cameras:** ARRI Alexa XT, Canon C500, GoPro
- **Locations:** Abu Dhabi, Beirut, Jordan
- **Funding:** Image Nation, Abu Dhabi
- **Post Production support:** twofour54 intaj
- **Rental support:** Gamma Engineering

**PRODUCTION**

**Director Ali Mostafa and his crew on location during the making of From A to B.**
It was a challenge for the film to have the right cast, which posed a challenge initially. The three main leads in the film are played by Fahad Albutairi, Fadi Rifaai and Fahad Albutairi. “It wasn’t easy to cast. When I was developing the script, I knew who I wanted but don’t have any of those leads in the film now. As the story evolved, the actors that I had planned to cast in the beginning did not suit the roles anymore. So we began to audition in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. “In the end everything fitted together like the pieces in a jigsaw. All three protagonists are first-time actors but I think that worked to our advantage and each of them delivered exceptional performances. While they are well-known in their respective fields, none of them is a film actor,” Mostafa says.

We have worked together on many commercials. He also worked on camera B in City of Life and was the main DoP on this film. We are working together with Alexa cameras and used the ARRI Alexa XT for this particular project. It shoots in RAW so we expected outstanding image quality,” says Mostafa.

From A To B was shot in 3K using ARRI Alexa XT camera. Canon C500 was also on hand to shoot scenes inside the car, if required. “Certain stunts that we could do only once, we tried to cover using a Canon C500. For a crash scene, however, as many as six cameras were called in, ranging from the ARRI Alexa XT to Canon C500 to the GoPro. We managed to cover as much as possible on Alexa XT because a lot of the scenes were shot on a low loader, a trailer that you put the car on and stick the camera out to rig.”

“Filmmaking is very expensive but according to the director no one could have done it better. “When auditioning in Egypt, one person who really stood out in the auditions happened to be a writer on the Dr. Bessem Youssef show. He too has a big following in Egypt. Our third lead was finalised just three days before we were scheduled to begin shooting. The three of them had perfect chemistry, which comes across on the screen,” comments Mostafa.

The film also has cameos by popular actors from the Arab film industry, further adding to its pan-Arab appeal. It was critical that the film delivered exceptional performances. While they are well-known in their respective fields, none of them is a film actor,” Mostafa says. YouTube phenomenon Fahad Albutairi plays the Saudi lead. At first glance doesn’t come across as someone to play a Westernised Saudi youngster, but according to the director no one could have done it better.

“We are used to working with Alexa cameras and used the ARRI Alexa XT for this particular project. It shoots in RAW format so we expected outstanding image quality”

Ali Mostafa, Director
“We shot From A to B over 29 days and finished its post production in seven weeks. Now we are in the final stages of editing the film and need to fine tune it a bit,” says the director. Tensfour’s in-house editor, Ali Suloom, edited the film and gave the director a rough cut as soon as filming was over. The film is expected to be released before the end of 2014, the director says.

“For us the best time to launch the film would be at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival in October but nothing is set in stone,” he informs.

City of Life and From A to B

Unlike From A to B, City of Life was an independent film for which the director had personally raised the money, and there was no studio overseeing the project. The making of From A to B was also quite different from City of Life, which was a bigger film and required more production support.

“We would have seven to eight trucks convoyed by police while shooting City of Life, such was the scale of that production. From A to B did not need that kind of setup, because it belonged to a different genre altogether,” Mostafa says.

An experience to cherish

As for its production highlights, the director points out that the entire film was like an adventure as he is quite fascinated by road trips in real life too.

“We were on a set in Jordan where we had to shoot the characters meeting some individuals. The scene involved at least 24 setups that had to be completed in four hours. There was no way we could have pulled that through, so we decided to call our steadicam operator back from the hotel and did the entire scene in one shot.”

For Mostafa, the experience of shooting in Petra in Wadi Rum in Jordan was something to cherish. While scouting for locations, he was guided by the same scout who helped Steven Spielberg and Michael Bay with location hunting for their films.

“I have always looked up to these filmmakers as legends and having the opportunity to film in the same locations meant a lot to me. There’s a train scene in our film that used the same train and was shot at the same location that was used in Lawrence of Arabia.

“Lawrence of Arabia is one of the most inspirational films I have watched and I have a huge amount of admiration for David Lean, its director,” Mostafa says.

Mostafa says his style of filmmaking is still evolving. For him, films are a medium to tell stories in an entertaining way and should have mass appeal.

“Although I love making stories for people, I also write films that I believe have commercial value. I don’t want to make films that are purely artistic or cater to a niche audience. I want my films to have universal appeal and reach out to as many people across the world as possible.

“Filmmaking is an organic process, one needs to improvise while filming for best creative results,” comments Mostafa.

Although a lot changed for Mostafa as a filmmaker after City of Life, it still took him four years to make another film, which goes to show how difficult it is to make movies in this part of the world.

“This also goes to show how young our industry is. We have a lot of Emirati filmmakers but the industry is still nascent. We need films to make an industry, which is lacking as of now. There’s a long way to go for us but the future seems bright.”

As Mostafa points out, at least four Emirati feature films have been produced this year alone, which has never happened before.

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Security is key in professional IPTV and is likely to become more important as the reach of these services grows. Eleuterio Fernandes sheds light on how the Middle East is safeguarding its content.

Businesses of all types are increasingly adopting video services to stay on top of the news, inform their workforce and provide entertainment to consumers. In the Middle East, IPTV is increasingly chosen to meet professional demand for video services across a wide range of organisations. This trend has led to questions regarding the security of content distributed internally over IP.

Lucintel’s “Global Broadcast Media Industry Analysis 2012-2017: Industry Trend, Profit and Forecast Analysis” report states that internet broadcasting is expected to be the fastest growing media sector, with the Middle East one of the regions spearheading this movement due to low barriers to entry and increased broadband penetration. Ultrafast broadband in the region is expected to rival IP-friendly markets such as Eastern Asia and Europe in the near future.

Increased broadband availability, in tandem with more operators and broadcasters launching new services in the region, clears the path for enterprise IPTV to become widespread in the region. In the Middle East, demand for video from local companies, international brands and visitors means that IPTV is catching up with more mature markets.

With the World Expo coming to Dubai in 2020, followed by the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, hospitality developments are in full swing. Competition among high-end establishments, as well as a growing number of two- and three-star hotels, has resulted in increased IPTV uptake due to video services shifting from an additional

“Increased broadband availability, in tandem with more operators and broadcasters launching new services in the region, clears the path for enterprise IPTV to become widespread in the region.”

Eleuterio Fernandes, Middle East Sales Director, Exterity
extra to an expected feature. The market may be growing at a frenetic pace but it is also maturing, which means that more attention than ever before is given to ensure that content is secure from end to end. As the broadcast landscape in the Middle East switches from coaxial networks to IPTV, many organisations in the region have started streaming content directly over IP alongside emails and internal communication services.

Tackling the security issue in internal content distribution
To enable IPTV systems to become a commodity in the region, vendors need to ensure that their solutions provide support for encryption from end to end, especially as high value content is increasingly distributed over these networks. Many operators have put in place industry standards such as Conditional Access (CA) and Digital Rights Management (DRM) systems, but professional IPTV also requires support for High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection v2 (HDCPv2) to offer advanced security. HDCP is the only standard for delivery over IP, protecting communications over one or more links in a network including both wired and wireless communication between devices.

This enables organisations to avoid piracy and distribute high-quality live and commercial channels, a key requirement for a growing number of industries in the Middle East such as education, hospitality and transport hubs. Organisations in the region are quickly becoming aware of how intricate the content industry’s requirements are and are looking at market proven and future-proofed IPTV solutions to prepare for the upcoming wave of informational visitors. To enable organisations to understand the content industry’s security issues and combat all forms of piracy in that sector, Middle East broadcasters, satellite operators and service providers have joined forces as the Anti-Piracy Coalition. By implementing advanced secure professional IPTV systems, organisations are making great strides towards eliminating security threats. To ensure businesses can meet the piracy challenge, technology providers must incorporate efficient encryption. This is particularly relevant for professional IPTV systems, which can be deployed in a wide range of installations, such as a stadium looking for flexible infrastructure to distribute video in real time to all attendees, or a mining company providing entertainment to employees on-site. Venues are especially vulnerable to content being spread illegally due to the limited window in which their revenues peak, while the hospitality sector needs to adhere to the content industry’s security requirements in order to offer premium pay TV to guests. Increased broadband availability has opened up many new video opportunities spanning countless industries as organisations attempt to modernise their businesses. This desire for video content means, of course, that it has become a prime target for piracy. All organisations investing in video-based solutions must take steps to ensure their IPTV solutions not only provide a seamless service but also have demonstrably robust security.

"To enable IPTV systems to become a commodity in the region, vendors need to ensure that their solutions provide support for encryption from end to end."
Eleuterio Fernandes, Middle East Sales Director, Exterity

HDCPv2
Security is key in professional IPTV and is likely to become more so as the advantages of HDCP v2.x, in terms of both security and operational flexibility, become more widely understood. HDCP is often referred to as a link-layer security mechanism, as it protects communications over one or more links in a network. HDCP v1 was originally developed to provide last meter security from the video playback device such as the set-top, home gateway or Blu-Ray player to the TV. HDCPv2 is a completely new link-layer security mechanism that protects both wired and wireless communications between devices.

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“IBC is special because it serves as a great platform to learn about new technologies and keep ourselves informed about how other broadcasters are using new technology. “This year, I’m looking at new technologies and related applications that are being used for remote news broadcasts. Essentially, we are looking at how people can shoot on a small camera, do quick editing and send the footage to our advantage.”

Mohammed Al Marhouby, Chairman’s Advisor for Technical Development, Public Authority for Radio & TV, Oman

“I think IBC will most likely be focused around the growing realisation of 4K and the end-to-end infrastructures needed to support it. Up until now, it’s been a hot topic without the necessary technology to make it a commercially viable proposition. I also expect to see the emergence of more cloud technologies both on the transmission and the platform side of the business. In the next couple of years, there’s genuine opportunity for an operator to start making real use of these technologies. OTT is always looking at platform development and is keen to build on the strengths of the existing platform and to embrace the latest industry developments to bring new technologies and features to our customers. “Broadcast in the Middle East also continues to grow – both the number of channels and the quality of those channels. Complementing this is the emergence of digital services. While it’s still early days for OTT in the region, it is an emerging technology and one which, in the future, will grow and further complement more traditional satellite delivery.”

Mark Billinge, CTO, OSN

“A team of four will be going from Bahrain, including the Director of Transmission and OB as well as three engineers who look after different divisions – RF and video “They will be looking at new technologies in both these areas with a special focus on DRM transmitters and DAB+ technologies on the one hand, and 4K and 8K for the studio side. We will also be looking at new technologies available to present our upcoming elections in October better. As you are aware, we have undertaken several projects with the intention of being state-of-the-art within the next few years. We have plans to introduce DAB and DRM in the country and also create a 4K studio. We have a lot of projects going on now and by the end of this year – actually, before the elections – we intend to finish many of them. One team went to NAB. This is the second team going to IBC, it is closer to the region and makes travel easier. A few companies we are dealing with will be at IBC, and some meetings will be also for existing projects.”

Abdullah Al Balouschi, General Director of Technical and Technology Affairs, IAA, Bahrain

“We have two main focuses for tech this year – news gathering and some rather ambitious plans on the digital side of our output. “We’re currently looking at some 4K cameras, as we’re interested in the potential for using that extra detail in the field in some clever ways. As for new trends, the use of IP as an evolution of SDI will be great, but it needs to be cheap enough to justify not running those extra cables, which it isn’t yet. 4K, to me, is just another evolution that will follow the same path as HD. However, I believe it should have relevance today, albeit in a different direction to the mainstream. We should be focusing on leveraging the extra resolution to provide personal TV experiences without the need for major infrastructural change, which we can realise immediately. I believe the future of broadcast lies in providing personalised content streams. It’s my plan to trial this idea faster than one may think. “At IBC, we will be seeking out people with innovative products that will help us to fulfil our vision. They don’t have an API or SDK, we have an API or SDK, we won’t be talking to them.”

Dominic Baillie, CTO, Sky News Arabia

IBC attracts an array of stellar speakers to address the conferences
POWER TO YOUR NEXT STEP

Tell your story with a ground breaking range of lenses

Canon’s EF Cinema lenses are exclusively designed to stimulate creative expression. Capable of 4K resolution and beyond, they offer outstanding optical performance and exceptional usability. The latest addition – the CN7x17 KAS S E1/P1 – is designed for broadcast and handheld use, featuring a 7x zoom and removable servo drive unit for a new level of versatility.

Riedel does the Tango

Riedel will introduce Tango and MediorNet 2.0 at IBC. Tango is an entirely new intercom solution, breaking systems boundaries. Making its European debut, the MediorNet 2.0 is a firmware update for the MediorNet real-time media network that provides video router functionality and high-speed rerouting. MediorNet 2.0 is available now.

The MediorNet MetroN is a 2-RU large-scale core router that provides a real-time routing capacity of 64 x 10G ports. MediorNet MetroN can function within a larger MediorNet installation, interfacing with other MediorNet frames via fibre. Finally, the MediorNet networked approach to signal routing and distribution has been expanded to include WAN capabilities.

Harmonic leaps into the future

Harmonic will demonstrate its latest innovations, including new software-defined, virtualised video delivery that unifies all media processing functions on a single platform. The company will showcase a virtualised video infrastructure featuring the new Harmonic VOS architecture.

The extensible platform enables virtualised media processing, such as Harmonic’s new Electra XVM integrated software package, the industry’s first software-based, fully converged, broadcast-ready media processing platform. Integrating real-time encoding, branding and graphics, and transport stream playout for broadcast and multiscreen services, Electra XVM offers users function integration and increased operational flexibility and scalability. Also on display will be the expanded Ellipse 3000 family of contribution encoders, which now features DSNG encoder to support the new DVB Carrier ID (DVB-CID) standard.

Robotic Q3 from Camera Corps

Camera Corps will demonstrate the latest additions to its range of robotic camera systems. Taking centre stage will be the Q3 pan/tilt/zoom/focus head and Meacat miniature camera. Q3 and Meacat can be integrated easily with all Camera Corps’ current control systems. Up to 96 cameras of various types can be joystick-controlled by up to four operators and four vision engineers. Camera Corps’ Q3 robotic pan/tilt/zoom/focus camera allows broadcast television coverage from practically anywhere. Fully IP65 rated, it is designed for use in coverage of events such as outdoor and indoor sports and reality shows.

VSN’s new look

VSN will show its media and business process solution’s new user interface, designed to improve user experience and system operability, as well as VSNEXPLORER’s PAM (production asset management) module, aimed at production environments, and VSNLIVECOM, studio playout software that also features for the first time at IBC.

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GatesAir will showcase intelligent networking and signal transport reliability as a key part of its over-the-air efficiency and innovation message. GatesAir will help broadcasters better comprehend and improve network performance with the launch of Intraplex LiveLook, a dynamic software solution that improves analysis and troubleshooting for IP transport. The company will also demonstrate new interoperability features that enhance audio contribution and distribution opportunities for over-the-air broadcasters.

LiveLook is a real-time interactive monitoring solution that works in conjunction with Intraplex IP Link codecs, optimising performance for mission-critical audio contribution and distribution networks. LiveLook provides time-based graphical analysis of network statistics, including burst packets.

FilmLight will demonstrate how its technology helps broadcasters, movie producers and creative studios shorten timescales without compromising creativity and quality. On display at IBC2014 will be a new version of FLIP, the real-time image processor for on-set grading of digital cameras; and a new dailies product, the comprehensive solution for near-set production. Visitors will also be able to try Baselight editions, which take the colour processing engine from full Baselight workstations and implement it as a plugin within the foremost professional editing and VFX packages — including Avid, Final Cut Pro and Nuke, with more planned. The grade can be exchanged and adjusted simultaneously between editorial and effects.

FilmLight evolves workflows

GatesAir debuts Intraplex LiveLook

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Argosy will demonstrate the latest in its range of fibre management solutions and data cables at IBC2014.

Leading the display at IBC2014 will be the Neutrik opticalCON advanced tactical fibre assemblies, including the opticalCON Duo, opticalCON Quad and the debut of the latest addition to the range, the opticalCON-MTP connection systems. The MTP offers a 12-channel fibre optic connection system for point-to-point multi-channel routing with a push/pull connector that helps to reduce rigging and de-rigging times. Its spherical shutter is easy to clean and guarantees low maintenance. The MTP connection system offers end-to-end solution with rugged outer jackets for harsh environments.

Sonnet unveils the RackMac Pro rackmount solution for the new Mac Pro computer. The unit supports the rackmount installation of one or two new Mac Pros.

The RackMac Pro provides a front panel power switch and USB 3.0 port for each computer; while panel-mounted cables connect each Mac Pro’s Gigabit Ethernet, USB 3.0, HDMI and power ports to ports on the back of the RackMac Pro for convenient external cable connection. The device’s heavy-duty steel outer enclosure provides secure mounting and protection for each Mac Pro, with an open-back design that allows for proper airflow and optimal cooling. Only 7 inches tall by 16 inches deep, the 4U RackMac Pro is suitable for use in a wide range of popular mobile racks, carts and rack cases, as well as in a server room.

Making its IBC debut is the Thunderbolt Pro P2 Card Reader, a P2 single-slot memory card reader. The device has the ability to ingest footage from up to 70MB/s P2 memory cards.

Cerebrum provides comprehensive tools to configure, monitor and maintain products from any manufacturer within and beyond the broadcasting industry. The result is that multiple users can take total control over multiple and complex routines.

In modern broadcasting, the multi-platform delivery and multi-purpose repackaging of materials demand that you master a diversity of workflows. Cerebrum makes the control and monitoring of multiple video and audio signal paths easier, more efficient and cost-effective than ever.
The Nexidia Dialogue

Nexidia will demonstrate Dialogue Search — a software tool that searches for any spoken word or phrase, independent of metadata, across massive media libraries in seconds.

The patented technology behind Dialogue Search allows media organisations to make better use of their media libraries by quickly and precisely finding their assets that searching traditional metadata could never reveal. Dialogue Search dramatically reduces logging and transcription costs, integrates directly with media asset management (MAM) and editing applications, and requires no training. Version v1.6 will include several new features: Dialogue Search RESTful API to provide Nexidia search capabilities within any application, including metadata filtering and search.

Stand 3.A54

Imagine Communications goes virtual

Expanding on its live NAB demonstration of played out in the cloud, Imagine Communications will showcase software defined workflows to source, manage, store and deliver content.

Demonstrations will combine content originating from public and private clouds with on-ramps and off-ramps to bridge baseband video and IP; hybrid integration with on-premises playout systems to leverage existing investments; and seamless transformation for multi-platform delivery including TV Everywhere. The MultiService SDN framework simplifies the network architecture of media companies operating in hybrid baseband and IP environments by enabling the video bit flow to be software-mapped, creating a fully virtualised network fabric for deploying advanced services.

Building on the services-oriented MediaCentral framework, Imagine Communications will highlight new solutions and functionality in the Landmark business application management platform, including the campaign management of impression-based, dynamic ad insertion for streamed and non-linear content. New capabilities enable faster, advertising around available inventory across a range of consumer viewing platforms.

Stand 7.202

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PRO50 has all you need to know about the top players in the region’s broadcast and satellite market. A compilation of profiles of 50 broadcast and satellite companies in the GCC, the hardback coffee table book is a valuable resource for not only business entities but also customers looking for a ready reckoner of key industry players.

Digigram will demonstrate its first cloud-based application engineered to simplify the management of a fleet of IP audio codecs. It will also highlight IP video solutions that meet customer demand for higher-density encoding and packaging of streams for delivery to multiple CDNs and, ultimately, the broad array of viewing devices used today. Demonstrating that lower-cost systems can afford high performance in video contribution applications, the company will feature the latest addition to its ADDROD line of IP video codecs. At IBC2014, Digigram will showcase the addition of RAENN/AES67 connectivity to the company’s GOYA range of audio-over-IP (AoIP) codecs, which now allows users to get audio programmatically directly from an in-studio RAENNA network and subsequently encode and stream them over IP to transmitter sites via a WAN in compliance with EBU ACIP. The LX-IP RAENNA PCIe sound card features ultra-low latency.

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TOP 50 COMPANIES YOU NEED TO KNOW

A look into Axon’s Cerebrum
Axon will launch the loudness monitoring and logging option for the compliance recording / video air check product-line, TRACS. Driven by Emsytech Hummingbird Loudness Meters, all audio (up to eight stereo pairs) is measured for Momentary Loudness (400ms), Short-term Loudness (3s) and Integrated Loudness (loudness measured over the last hour continuously). During live play or playback of the recorded content, the Momentary, Short-term and Integrated measurements are shown in audio bars, in sync with the video.

Set-top box on the go
AirTies Wireless Networks, a supplier of wireless and OTT/ IPTV technologies, will be showcasing a portable wireless set-top box, small enough to fit into your handbag. Measuring just 10x10cm, the miniature STB attaches wirelessly to the IP gateway and can easily be moved from room to room. It features RF remote control and home automation capabilities to enable remote programming and is portable enough to take on holiday or to a neighbour’s house to watch the football. The combination of Wi-Fi connectivity and the device’s miniature form factor makes it the ‘Set-top box To Go’, allowing consumers to take their HD viewing experience with them to the next room or the next country. The STB wirelessly connects to the home gateway and works on any unmanaged internet connection.

Wohler’s new captions
New for IBC2014 is the introduction of WohlerCaption, which addresses the captioning/subtitling requirements used around the world and gives users complete flexibility in delivering captioned/subtitled media in the international marketplace. Wohler will also demonstrate its flagship AMP2-E16V audio/video processing monitor throughout the IBC2014 exhibition. Providing functionally critical for facilities migrating toward IP-oriented distribution networks, the MPEO series monitors decode and provide convenient at-a-glance measurement of programme content from MPEO-2/4 ASI and Ethernet IP streams, as well as HD-SDI inputs. To meet broadcasters’ increasing need for stream-based monitoring, the MPE0 video monitors identify, decode and display in high resolution both MPE0 and Ethernet IP streams, as well as 3G/HD-SDI inputs.

Monitoring of programme content, the course of the loudness levels during a user-defined period of time can be shown in a loudness history graph which can be exported to PDF or CSV files. Axon introduces a foldable flight pack for mobile live production applications with AXON’s Synapsa infrastructure.

Stand 8.C51
Stand 10.B10/A21
Stand 10.A21/B21
Stand 10.B10
Stand 10.B10/A21
“[Hyperlocal] events present new opportunities for broadcasters ... but may be worth pursuing only if they are produced cost effectively while still maintaining high standards”

openTruck paves the way

Around the world, broadcasting is become increasingly local and specialised to the point where broadcasting might just be exactly the wrong word. With the rise of the internet, and cable and satellite channels to get live content to viewers in addition to traditional means of broadcast, huge opportunities have risen to broadcast hyperlocal or specialised events to smaller, much more targeted viewing audiences.

For those not as familiar with the term, hyperlocal refers to broadcasts that service just a few towns or even just a part of a city that people normally associate with traditional broadcast. Hyperspecialised refers to productions that might be interesting to a small targeted audience and don’t necessarily merit a linear broadcast. Hyperspecialised productions require a different approach.

There are several existing solutions. The worst of this is to use older SD trucks to save money. It turns out that the internet isn’t low quality SD anymore, and viewers can tell that the graphics are based on old technology.

Another existing solution is to use some of the all-in-one computer-based switching/graphics products available. This doesn’t work anymore because viewers expect internet productions to look just as good as linear broadcasts now. The solution does not lie in investing in smaller trucks or vans either.

A new solution is openTruck. These are truck and van designs for sports and live productions from a consortium of manufacturers that are collaborating on interoperable, efficient, and cost-effective solutions targeting this new class of events.

The very first openTrucks being built include products from Ross, Riedel, Harman, Alesis, Bosch, and Canon.

More vendors are lining up to be part of future openTrucks and signing an agreement to guarantee a minimum standard of support and interoperability while maintaining the appropriate price points. One of the core technical advancements to make openTruck special is in the introduction of a new production switcher graphics workflow. In openTruck, a Ross Carbonite production switcher operator can have direct control over loading any template or transitioning any layer in the XPression CGs graphics. Since XPression offers an unlimited number of layers per channel, this effectively adds an infinite number of keys to the production switcher’s MI and drastically reduces operator complexity and the size of the production switcher required.

A second achievement of openTruck is the use of the free Dashboard control system. Dashboard is, or will be, supported by over 70 manufacturers as part of the openGear and openGear connect initiatives. This unifies the user interfaces or remote control of their products under a single system.

New Product

• 64-track Dante and MADI Audio Recorder

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David Ross is the CEO of Ross Video.
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