The broadcast industry lays out a winning strategy at the inaugural MENA Anti-Piracy Conference
PROintRO

Why should we take piracy seriously in the Middle East? Because it has started crippling our media companies to such a great extent that if we don’t collectively do something about it, we may be left with an impotent media industry incapable of flourishing profitably – and consequently, our entertainment options may dwindle substantially.

The media is not crying wolf. And we will have only ourselves to blame for not paying attention.

This is why BroadcastPro ME decided to bring the industry together for the inaugural MENA Anti-Piracy Conference last month. We were not surprised by the united calls from CEOs for regulators to take piracy seriously and mete out harsher punishments to pirates. Most of the big media houses invest heavily in investigations, track down culprits and present evidence to the relevant authorities, only to find that the resulting nominal penalties do nothing to deter others.

The reasons behind slap-on-the-wrist punishments are often rooted in the culture and colonial history of the region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened criminal who has murdered someone when judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened criminal who has murdered someone when judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened criminal who has murdered someone when judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed. Also, judges are faced with a hardened region, one delegate observed.

The latter’s crime looks insignificant, and he gets away with a small sentence. A lawyer on our panel urged that increasing awareness within the judiciary could lead to harsher sentences.

Piracy is not a victimless crime, and delegates agreed that awareness is necessary for everyone in the chain, from parents, teenagers and consumers to regulators and judges. This led us to the third panel, where international experts shared some of the technical and operational strategies successfully employed to outwit the pirates.

And lastly, there was a collective call for Google, YouTube and Apple to be more vigilant, as their platforms are the greatest enablers of piracy. There was so much first-hand information shared at our conference that media heads haven’t spoken about in the past, so I encourage you to read about what they had to say and the strategies shared by experts to counter piracy.

Later this month, our team will be making our annual trip to Singapore for ConnecTechAsia. See you there.
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BroadcastPro ME Summit & Awards is our annual flagship event to promote and celebrate excellence in the broadcast and satellite industry across the MENA region. Featuring extensive networking opportunities, seminars and awards presentations by key industry and government leaders.

broadcastpromeawards.com
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Sennheiser’s best performing analogue and digital receiver system in one compact pack.

The EK6042 two-channel camera receiver handles analogue and digital transmitters simultaneously.

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MENA broadcasters lauded at ASBU Radio & Television Festival

The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) organised the 19th edition of the Arab Radio and Television Festival last month in Tunis, as the first event at the newly opened Tunis Cultural Centre. The annual festival, which was bigger than previous editions, was organised in cooperation with the Tunisian Radio and Tunisian Television Establishments and in partnership with Arabsat. This year’s agenda also saw a special focus on Saudi Arabia, with the Kingdom having opened up its doors to media and entertainment.

The gala opening ceremony was provided by the Cultural Minister of Tunisia, accompanied by Abderrahim Sulaiman, Director General of ASBU, and other dignitaries in attendance. The four-day festival hosted ASBU’s partners from the MENA region and global suppliers, with a busy exhibition floor and a series of seminars and workshops showcasing the latest technological developments in the media industry.

The festival concluded with an awards ceremony recognising achievements in television and radio, among other media sectors. For interactive radio programmes, Bahrain Radio and Tunisian Radio walked away with top honours. The prizes for the best documentaries on the Palestinian cause went to NMA, Egypt (Madinet Assafat) and Emirates FM/ Abu Dhabi Radio Network (Sanjeevies Youmman). For the Novoscat category, Tunisian Radio (Nachrat Anbaâ AdbHol) got the top honours, with the second prize going to Abu Dhabi Radio (UAE) (Nachrat Al Inasat Al Ais).

In the television category, Iraq Media Network was judged the best in the News Report category. The Sulhante of Omen got top honours in the Talk Show category. Algerian Public TV won in both the entertainment/evening shows and kids’ programmes. SNRT from Morocco received the top prize for the best social and comedy series. A Kuwait TV documentary titled Gold Threads was judged the best in terms of supporting the Palestinian cause. Prior to the closing ceremony, Saudi Arabian films were screened in line with the special focus of the festival on the Kingdom.

B4U ME introduces drama series on B4U Plus

B4U Plus, which has previously featured only movies and other variety entertainment programming for its Middle East viewers, has recently launched three drama series from Pakistan on the channel. The three series include Nayab, a love triangle; Akeli Reh Gai Main, the story of a young female protagonist, who braves many challenges; and Whahm, a horror show.

Speaking to BroadcastPro Middle East, Zeeshan Sajid Amin, Business Head of B4U MENA said; “B4U Plus was one of the first free-to-air general entertainment channels (GEC) to target the South Asian audience in the Middle East. At present, we are rated as the 2 Asian channel among female viewers in the 25-44 age bracket, according to IPSOS. This age bracket is the core target audience within the GEC business.”

So far, the channel has showcased a mix of classic and new movie releases, cooking and reality shows, among others. The addition of drama series and local productions will make the channel more complete, Amin said. “We are also looking at creating a local series with local talent soon,” Amin added.

Arab Format Lab’s first TV drama premiers on Abu Dhabi TV

The first TV drama from Arab Format Lab, a content developer, producer and distributor with offices in Dubai, Cairo and Jeddah, premiered on Abu Dhabi TV last month. The series is an Arabic adaptation of teen drama Red Band Society, an American medical comedy-drama that aired on Fox for the 2014-15 American TV season.
Mubadala to sell EMI stakes to Sony for $4.75bn

Mubadala Investment Company, a fund of Abu Dhabi, has announced the sale of its consortium’s 60% equity interest in EMI Music Publishing to Sony Corporation at an enterprise value of $4.75 billion. Over the past six years, Mubadala Capital – the financial investment arm of Mubadala – and Sony have worked together as partners to create value alongside Sony/ATV, Sony’s music publishing arm. Sony/ATV has been administering the EMI Music Publishing catalogue’s legacy of iconic writers and artists including the Motown catalogue, and along with the consortium, the company has been re-investing in existing writer relationships and growing the catalogue by signing new writers on a 50/50 basis. These actions, coupled with the global rise of streaming and paid streaming services, have led to an appreciation in value of the EMI Music Publishing catalogue as millions of new consumers have been provided access to innovative distribution channels. The original transaction and investor consortium that partnered with Sony and the Michael Jackson Estate to acquire EMI Music Publishing from a wholly-owned subsidiary of Citigroup Inc. was sourced and assembled by Mubadala Capital’s private equity business, which has controlled and managed EMI Music Publishing on behalf of Mubadala and other third-party investors since 2012.

Globecomm to transmit Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa in MENA

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) awarded a five-year contract to Globecomm to provide satellite transponder, teleport and terrestrial fibre services for Middle East Broadcasting Network’s (MEB) Alhurra channel. Globecomm will facilitate the transmission of MEB’s Alhurra TV HD and SD video and Radio Sawa audio content to the MENA region. This is the first project awarded by the BBG to Globecomm for turnkey satellite and terrestrial-based broadcast services. It is also Globecomm’s first deployment on the new $1.5bn ESA Complex Commercial SATCOM Solutions (CSS) IDIQ contract. The content will be delivered via satellite to more than 58m DTH users and multiple rebroadcasting stations across the region.

Image Nation and O3 Productions to co-produce Saudi films

O3 Productions, the drama and film production arm of MBC Group and Image Nation Abu Dhabi, has announced a new partnership to co-finance and co-produce a slate of Saudi films for local, regional and international audiences. Although specific details of the new five feature projects are under wraps, genres are likely to include action, thriller, real-life drama and comedy. Projects will aim to film in Saudi Arabia and use Saudi talent in front of and behind the camera. Development has begun on all projects, with production set to commence in 2019. This new deal comes in the wake of the first cinemas in two generations opening in Saudi Arabia following the lifting of the 35-year-old ban on cinema halls.

Canare’s Middle East operations in full swing

Japanese cable specialist Canare has opened a new office in Dubai Airport Province (DAPSA) Industrial Park to support the growing needs of the MENA market. The office is headed by Momen Nabil, GM of Canare Middle East FZCO. The company is a well-known supplier of electronic cables, connectors, cable assemblies and patch panels for the broadcast, audio and video markets. “We felt we needed a subsidiary company in Dubai because we have businesses in Egypt as well as Africa, and needed to support our business plans there,” Nabil told BroadcastPro ME. “In addition, we also address other markets including Pakistan, Turkey and some of the CIS countries from here. Canare has eight subsidiary companies in the world and our office in Dubai is one of them. 80% of our line-up is available as part of our inventory in Dubai.”

Emirati filmmaker rebrands and launches studio

Nayla Al Khaja, an Emirati filmmaker and CEO of Nayla Al Khaja Films LLC (NAKF), made recent announcements on the eve of the opening of the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, including the rebranding of her company, which is now known as D-Seven Motion Pictures and the launch of her Creative Studio at Sidra Tower, Dubai. Al Khaja also announced that she has been chosen to pitch her first feature film to a major film company in the UAE, to help launch new projects under the supervision of an experienced team and a network of channel finance and co-produce the drama and film company is a well-known supplier of electronic cables, connectors, cable assemblies and patch panels for the broadcast, audio and video markets. “We felt we needed a subsidiary company in Dubai because we have businesses in Egypt as well as Africa, and needed to support our business plans there,” Nabil told BroadcastPro ME. “In addition, we also address other markets including Pakistan, Turkey and some of the CIS countries from here. Canare has eight subsidiary companies in the world and our office in Dubai is one of them. 80% of our line-up is available as part of our inventory in Dubai.”

Fourth episode of YallaFeed’s live MENA Twitter show attracts 1m viewers

YallaFeed, a STEP Group platform for Arab millennials, which partnered with Twitter to launch their first live MENA show #HawanaZen attracted 1m viewers to its fourth episode, which hosted Egyptian actor Mohamed Henudy as its celebrity guest. The two-hour evening show, which is approximately 20 minutes long, attracted 460,000 viewers to its first episode, 390,000 to its second, 410,000 to its third and a whopping 1m to its most recent episode. The show focuses on what’s happening in the Arab world, especially during Ramadan. It is hosted by two content creators, Abdullah and Noor Alkhaja. (Aboud and Noor), who are identical twins. Elaborating on the format, Bahaa Moussalli, Co-founder and CMO of STEP Group, told BroadcastPro. “We’re taking a decades-old TV format and re-interpreting it into today’s social news entertainment. The show airs post-primetime TV and pre-Suhoor during Ramadan, when people are relaxing and browsing on their phones to see what’s happening. The show has two segments. The first segment has a theme and our hosts offer funny insights and take on the social news of the day and what is trending on Twitter. They also comment on the popular TV dramas during Ramadan. We have a reporter on the ground in Jeddah. In the second segment, we have a guest with whom the hosts play a game. Guests are not necessarily celebrities; we are number-agnostic. #HawanaZen is being produced by YallaFeed with support from Hollywood-based production company, Propagate.” Describing the show, Nayla Ibrahim, Director Media Partnerships, MENA, Twitter said: “We have been looking at live content for the past two years, with major deals already signed with organisations such as Fox Sports, major league soccer and more recently with Disney, NBC and Vacom, among others. We have been working with STEP Group for some time helping them monetise their video content. With people consuming live feeds in a big way given the success of the likes of BuzzFeed’s morning show, it made sense for us to bring the current social conversations among Arab millennials in a curated live stream format.”

UAE’s NMK Electronics bags award at Shure summit

Shure MEASA recently hosted a summit and awards ceremony for its distributors across the region at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai, at which the UAE-based NMK Electronics was recognised as Distributor of the Year. The company has four physical offices in the region and a network of channel partners spanning more than 30 years. The NMK team received the award from Shure representatives. The summit and awards ceremony for Shure MEASA was held at Madinat Jumeirah in Dubai, at which the UAE-based NMK Electronics was recognised as Distributor of the Year. The company has four physical offices in the region and a network of channel partners spanning more than 30 years. The NMK team received the award from Shure representatives. The NMK team received the award from Shure representatives.
Uganda’s NBS Radio deploys Lawo crystal

Hamza N’Mbago, Chairman of NBS Radio 89.4FM, stated: “The installation of the Lawo crystal IP audio broadcast console strengthens our leading position within the Ugandan radio broadcast landscape. The integration of this technology enables us to advance our workflows, making our radio production faster and more efficient – and the user-friendliness of the crystal console allows our operators to concentrate on their work while doing their radio shows.”

The crystal console, the release stated, offers a cost-effective point of entry into the Lawo world of mixing, with crystal, RAVENNA/ARSC7 compatibility is available. The crystal mixing console comes with YaTool, a touchscreen-optimised PC software.

PlayBox Technology’s AirBox Neo boosts workflows at Ghana’s Citi TV

PlayBox Technology has announced the completion of a major project for Ghana’s Citi TV by systems integration partner TV & Communication Systems (TVC) in cooperation with Vision in Motion. The project encompasses the design and integration of two live production studios, programmes storage and media asset management, fully tested and commissioned at the broadcaster’s headquarters in Accra. At the heart of the installation is a fully automated broadcast playout system centre on AirBox Neo.

“Key parameters for Citi TV were the need for reliability, operational efficiency and future-proof expandability,” said TVC’s Televison and Communications Systems Manager Andrej Brickij. “Neo allows the channel’s staff to precalculate all content and interstitials for fully automated playout while retaining the freedom to switch into live broadcasting mode whenever they choose. Neo is also highly space-efficient and therefore easy to accommodate in often crowded apparatus rooms. The system we have produced for Citi TV includes a PlayBox Technology DataBox Neo server with a 32-terabyte network-attached storage archive including RAID5 protection. This provides instantaneous access to more than 20,000 records simultaneously. It is being used to hold media files ranging from stills and production clips to complete programmes. Each file can be classified by characteristics such as type, category, keyword, credit and format. This allows tasks such as logo overlay, content storage and retrieval and playlist construction to be simplified or completely automated. Archived content can be easily accessed using multi-profile search simultaneously as well as multi-criteria filtering.”

Commenting on the upgrade, PlayBox Technology CEO Pavlin Rahnev said: “African broadcasters are investing in HD services with increasing confidence, reflecting very strong sales of HD displays for home TV viewing. “The AirBox Neo platform also gives channel managers the option to introduce terrestrial, satellite-based or online UHD services when they consider the market is ready.”

Sennheiser’s evolution series comes to Middle East

The region gets its first look at the evolution wireless G4 series of wireless mic and in-ear monitoring systems at events recently conducted by Sennheiser in the UAE and Kenya. The seminars in Dubai, hosted by Sennheiser’s long-standing UAE distributor Venutech, centred around the company’s audio-for-business solution range, while in Kenya the event was a more technical approach, with detailed workshops covering all aspects of wireless audio capture.

Introducing the world’s most advanced all in one Ultra HD live production switcher!

ATEM Television Studio Pro 4K combines a professional broadcast hardware control panel with a powerful 8 input 12G-SDI switcher for working with all HD and Ultra HD formats up to 2160p59.94. Each 12G-SDI input is fully independent and features built-in standards converters so you can cleanly switch between different input formats and frame rates. That means all inputs are automatically converted to the correct program output format!”

You also get an advanced Fairlight audio mixer with EQ and dynamics, an ATEM Advanced Chroma Keyer, Ultra HD multiview, extra aux and 8 12G-SDI program outputs, analog audio inputs, built in talkback, two flash based media players, dozens of creative transitions, a DVE for effects and much more!
Qligent and GatesAir team up in Ethiopia

Omantel upgrades with Imagine Comms’ Selenio

Calrec appoints International Sales Manager

Intigral launches TV app, plans new box roll-out with STC in July

Jawwy TV to host Starz Play content in three-year deal

Lynx Technik expands EMEA sales team

Qligent has partnered with GatesAir to roll out a QoS/QoE monitoring and compliance verification platform for Ethiopia’s second-generation DVB-T2 network. The comprehensive deployment of GatesAir’s StreamAssure solution will allow operators to access detailed performance data and compliance recordings from 20 transmitter sites at central and regional headends, without the need for complex and expensive hardware.

The StreamAssure deployment in Ethiopia will cover nine monitoring points at each transmitter site, with all performance data and compliance recordings accessible on local dashboards. Using StreamAssure’s multiviewer at the central headend and 11 regional monitoring facilities, operators can monitor performance live, and access recorded files, to understand baseline performance and establish long-term trend analysis. StreamAssure also automates content monitoring and compliance logging to strengthen visibility into proof of air and content quality.

Rich Redmond, Chief Product Officer for GatesAir, stated that StreamAssure’s scalable footprint will enable simple expansion to new transmitter sites, with Qligent’s networked intelligence also enabling simple migration to a full cloud-based monitoring platform via a simple software upgrade.

Last month, Dubai-based Intigral announced the launch of Jawwy TV, its OTT streaming service. Alongside that, Intigral, a wholly owned subsidiary of Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC), has also designed a new box to be rolled out in July 2018. The new HomeBox, which has an integrated OTT element, will feature all of STC’s premium content including the Saudi Football League, to which the telco secured the exclusive broadcast rights for the next ten years.

HomeBox will initially be available only through the telco operator, although it will eventually be available for direct sale to customers in the future. Explaining the new launches, Intigral’s CEO Hamoud Al Rumayan said: "We have two different products. The full version is our HomeBox, which we will launch in July along with STC. On this box, we have both FTA and encrypted content. A basic bouquet is available, and subscribers can upgrade based on their requirement.

“The other product is a TV app which will cater to the whole MENA region, although at this time it is only available in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman. Once you register on our website, you can download the Jawwy TV app from Google Play or the App Store. This app allows you to see the content on both the mobile and the tablet, with no possibility of mirroring to the big screen.”

For a monthly subscription fee of $8, Jawwy TV boasts more than 7,000 assets thanks to Intigral’s partnerships with Wide Khaleeji, Blu TV, Starz Play and OSN, among others. While HomeBox will have the entire Starz Play collection, a lite version will be available on Jawwy TV. The platform will also stream highlights from Saudi Football League matches.

“Intigral’s aim is to make Jawwy the MENA region’s best OTT platform and we are exploring partnerships with numerous platforms including Shahid, in addition to creating our own content and acquiring Arabic content,” commented Tony Saab, VP of Products & Content, Intigral.

“Our USP is our original Arabic content and the Saudi Premier League. We have a team of all the five major studios on Jawwy TV, including content from Bollywood. We have our own drama productions and will have 900 to 1,000 new hours a year. We aim to have our own productions and co-productions, starting July,” he added.

Matthias Gueckel, Managing Director ME and S. Asia, Imagine Communications with Said Abdullah Al Ajmi, VP of Operations, Omantel. The Selenio MCP solution’s support for backbone and IP protocols enables Omantel to use a single device for both SDI and MPEG-2 transport streams on the broadcaster side. Signals are encoded or transcoded as needed for cost-optimising the Omantel fibre network, while helping to ensure resilience through redundant paths.

In addition to feeding all terrestrial transmitters in Oman, the telco’s network provides contribution circuits for live broadcasts, such as sports and major public events, to the broadcasting centre. This ensures a reliable solution while reducing operational costs typical of traditional link vehicles from remote areas.

Omantel leverages Selenio MCP to operate a network linking 55 sites over dedicated fibre, providing HD contribution and distribution services to studios and transmission centres across the country. The same platform also supports backhaul operations for remote productions, including sports and national events.

The Selenio MCP solution’s support for broadband and IP protocols enables Omantel to use a single device for both SDI and MPEG-2 transport streams on the broadcaster side. Signals are encoded or transcoded as needed for cost-optimising
iflix sets up Cairo hub, partners with Vodafone

iflix has set up a new regional centre in Cairo while also partnering with Vodafone in Egypt to offer the telco’s subscribers access to the streaming service for $0.06 a day. The firm is looking to tap into Egypt’s large reservoir of content by establishing a hub in Cairo. With this new regional headquarters bringing together regional marketing, content and business development teams, iflix is looking to expand its business in Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

Speaking about the partnership, John Saad, CEO of iflix MENA, said: “Egypt is the nerve centre of culture and creativity in the region. We are thrilled to set up our new regional head office here and partner with Vodafone Egypt, the country’s leading telecommunication service provider, to make our service available to tens of millions of customers across the country.”

Sony Pictures Television teams up with Kenyan producer

Sony Pictures Television (SPT) has signed a development deal with African producer ‘Quite Bright Films Lifestyle (QBLF) for a series of cookery shows. Formed by Creative Director Daniel Prior and Director Kiran Jethwa, QBLF’s reported aim is to become the region’s leading producer in factual and lifestyle entertainment. Jethwa is a chef, restaurateur and TV presenter who has previously made cookery adventure shows, including “The Fearless Chef for National Geographic and Extreme Foods on Channel 4. SPT will distribute the shows that will emerge from the partnership, the release stated.

India’s T-Series appoints exclusive GCC licensor

Indian music label T-Series has authorised Dubai-based SAM Events Management for the licensing of master sound recordings and audio-visual songs in its music catalogue for GCC countries. SAM Events Management will have the exclusive rights to collect royalties and the authority to take civil and/or criminal action against any infringement of the T-Series music and video catalogue in the GCC.

SPT will distribute the catalogue in the Middle East region. The distribution agreement with SPT will be for an initial period of two years. The catalogue will include all T-Series music and video content, excluding all mobile and digital platforms which T-Series will continue to licence directly.

RTS Intercoms unveils ODIN digital matrix at regional event

RTS Intercoms officially unveiled the ODIN OMNEO digital matrix to MENA broadcast professionals at a launch event held in Dubai. Sanjay Kumar, Sales Manager, RTS Intercoms MEA, revealed that the 16-port ODIN OMNEO digital matrix, part of RTS’ development of its IP-based intercom product line. While the product is relevant in several verticals, Anderson stated that in the broadcast market ODIN is aimed at both OB trucks and TV studio control rooms, where space is at a premium.

Sony Pictures Television’s Shawn Anderson, Head of Product Management for RTS Intercoms, gave a detailed demonstration of the ODIN OMNEO digital matrix, part of RTS’ development of its IP-based intercom product line. While the product is relevant in several verticals, Anderson stated that in the broadcast market ODIN is aimed at both OB trucks and TV studio control rooms, where space is at a premium.
Akkad’s The Message to screen in GCC after 4K restoration

Trancas International and Frent Row Filmed Entertainment have announced that Moustapha Akkad’s masterpiece The Message that underwent 4K restoration will be screened during the Eid Al-Adha holiday starting on June 14, 2018. The Oscar nominated film from producer/director Moustapha Akkad chronicles the life and times of Prophet Muhammad and serves as an introduction to early Islamic history.

New KSA TV channel to cater to youth

Saudi Arabia launched a new TV channel, SBC, on the first day of Ramadan for young viewers and to project a modern image beyond the Kingdom’s borders. “This is a general channel that seeks to attract the new generation of Saudis,” said Saleh Bin Matar, CEO of the General Culture Authority, on the sidelines of the launch ceremony. “We’re developing guidelines on how to get even higher than 35%. That will be for all content consumed in Saudi Arabia,” commented Matar. Consumers have an average of 94% of the content will be geared towards the 15-35-year-olds.

Illuminated, Saudi Arabia ink deal at Cannes

Illuminated and Saudi Arabia’s General Culture Authority have signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly seek opportunities to identify and develop local Illuminated formats. The GCA and Illuminated will look for opportunities to help Saudi studios and directors release films with cross-border appeal and eventually tap Illuminated’s global distribution platform to export their films to non-Arab markets. Earlier this year, Illuminated opened its first commercial multiplex theatre in partnership with Vox Cinemas in Riyadh. The company expects to build 15-25 theatres in Saudi over the coming years.

Saudi content creator Telfaz11 wins $9m in funding

Telfaz11, a Saudi digital media company with 200,000 subscribers in its network, said it has received $9m in funding from lead investor Saudi Technology Ventures (STV). The investment will be used by the company to build capacity, accelerate revenues and scale operations. Listed among the top 50 start-ups in KSA, the company recently screened short films from the Saudi Film Council initiative at Cannes.

Pulse 95, Sharjah’s first English language radio station opens

Pulse 95 Radio, Sharjah’s first English language radio station opened on air last month. At a pre-launch event held at Al Majaz Amphitheatre off Sharjah’s corniche, the station’s presenters walked the audience through the various programmes the station will air including The Morning Majlis, Musafir in the City and Yalla Home. Inaugurating the first show on-air was guest of honor Anwar bin Ahmed Al Qasimi, Chairman of Sharjah Media Council (SMC) who took on-air questions from the presenters. The team includes Emirati, Arab, and international presenters. Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, on the sidelines of the launch, Head of the station, Mohammed Yanez said: “We want to promote Sharjah at every level – for investment, tourism as well as to live and work here. This is one of the first English radio stations that has a mix of Arabic and other nationalities as presenters. We already have rich content drawn from interviews with day people on the streets, taxi drivers, to hospital staff and individuals from other walks of life. As for music, we will play covers which make us unique including big hits from the 50s to the present day. Commenting on the target audience, he elaborated: “We may be targeting audiences above 30, but we will also play the current top-40 hits. So it will appeal to a 15-year-old as well.” With the theme ‘The Heart of Sharjah’, Pulse 95 is described as “a fun, positive, feel-good station” that can be accessed on 95 FM or from the Sharjah Media Corporation’s (SMC) web and mobile application.

KSA offers 35% rebate for global productions

Saudi Arabia will offer staff competition to twofour54 Abu Dhabi with its announcement of a number of new incentives designed to attract international film productions to the Kingdom. A 35% rebate or even higher for all international productions and 50% funding for all Saudi talent hired on such productions was announced by Ahmad Al Maziad, CEO of the General Culture Authority, on the sidelines of the 71st Cannes Film Festival last month.

“We’re developing guidelines on how to get even higher than 35%. That will be for all content consumed in Saudi Arabia,” commented Maziad at a press conference held at Cannes, adding that the General Culture Authority will fund 50% of all money spent on Saudi talent. With the rebates, Saudi Arabia hopes to open up new production markets while also developing the Kingdom’s own talent pool. Maziad added that once the Kingdom attracts more productions, other related services and infrastructural developments will also evolve.

Maziad also announced a national grant programme “aimed at developing Saudi talent to help them produce movies in Saudi Arabia.’ The programme will be open to Saudi nationals who produce or post-produce content in the Kingdom and meet eligibility criteria, the details of which “will be shared shortly on our website” according to Maziad.

A number of training programmes and multi-week summer camps will take place in Saudi Arabia. Los Angeles and Paris through education partners, covering the full spectrum of skills within filmmaking, including directing, editing, screenwriting, sound design, VR/AR and 2D/3D animation.

Vuclip to provide Viu to Omantel customers

VOD service provider Vuclip has partnered with Omantel to offer Viu, Vuclip’s OTT video service, to the telco’s mobile customers across the country. The partnership comes as part of Viu’s expansion into the Middle East market. Through this association, Omantel will provide its mobile customers access to localised regional and local premium TV shows, movies and Viu Originals through the Viu app on mobile devices for 50 BHD per month. The video content is tailored for both local and expat customers and is available in several languages including Arabic, Hindi, English and Tagalog.
From cross-border criminals to eager teenagers wanting to access the latest content by any means, BroadcastPro’s inaugural Anti-Piracy Conference addressed the multi-dimensional nature of the MENA piracy problem.

The CEOs were candid about the region’s ambivalent attitudes towards piracy. Technology providers outlined their successes, but admitted that measures need to be implemented consistently; otherwise, the problem merely gets displaced from region to region. The lawyers urged the industry not to be discouraged by the cost and length of litigation.

The three panel discussions at the inaugural Anti-Piracy Conference held on May 2 at Dubai’s Ritz-Carlton Hotel underscored the need for a collaborative, multi-faceted approach towards combating piracy. It also called for regulators to play a more active role to check piracy.

The half-day conference organised by BroadcastPro ME played host to more than 120 of the region’s broadcasters, satellite operators, telcos and solution providers. Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, delegates believed that the views expressed were candid and eye-opening, and a useful platform for discussing the sensitive issue of piracy in the region.

Delegates were also given an exclusive report on anti-piracy by MUSO. The event drew attendees from the wider region. Nigel Rosette from a Seychelles-based IPTV provider, for instance, commented that the rampant piracy in his island nation drew him to attend this conference.

Raz Islam, Managing Director of CPI Trade Media, publisher of BroadcastPro ME, added: “We are encouraged by the turnout and the quality of debates at the conference, and we hope to make this a regular annual feature.”
CEOs CALL FOR MORE REGULATION

From lax enforcement in the region to big perpetrators in Silicon Valley, CEOs of MENA-based broadcasters offered a candid breakdown of the menace of piracy at BroadcastPro ME’s inaugural Anti-Piracy Conference held on May 2 at the Ritz-Carlton in Dubai.

The Middle East is notorious for its piracy, but also for not having enough regulation in place to protect the media business. A 2017 report from MUSO, for instance, points out that the UAE is ranked “29 in the world for the volume of TV piracy consumed, seeing a total of 750.90 million visits to all piracy sites in 2017”.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have even worse records. Over the last couple of years, the MENA Anti-Piracy Coalition, which launched in 2014, has had a number of successes in closing down pirate channels thanks to close collaboration between partners, which mainly comprise broadcasters, satellite operators, production and distribution companies, telcos and more recently anti-piracy firms. The broadcasters have put their legal teams to work, undertakes significant investigation in most cases and spent time, money and effort to bring pirate to book.

But is it enough? At BroadcastPro Middle East’s inaugural anti-piracy conference, the CEO panel, moderated by Christophe Firth, Principal at AT Kearney Middle East, was unified in its call for regulation to up its game in the MENA region.

Sam Barnett, CEO of MBC Group, pointed out that regulation is currently the single biggest missing element in the fight against piracy.

“Today, we can take down a site in three to six weeks, which is good. The challenge is it takes them only an hour to return with another name. We now need the support of regulators to ensure they stay down… People are very keen on building media cities, studios and infrastructure which supports the production and development of media assets, but without the protection of those assets, you are limiting the development of what should be a vibrant and successful media industry in the Middle East,” Barnett said.

Martin Stewart, CEO of OSN, agreed, reiterating that “the tolerance of piracy in this region is damaging to everyone” and must be curtailed “in order to have a successful media sector”. He reiterated the economic implications in terms of the jobs at risk from online piracy.

“If more is not done through regulation and empowering telcos to take down sites by putting pressure on rights holders and international players like Google, none of the ambitions that are being sought in various documents will be realised.”

Mukund Cairae, CEO of Zee Middle East, asked why the same measures put in place to curtail traffic violations couldn’t be enforced where content rights are concerned.

“Pay TV for us as an Asian player should be four to five times the price that they are willing to pay. As the only CEO representing an exclusive OTT platform, Firth asked, and educating unassured users, and questioned whether they are doing enough to address unassured users.

As the only CEO representing an exclusive OTT platform, Firth asked, if the streaming service was doing enough with its packages and pricing to make illegal services irrelevant. While agreeing that packages tailored to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the region served as a differentiator and acknowledged the success stories of the anti-piracy coalition, Sheik queried why the studios, Google and Apple did not share the burden of curtailing piracy along with telcos, satellite operators and broadcasters, as most people tend to download content from the internet. He pointed out that legal platforms like Starz Play had to provide “hooks of information” to the likes of Google and Apple to prove they had the rights to the content they have paid for, while studios turn a blind eye to their content being downloaded illegally on apps available through those platforms.

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“We are taking down half a million links every quarter and they are done pretty quickly. We put fingerprints on our content, features or price that is no legal service available with heaps of information to the likes of Google and Apple to prove they had the rights to the content they have paid for, while studios turn a blind eye to their content being downloaded illegally on apps available through those platforms. Their latest movies are being pirated on Apple apps that are available through these platforms.

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Barnett stopped in at this point to add that “enforcement should be on the supply side and not on the demand”.

Firth introduced the notion that “the tolerance of piracy in this region is damaging to everyone” and must be curtailed “in order to have a successful media sector”. He reiterated the economic implications in terms of the jobs at risk from online piracy.

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available globally. I think the Googles and Apples and Facebooks of the world must be a part of this anti-piracy effort, because the latest movies and shows that are being pirated online and being shown on apps are downloaded illegally from their stores. Why are the studios and Hollywood not doing anything about that? Why should regulators and telcos alone bear this burden? Barnett agreed that packaging content for local consumers certainly helped make a regional broadcaster’s bouquet more attractive than illegal alternatives. He pointed out that today’s kids are not going to websites to download content, but “to illegal apps that are easily available” on the internet.

“This is why regulation and cooperation with telcos is important. But it is equally important for the studios to work with Google and Apple to block these apps,” he reiterated.

Barnett took the opportunity to point out that MBC has also tried to block these apps, “to illegal apps that are downloaded illegally from these sites by putting pressure on rights holders and international players like Google, none of them want the burden to curtail piracy as "they are the biggest enablers of piracy". Barnett agreed that packaging content for local consumers certainly helped make a regional broadcaster’s bouquet more attractive than illegal alternatives. He pointed out that today’s kids are not going to websites to download content, but “to illegal apps that are easily available” on the internet.

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Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN

kids’ VOD offering, which he says will be particularly attractive to parents concerned about their children downloading pirated content which may also have content deemed unsafe. “We package our content for local values. If you watch a movie with your family, you won’t be embarrassed. That’s a value-add, because we chop out what’s embarrassing. You don’t get that on the pirate sites. People may watch pirated content, but they are often concerned about what content their kids can watch, and on a pirated site, nothing is censored. We have launched Goboz, which is our kids’ VOD, and I suspect that people who download movies for themselves will be much more willing to pay money for Goboz so they can guarantee that what their children are watching is safe,” commented Barnett.

He cited a recent example, where what looked like a harmless version of Peppa Pig on YouTube had some objectionable content in the middle of the video, whereas packages from legitimate sources would protect children from such material. OSN’s Stewart pointed out that the pay TV network had a similar discussion with the studios, but it was futile. He also decried how a lot of the premium content that OSN pays hundreds of thousands of dollars for turns up on YouTube and “then we have to go through the same tortuous process of taking them down, and it takes weeks.” Stewart brought the discussion back to regulation, raising the very valid point that if certain videos VOD services and the like have been blocked effectively in this region and never show up on YouTube or Google, then it’s evident that such content can be blocked but is being overlooked because regulators don’t view content piracy as a serious criminal offence.

“It’s just a matter of will. If you take it seriously and think it is important to protect intellectual property and genuinely want the media sector to properly flourish, you can make it happen. You don’t make it happen at present because you don’t think it’s important,” he commented.

Cairae explained that an Indian anti-piracy coalition seems to be successfully taking down 100,000 links every month.

“In the last four months, the content from main broadcasters doesn’t seem to be available on those illegal sites anymore. That means a concentrated effort to speak to Google, Facebook and Apple has worked for them.” Barnett stated that MBC has had a lot of success with YouTube, “where
we are taking down half a million links every quarter and they are done pretty quickly. We put fingerprints on our legal content and it disappears, and we are in discussions to have them removed from Google search and that has been effective."

The issue, he pointed out, is new entities coming to the region and having to start a fresh dialogue with them and waste another two to three years in the process.

"It would really help if the regulators have that conversation with them. Then it is less about us individually trying to persuade big companies to obey the law, and it would be a much quicker and more effective way of doing it."

The panel also derided the sale of Kodi and similar illegal boxes that can easily be bought on shopping sites in the region. Stewart mentioned at this point that while regulation and customer experience, including the price and the packaging designed for a safe experience, are relevant, awareness and education are extremely important.

"Technology, which in the past was used now to track and monitor pirates. Firth questioned if enough is being done by law enforcement agencies to contain this. "Government have to decide what their priorities are. Most of the countries that we operate in say they want to support the media sector and places like the UAE are doing this, but if BeoutQ is able to go into countries and steal huge amounts of the content, that ultimately weakens the sector," Barnett said, but he also added that the coalition has had many success stories through collaboration.

"Awareness goes a huge way. It’s not just about the consumer. The success of our coalition was that we pulled the broadcasters and the satellite operators together and were able to show them that there were about 75 operators and satellite distributors were told that they were carrying some pirate channels, the vast majority stopped doing it. That’s how we got these channels taken down. But there are operators who refuse to acknowledge that at the moment." Barnett cited the example of MX1, a new entry into the MENA market, which is selling capacity to some channels identified as allegedly running illegal content.

"They have 8-12 pirate channels and we sent them notices saying some of the channels on their platform are pirating content, but they say it has nothing to do with them because they are just providing a platform.

"That does not work when you are selling stolen goods. I doubt anyone wants to be dealing with organised crime and taking cash from pirates. We have a challenge to communicate that to the executaries at the company. I'm sure that once they understand it, they will also clamp down as did the rest of the satellite market. That is the point about awareness and ultimately, people will try to make it better."

"That is where the content is the basic difference between music and video. When the length of the content is 45 minutes broken up into nine tracks, it is pretty short. The amount of money you put into creating that content is a fraction of what it takes to create a whole series of Arabic, Western or Indian content. So will video move the way music did? It is highly unlikely, considering the capital required to create that amount of video. Short-form videos are relatively inexpensive to produce, but if you have 30 episodes and three seasons, the game changes."

Firth then queried if set-top-box piracy was still relevant today or was diminishing in importance as compared to piracy on streaming services. Stewart pointed out that working with good encryption providers has always been vitally important.

"If it's a multi-faceted fight, we are going further with fingerprinting and watermarking. Once we track down boxes that are being used for illegal distribution, they can be killed remotely. All of us may have a predilection to one part of the problem, but together we need to ensure that we address all forms of piracy."

Firth deftly brought the discussion to the music industry, commenting that this sector seems to have cracked the code to fighting piracy and making money.

"2018 is the fourth year in a row that the music sector is growing as a whole. That hasn’t happened since the 1990s. After many years focusing their efforts on litigation and other measures to fight piracy, music label executives shifted their efforts to refining themselves and their business models for the new reality of the music sector, and have since been doing very well. But downstream companies distributing music locally have suffered as a result of these new business models. Is there a lesson here for the video sector? Are the content owners and downstream companies to obey the law, and it would be a much quicker and more effective way of doing it."

Sam Barnett, CED, MBC Group.

"Pay TV for us as an Asian player should be four to five times what it is today, and the reason it is not so is because people have this perceived demand that they should have 300 channels, even if they only watch four or five."

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"It would really help if the regulators have that conversation with them. Then it is less about us individually trying to persuade big companies to obey the law, and it would be a much quicker and more effective way of doing it."
be more positive in five years’ time.” Stewart said his greatest wish would be to see each country in the region hit their five- or 10-year vision. To do that, “they will need a vibrant media economy to be part of their overall success, so hopefully they will execute on what is in those documents”.

Cairae commented that there are proven successes with coalitions working and talking in one voice to regulators, and the combination of these with technology will definitely help beat the pirates. Sheikh reiterated that the issue of online streaming and piracy will not be resolved until it is addressed in Silicon Valley and Hollywood.

“Until these two entities do something about it, there is not much we can do about the problem. What we can do is deliver a safer user experience and package the content for regional audiences. But the online piracy debate needs to be addressed in the US and globally.”

A significant question from the audience was whether advertisers should also stay away from pirate sites. “Pirates are in this for the money, so are there any efforts to cut that cash flow?” an attendee asked.

While Cairae said search engines were cognisant of these issues and had started a new set of algorithms, other panellists said advertisers and digital media agencies should make a conscious effort to eliminate illegal panels from their list of platforms for advertising.

Sheikh left the crowd with a very pertinent but disconcerting issue at this point, commenting that the move from linear channels primarily to digital advertising took place because platforms supposedly had a more detailed understanding of the profile of their viewers.

“The whole idea with digital advertising was to control your message based on the profile of your audience. We were not getting that with linear. But now, there is so much secrecy around who your ads are reaching and what platforms and what publishers and what websites your ads are ending up on. I can’t say I can only advertise on these three websites. I don’t go to Google and say I want my ads only on these three publishers, because that’s not how it works. “The challenge we have is that algorithms and AI are being used to place these ads. So there is no human behind assessing whether a site is legal or not legal, and those are proprietary algorithms used by the Googles of the world. As long as those apps and websites exist, this is the reality of the business we have to deal with. “This is why I said this problem has to be addressed in Silicon Valley,” he reiterated. – Vijaya Cherian
In 2016, the administrator of a UAE-based website was charged with an illegal streaming of copyrighted content. The punishment included a $13,600 fine, six months in jail and deportation. While this is decisive action, the size of the problem facing content owners is enormous. According to estimates by the International Data Corporation, TV piracy – through the use of illegal set-top boxes (STBs), unauthorised VPN subscriptions and torrent downloads – costs a whopping $70bn in losses to content owners and rights holders across the MENA region every year.

The second panel discussion at the anti-piracy conference hosted by BroadcastPro ME was titled ‘Addressing Piracy and the remedies you would have as a content owner are much better than litigation, especially if you don’t have enough investigation and intelligence-gathering resources. Based on the strength of your case, you take the call.’

MacInnes then turned to Waleed Mahboub, Content Director at Diwan Videos, who said, “It will depend on a case-to-case basis,” said Verma. “Whether it is a subscriber who has pirated content, or a pirate IPTV service, or a trademark infringement, and so on. As a first step, we analyse where this piracy is coming from and then we work with our internal content protection and security team to gather as much evidence as possible, and subsequently we involve authorities and external counsel. “We can pinpoint the location of pirates in certain cases. Evidence needs to be simplified to be presented to authorities, and that is a challenge, but over time we have fine-tuned the process.”

“Whether it is a torrent site or the selling of illegal set-top boxes, we still try to present the case as an electronic crime.”

How do we do that? There must be some sort of electronic deal between the trader who sells the STB and the customer, by way of online subscriptions or online payments. That is enough for a case to be built as an electronic crime.”

The onus of gathering evidence is on the prosecution, Obeidat said. “Ours is always on the content owner. You have to prove that you are the owner and what you are attempting to prosecute is an infringement. Sometimes there are administrative remedies that are better than litigation, especially if you don’t have enough investigation and intelligence-gathering resources. Based on the strength of your case, you take the call.”

MacInnes then turned to Waleed Mahboub, Content Director at Diwan Videos, a Dubai- and Cairo-based multi-channel network (MCN) to stop advertisements to these sites, we cut their resources.”

According to a study in 2017 by the US-based Trustworthy Accountability Group (TAG), anti-piracy steps taken by the media production company. He asked him: “As a director of content, how attractive does mounting a legal case sound?”

“Frankly, it is a long process,” admitted Mahboub. “The best-case scenario is six months to hunt down pirates, accompanied by monetary loss for content owners and broadcasters. However, there is another factor to this piracy ecosystem. Torrent sites are being funded by advertising. I am sure advertisers are not aware as to where their brands are showing – it is a decision typically taken by a digital advertising agency based on traffic and CPM. This is another element in the fight against piracy that we can pursue. Big advertisers have legal departments, so they are easy to talk to. If we manage to stop advertisements to these sites, we cut their resources.”

Panellists agreed that the law in the region was in line with international standards but despite some good judgements, there needed to be a stronger element of deterrence in the penalties imposed.

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Investigation by private citizens is not permitted, even if your content is being pirated. You need the approval of authorities – you don’t want to be an accessory to a crime”

Omar Obeidat, Partner and Head of Intellectual Property, Al Tamimi & Co
"If we are able to stop advertisements to these [illegal] sites, we cut their resources"

Walied Mahboub, Content Director, Diwan Videos

an ongoing process because we need to keep up with the pirates.”

"Is the perception fair that IP laws in the region are not as advanced as they could be?" asked Machines.

"I would not blame the laws," Obeidat stressed, adding that they are in keeping with international agreements. Attendees at the conference had earlier raised the issue of lax enforcement and certain cultural issues where domestic copying in the Middle East is often justified in the light of “standing up to Western hegemony”.

Obeidat continued “Most countries in the region are signatories to international IP agreements that they signed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There are cultural issues, however. How do you speak to a judge who does not find this [copyright infringement] terribly wrong, although the law says it’s a crime? So the judge will rule the minimum, which could be a slap-on-the-wrist penalty ranging from $500 to $5,000.”

Obeidat admitted that the penalty was often small compared to the cost of litigation but reiterated that cost was not a primary concern when fighting pirates. Secundering that sentiment, Mahboub said “In matters of piracy, we should not look at it from the balance-sheet point of view. When I am trying to stop my content from being seen for free, it should not matter how much I pay for litigation.”

Obeidat stressed the need for deterrence while being creative in the battle against piracy. “We are looking at small-timers selling illegal STBs, we would advise an administrative approach. But if this is a major pirate that has a network, you would want to prosecute the individual or company as a criminal. We have seen this happen both in Kuwait and the UAE with removal of servers, confiscation of equipment and so on. We must prosecute the whole way and try to convey a message of deterrence that as an agent owner, we will not tolerate such infringement. We must craft the best route possible as well. While in Jordan, we have approached the National Library of Jordan, which is the legal deposit and copyright library for Jordan. We approach the Economic Department in Dubai at the outset rather than the CID.”

Building on Obeidat’s call to be creative in approaching the fight against piracy, Verma recounted some specific instances. “A lot of times the evidence is dynamic – it keeps changing and is often cross-border when ISPs are involved. With a torrent-based piracy case, we were able to present evidence in a simplified way and the case led to deportation, a fine of $55,000 (AED 200,000) and a six-month jail term. That case set the standard for us. It taught us as to how to approach the authorities, collect evidence and work as a team with them. There is a certain limitation imposed on us by law when it comes to investigating a crime, and that is why we make sure we work with external counsel. We have done this in the UAE and in Jordan.”

Obeidat warned against the industry taking an “I don’t want to bother” approach to legal cases saying the law does not develop on its own and needed litigation.

“Defining jurisdiction is a challenge”

Mahboub of Diwan Videos urged the industry to think laterally and monitor traffic on pirate websites for insights that will help in the acquisition of content.

"Our strategy has always been to try a case as an electronic crime, where jail terms are higher than for copyright crimes"

Omar Obeidat, Partner and Head of Intellectual Property, Al Tamims & Co

at times when you are looking at dynamic, cross-border evidence. Do we have any protections? Is that particular jurisdiction suitable for us? We need to consider all these aspects. With PTA-related piracy and internet piracy, the crime typically travels across multiple hands and borders. It does not mean we can’t get them, and that’s where industry forums that comprise different stakeholders play a role.”

At this juncture, MacInnes chose to remind the audience that pirates are often teens or even pre-teens. “Would you prosecute a 12-year-old?” he asked. The question inspired a number of creative options far removed from jail, deportation and confiscation of equipment. Obeidat spoke of the possibility of using ethical hackers to identify weak links in the content distribution chain and raised the issue of increasing awareness about the menace of piracy among the young. Mahboub questioned the windowing strategies adopted by the region’s broadcasters – the infamous time gap between the US premiere of popular television shows and their eventual broadcast in the region. Obeidat spoke of the possibility of using ethical hackers to identify weak links in the content distribution chain and raised the issue of increasing awareness about the menace of piracy among the young. Mahboub questioned the windowing strategies adopted by the region’s broadcasters – the infamous time gap between the US premiere of popular television shows and their eventual broadcast in the region. Obeidat spoke of the possibility of using ethical hackers to identify weak links in the content distribution chain and raised the issue of increasing awareness about the menace of piracy among the young. Mahboub questioned the windowing strategies adopted by the region’s broadcasters – the infamous time gap between the US premiere of popular television shows and their eventual broadcast in the region.

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other crimes such as pornography and so on. I agree with Aditya that there should be statutory damages awarded otherwise, content rights owners are not compensated for their losses and to make matters worse, pirates resume their activities because they are not afraid. The judiciary needs to understand that the ruling or verdict must result in deterrence."

Verma added: “When a judge presides over a court with nine hardened criminals awaiting trial, for instance, and one individual booked for an IP infringement, he could be mentally unprepared to provide equally harsh penalties on IP infringement as his perspective is influenced. Ideally, the government should ask the industry as to the problems we face and seek solutions from experts, and that could probably help in guiding the judges in terms of the interpretation of the law.”

As the panel discussion drew to a close, Mahboub urged the industry to think laterally and monitor pirate websites. Netflix famously adopts this not-so-new concept to track what is being illegally downloaded on BitTorrent and pirate sites, to work out what content they should be acquiring.

Drawing on the regional relevance of the strategy, Mahboub said: "If the source of piracy is a country where regulation is difficult, and these sites are accessible through VPNs, we will never be able to stop piracy 100% unless we convince these countries to criminalise pirates. Monitoring illegal websites for traffic offers insights that will help in the acquisition of content. This is especially helpful for those who do not have sufficient funds to acquire a wide range of content. By understanding what is trending, the window for the release of a title can be adjusted. The moment we see a ripped title, we can offer it at lower price points and eventually we discourage the trend of pirating content.”

Obeidat cautioned against any unilateral initiatives by the industry. "My advice is to involve the CID. Investigation by private citizens is not permitted, even if your content is being pirated. You need the approval of authorities – you don’t want to be an accessory to a crime.”

Lastly, to the suggestion that the MENA region needs specialist judges who understand IP, Obeidat said the move could backfire by creating silos of expertise. He observed: “I am all for the help of external counsel”

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Let there be Sky.

S360-C: SkyPanel on an immense scale
The final panel of the BroadcastPro Anti-Piracy Conference dealt with various strategies, both commercial and technical, that could be applied to fight piracy. Joining us for this discussion were a panel of seasoned professionals from different parts of the industry: Dr. Naser Refaat, CTO of Rotana Media Group; Petr Peterka, CTO of Verimatrix; and Mike Barley, Non-executive Chairman of UK-based anti-piracy firm FACT.

Alex Borland, Head of Media Sales EMEA at Ericsson, and technical, that could be applied to fight piracy.

"There are different aspects to anti-piracy technology. One is prevention. We use cryptography, conditional access and digital rights management to prevent the leakage of content to unauthorized users. The second step is the ability to trace the source of the content and forensic watermarking is a part of the solution for this. Finally, we have the ability to trace piracy in ways in which we could not in the past," Borland then asked Barley to relate some of his experiences in the UK, where he has had a lot of success fighting piracy as part of the Sky team, where he has worked for a long time alongside his role at FACT.

Barley agreed that "using technology is absolutely key to getting ahead of the pirates, and we have used it effectively over the years". He cited the example of two people in the UK who were sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for selling Kodi boxes during the Premier League season. "That was a good sentence. "We used technology and search tools to discover this information. We used search tools and went through 36 auction sites. The information was available across social media, Facebook, Twitter and the like, and we used keyword search terms. Then we harrowed that information and used it to make prosecution cases."

When asked if there was any need to prosecute a 14-year-old, based on a discussion in the previous panel, Barley agreed that there wasn’t. "When asked if there was any need to prosecute a 14-year-old, based on a discussion in the previous panel, Barley agreed that there wasn’t. "We operate a strategy in the UK which takes a multi-faceted approach, in that you either deter through public awareness or you engage with the advertisers, the payment providers, and disrupt the activities of the pirates. Of course, the last part is detection and prosecution and it only serves a purpose if it is executed at the right level. You want the prosecution to have the right impact so that people who read about it on social media should think, ‘I don’t want to go to prison, it is not worth it.’ It is that multi-faceted approach to piracy that is effective.’

He went on to add that for prosecutions to be effective, you need to have enough technology to gain as much information as possible about a case. "I’d like to see much more collaboration with using that information. In individual silos, all of us gather a lot of information but if we harnessed it together, it would be a lot more useful.”

Dr. Naser Refaat, CTO of Rotana, pointed out that the real problem lies elsewhere. He lamented the lack of a centralised registration centre where buyers could check the authenticity of the people selling content to them. "Egypt is the only country that has a Chema Chamber and issues a certificate should you want to buy and sell Egyptian films in the region. This certificate provides the buyer with some semblance of security,” he commented, adding that there is no contract authentication registration body in the MENA region for any produced drama, documentaries, music clips ownership or distribution rights.

He pointed out that in many instances, so-called pirates were unwitting victims who had bought content from someone who claimed to have the right to sell it. He went further to suggest that all players put an additional sum of money towards the cause so that telcos and satellite operators would be incentivised to be more proactive. "If I pay 100K per mega now, let’s make it 101K and ensure that everything is fingerprinted and watermarked, and not just our own content. If there is integration with the telcos and satellite operators in terms of paying to a central regulatory unit, it is likely we will meet with more success.”

He commented that if governments are unwilling to take a positive step, then one should go above them to the Arab League, as he and his team are doing now. "Now there are initiatives in Egypt with certain bodies of intelligence to start this union. Presently, if you want to buy a movie that Rotana owns, you go to the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce and pay $1,000, but if you go to the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce and pay $1,000, but that does not truly contribute to distribution rights management. Rather than paying that amount, pay the union an annual fee to host all media content ownerships and
"Egypt is the only country that has a Cinema Chamber and issues a certificate should you want to buy and sell Egyptian films in the region."

Dr Naser Refaat, CTO, Rotana Media Group

We had identified these individuals and we put together an evidence pack, supported by technical information. Then they bought some Kodi boxes from those guys. The courts in the UK understand that piracy is a crime and so will pass sentences of a certain length. You don’t prosecute just anybody. Sky worked to prosecute these two men because their criminal gain was to the tune of £1.8m.

Barley said prison sentences are effective in the fight against piracy. The idea is to convert people to buy the proper package. We had discussions about FACT and how they use it, understanding the devices the pirates are in this only for the money. Pirates are in this only for the money. Pirates will say no. The pirate will find an alternative mechanism. There is a deterrent factor is really important. The courts in the UK understand that piracy is a crime and they will pass sentences of a certain length. You don’t prosecute just anybody. Sky worked to prosecute these two men because their criminal gain was to the tune of £1.8m.

Barley added that unless the regulator takes piracy seriously, nothing will come of it, and that broadcasters depend on the underlying infrastructure, judicial support and the regulator to be effective in the fight against piracy.

Peterka stepped in at this point to state that if technology is used effectively and integrated correctly across all the points within a distribution chain, it would be possible to curtail piracy significantly.

"You have the technology today that reflects the deterrence factor is really important. Companies like Sky don’t say we are going to prosecute our end users. We are happy to front up that publicity, and they have worked over the years to get publicity around these types of cases. Generating that sort of publicity raises the awareness not only among the public, but among judges as well. Judges read the papers too. There are sentencing guidelines in the UK, so the judge would look at the tariff and the matrix, and then decide on the sentence. Then it has the right impact."

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PRO ANTI-PIRACY

Mike Barley, Non-Executive Chairman, FACT

“We operate a strategy in the UK which takes a multifaceted approach, in that you either deter through public awareness or you engage with the advertisers, the payment providers, and disrupt the activities of the pirates”

nukes an hour when the limit is 30. “Nobody is going to do anything about it. If that same attitude occurs within the audio-visual content space, we have real problems coming up, because we have a whole generation of people who think it is okay to stream illegal content. That has a massive impact on this industry, the creative industry and broadcast. It is about changing the mindsets of people, and you can only do this by raising awareness and using the media to a great extent to highlight the dangers of streaming content and visiting pirate websites.”

He added that a majority of pirate websites have some form of malware on them, leading to credit card scams, data stealing and the like. All three panellists agreed that awareness is important and that education begins at home with our children. Barley pointed out that Sky spends £60m a year acquiring content, so it only makes sense for them to also invest money in protecting it. Peterka added that as long as the same protection mechanisms are not followed across the world, pirates will go to a place where there is no protection. “Consistency is critical to our success,” he reiterated.

In conclusion, the panellists highlighted the need for a greater collaborative approach. The problem of piracy is not a black-and-white issue anymore. It is a multidimensional problem that requires a multifaceted approach. The industry must work together with the advertisers, satellite operators, and telcos to ensure that the distribution chain is secure. The panelists also stressed the importance of raising awareness among consumers about the dangers of consuming pirated content.
Reality TV show I am a Nat Geo Photographer returned to National Geographic Abu Dhabi with a mission to nurture young photographers from the Arab world. The producers of the show, Spotlife Films Production, walk us through the nuts, bolts and nervous moments of creating the show.

Sheherzad Kaleem, Producer at Spotlife, explains: “We decided that this show will have no eliminations but be built on a point system. This approach gave all participants an equal shot at winning the series, and also gave them ample opportunities to be mentored by the judges that presided over each of the episodes. “The photography challenges were built around different genres of photography and included portraits, architecture and fashion, sports and essay. The challenges grew in complexity from one round to the next, and the contestants had to have an in-depth understanding of the technicality of photography, equipment and editing software to retain any chance of winning the final title.”

“One of the biggest challenges of producing a show like this, from a technical perspective, is media management. We had four contestants followed by either two or four camera crews, depending on the nature of the challenge. In addition to this was the actual footage that the photographers were capturing on their cameras. With the sheer volume of footage we filmed, we had to find the most efficient system to ensure that media and productivity were not lost, and on set, to make sure we could streamline and organise the media.”

“With a dynamic format, shooting required a specific workflow. Reality TV filming is about being in the middle of the action and having no time setting up, stresses Sheherzad. “Flexibility in movement was key for us, and we needed to work with cameras that were of high quality but lightweight. Our cameras gave us that flexibility without...”

Arzouni is reportedly the only Arab director to have led a camera crew to Everest Base Camp, when he filmed 11 Emirati climbers as part of Mission Everest: The UAE Military Team during his seven-year stint with National Geographic channels. While following four photographers in the streets of the UAE is not akin to filming in sub-zero temperatures, reality TV has some exacting demands.

When Survivor and Big Brother premiered in 2000, the competitive reality show was an unknown concept – but by 2003, the Emmys had created an Outstanding Reality-Competition Programme award. In a cluttered field, any new show devised must be engaging, educational and fun to watch. Then the laundry list gets more onerous with the need for genuinely talented contestants, ingenious challenges, impressive guest judges and so on.

Elaborating on the new approach, Arzouni says: “We made sure that everything about the show is new, and that is reflected in the challenges and the shooting locations we chose for each of the challenges. We wanted to create a city-centric show and make it our playground. Dubai was our first choice, for its diversity and richness. The identity of the show made us look at an alternative image of Dubai.”

The show is hosted by Saudi media personality Tariq Eldeweis, Professional photographer and publisher of Photo Egypt Marwa Abu Laila, features as the main judge. They are joined by actors and subject matter experts for each episode, based on the nature of the challenge, including martial arts expert Rio Altaie, fashion designer Faisal Riz Malik and Los Angeles-trained actor Deepak Vyasgoop. Every reality show must decide if it will be self-contained, with episodes that stand on their own, or if it will be an arc reality show with a storyline that connects every episode. But in this case, the Spotlife team decided to try a middle path.

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A large, well-trained team was required to execute a project of this magnitude, says Sheherzad Kaleem of Spotlife.

“This series was targeted at a young Arab audience, and the visual treatment of the show had to keep in line with that”

Sheherzad Kaleem, Producer, Spotlife Films Production

Saudi photographer wins

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“This series was targeted at a young Arab audience, and the visual treatment of the show had to keep in line with that.”

Sheherzad Kaleem, Producer, Spotlife Films Production

compromising on quality. We filmed the entire series in standard 4K and got a fantastic range of footage to play around with. Everything had to be wireless and movable.”

There are inevitable hurdles, and this shoot was no different, Sheherzad reveals. In this case it was classic force majeure. No, it was not the typical sandstorm or fog that would unsettle an otherwise uneventful Dubai day. It was an unexpected rainstorm.

Sheherzad recalls: “A rainstorm came over Dubai unannounced on the day we were supposed to be shooting the fashion and architecture challenge in Dubai Design District. Our models, wearing designer clothing, were supposed to be modelling in an outdoor uncovered space. We had to flip the whole schedule and act fast to manage the situation. On a production such as this, where there are a lot of moving pieces, there was a lot that we had to look after and manage. And this is where a strong team comes to the rescue.”

Summarising the production, she says: “We spent a tough 10 days on set, where we worked almost round the clock to pull in all the elements of the show. Once the production phase was over, we dived right into post-production, which took a few months to complete. Each episode had to have the right amount of energy to keep the viewers’ interest but also be paced in a way that each character could be developed properly. We commissioned an original soundtrack for the series and spent a significant amount of time in colour grading, audio mixing and graphics.”

A project of this magnitude needed a large, well-trained team, she stresses.

“We built a squad consisting of line producers, assistant directors, production coordinators, stylists, sound recordists, camera operators, DoP and many others to handle the myriad equipment we were going to employ. We wanted to push the envelope of creativity, and we are confident we achieved that. “This series was targeted at a young Arab audience, and the visual treatment of the show had to keep up with that. We brought in a range of equipment that would enable us to get creative with the angles and movement in the filming, such as jibs, smoke machines - the works. The studio and set were designed to be contemporary and industrial in their aesthetic.”

As for the post-production pipeline, the team decided on a linear workflow that shifted from offline editing on Adobe Premiere Pro on one machine to the online phase on another machine and then the final round without going back to Adobe Premiere.

Sheherzad explains: “This linear workflow allowed us to work independently on the episodes. While the online phase was finishing an episode, the offline would start cutting the next.

“Our shared storage also allowed for quick turnaround of rushes. The eight-bay RAID 6 was a perfect solution for sharing all the rushes with superb read/write speed while at the same time creating redundancy.”

One of the unique challenges faced by the team, Sheherzad explains, was posed by the nature of the competition. “During the studio presentation of the contestants’ photos on screen, the TV display wasn’t giving a fair representation of the actual photos shot, so we tracked the screen and recreated the same camera movement then replaced the photos with the actual photos taken by the contestants.”

Besides the Everest shoot, Arzouni is a 12-year veteran of many iconic shoots in the region – but the Nat Geo reality show is special for him. He explains: “This was the first reality show of its kind in the region that we did as Spotlife Films Production. As a company, our niche is factual entertainment, reality tv and documentary. We believe in pushing the imagination of our clients and are always trying out new ways to do traditional things.”

Saudi Arabian photographer and health management technician Hesham Humaid beat Emirati explorer Obaid Al Budoor, Lebanese artist Cynthia Ghoussoub and Egyptian photographer Amina Sabry to win the top prize. He won an all-expenses-paid National Geographic photography expedition trip to Tanzania worth more than $10,000.
Ron Downey, CEO at Massive, talks about the stand-out OTT trends in the market and urges operators to deliver a tailored experience to the end user the dust may have settled on NAB, but the OTT sector is whipping up a storm. From VR to next-gen personalisation, and from Android TV to previously unseen revenue streams, this year’s show in Vegas puts four trends on the radar of content rights holders and broadcasters, trends that will soon become the cornerstones of enhanced OTT offerings in 2018 and beyond.

What’s particularly interesting is that each trend has its hooks set firmly in the consumer experience. The reality is that TV has become an increasingly individual affair, creating an extra hurdle for content providers to overcome. After all, if viewers aren’t watching TV with others, why should they be offered the same viewing experience, content and promotions as everyone else?

For broadcasters too, it’s becoming increasingly clear that taking personalisation up a level will help to ensure the success of their OTT service in the future, writes Downey.

For OTT players looking to bolster their bottom lines and tap into the latest market developments at a time when it can help them to stand out from the crowd, here are the four big trends from NAB that should be in focus – and the reasons why.

1. Pushing the VR envelope
   VR and AR continue to dominate many conversations concerning the future of television, even though examples of mass implementation remain relatively thin on the ground. Although there have been a few examples of TV operators pushing the envelope since last year, VR is still very much experimental territory for the majority of players. But that’s not to say consumer appetite isn’t growing. New research indicates revenue generated by the virtual reality industry will top $20 billion by 2020, while the augmented reality market is pegged to hit $61 billion by 2023.
   The key to all this is the way viewers can engage with virtual or augmented content, which means it should come as no surprise that many players are now investing heavily in future design and development of the UX for these next-generation technologies.

2. New revenue opportunities on the horizon
   Although the subscription model is a tried and tested revenue driver for thousands of OTT services, there are now other avenues for monetisation that broadcasters and rights holders can explore. “Sponsored UI [allows] brands to have ownership over a section of the OTT interface in exchange for an advertisement fee,” says Downey.

3. Sports is the most viable use case for VR outside gaming and holds a multitude of opportunities for augmented or virtualised content presentation. Just think how much stickier a brand experience would become by getting creative with the delivery of real-time game data, multiple camera angles and communal viewing, all housed in a 360-degree experience.

4. “For broadcasters, it’s becoming increasingly clear that taking personalisation up a level will help to ensure the success of their OTT service in the future, writes Downey.”
around the world, it does have a few flaws – increasing customer acquisition costs, limited market headroom, low initial price points. This year, NAB offered a breath of fresh air to those operating in this space with the introduction of new trusted, complementary, non-intrusive ways to increase revenue.

The biggest is what’s called a sponsored UI, allowing brands to have ownership over a section of the OTT interface in exchange for an advertisement fee. It could be just one or two rails of content, or an entire section for a limited time across all devices.

**Next-gen user experience**

This is a big one. The majority of streaming services out there currently offer the same experience and design across their suite of apps. This happens regardless of who the viewer is, what their individual preferences are or how they’ve interacted with the platform before, which brings us back to the issue with taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

No two viewers are the same. Sure, they may share certain characteristics that allow an OTT player to introduce demographic-based segmentation, but a level of differentiation still needs to be there. Take a new streaming service, for example. Some will be fast-time visitors who expect to see a curated snapshot of what’s available in the content library. Others will be die-hard thriller fans who want a personalised homepage based on their genre of choice.

Again, drawing parallels with the future of VR, this is a concept particularly applicable to live sports. This is an area where some of the most exciting personalisation options currently lie, thanks largely to the plethora of different sports fans out there. Each type of fan has different needs and expectations when it comes to service functionality and design, offering a tremendous opportunity to deliver a highly personalised experience that will help drive ARPU and reduce churn as a result.

**The rise of Android TV**

Operator interest in Android TV is at an all-time high following high-profile triple- and quad-play providers deploying these solutions in the latter half of 2017, so it comes as no surprise that Android TV picked up even more steam at NAB, particularly now that Google has rolled out its Android TV Operator Tier 08, positioning itself much more favourably to customers who want to build their own UX on top of the open source Android framework.

**“To stand out from an incredibly crowded and volatile marketplace, TV operators ... are increasingly focused on moving away from templated, static applications”**

Ron Downey, CEO, Massive

The benefits are obvious – faster time-to-market, quicker service and platform updates, and attractive out-of-the-box features like pre-integration with third-party apps and support for Google Assistant, among many others.

Sure, the presence of rival third-party apps which cannot be excluded from the platform could be considered a threat, but for many clients that we speak to, this threat is outweighed by the benefits of being seen as an aggregator that offers its customers a slew of popular video apps combined with the traditional pay-TV offering.

The future of OTT delivery

It seems clear that content is no longer king – the consumer experience has taken the throne. In order to stand out in an incredibly crowded and volatile marketplace, TV operators around the world are increasingly focused on moving away from templated, static applications and delivering an experience tailored to the end user’s personal interests, platform availability and payment choice.

Given the complexities associated with delivering what’s needed to cater to the modern viewing experience, this often boils down to broadcasters introducing a centralised front-end management system that can be operated by non-technical internal staff, without needing the involvement of engineering. This makes it possible to take advantage of all of the opportunities presented by live sports, personalisation and emerging platforms.

However it’s tackled, it’s clear that the video businesses that come out on top will be those that learn the lessons of this year’s NAB and deliver all of the above in real time, without incurring significant engineering spend or contributing to the already significant cost of ownership associated with running an OTT service.
Visitors to BroadcastAsia 2018 will be privy to the latest in UDR/HDR, IP broadcasting, live production, security, OTT and alternative content platforms. The summit and exhibition floor promise to shine a spotlight on industry players transforming the entertainment and broadcast value chain.

Lynx Technik’s new Testor APP for greenMachine

Lynx Technik AG has launched its new Testor APP for the greenMachine platform. The new Testor APP adds multi-format test signal generator functionality to the set of greenMachine APPs. It is touted as a trouble-shooting tool for technicians and engineers working in the field, in-studio applications and for test-up tasks in master control rooms. A single Testor APP replaces four individual test generators that are typically sold as separate pieces of hardware. Plus, the greenGUI software provides users with advanced graphic editing features and a more visually straightforward environment, the release stated. The Testor APP also includes a 16-channel audio test generator with adjustable level and frequency, which is embedded into the SDI video or output to the external audio outputs of greenMachine.

Paint by ChyronHego redefines telestration

At BroadcastAsia 2018, ChyronHego will be showcasing Paint, a telestration analysis solution for sports broadcasting. It will highlight Version 7.4 of Paint, with new features. Paint 7.4 now boasts full 4K support including built-in recording in 4K, as well as new IP capabilities including support for HTTP/H.264 live IP stream recording. Also joining Paint’s existing integration with EVS slow-motion replay servers is an all-new integration with the LiveTouch replay system from Grass Valley, a Belden Brand. The new version of Paint also includes new automatic player-tracking capabilities that remove the need for key framing, making the telestration solution fastest to air. In addition, ChyronHego will showcase Coach Paint Capture, the first-ever product to provide a complete video telestration workflow for coaching staff – from content capture to logging/paging.

Rohde & Schwarz unveils new IP solutions

At BroadcastAsia 2018, Rohde & Schwarz will showcase new products and system solutions spanning different application areas in the broadcast and electronic media processing market. Among the solutions on display will be R&S Clipster, a workstation for mastering and distributing feature films and episodic TV. Supporting up to 4K120p from an array of professional media file formats or baseband SDI, R&S Clipster can support various stages of post-production with its built-in tools.

Telestream showcases live coverage capabilities

Telestream will showcase products and technologies being deployed by international sports broadcasters at this year’s World Cup in Russia. The company will demonstrate how its media processing platform enables large production teams to televise this global event in UHD quality over many channels and OTT sources without leaving their US-based production headquarters. Visitors to the Telestream booth will see how the company’s iQ solutions deliver actionable intelligence to both content owners and distributors, providing visibility and accountability along the media supply chain. Winicast, the live production software for streaming to Facebook, YouTube and other destinations, will be on display. Winicast offers professional multi-camera production and built-in live conferencing.

Proven Connect at BroadcastAsia: It’s E-sports and gaming at Producer Connect. Learn how broadcasters and operators are making moves to exploit this fast-growing market.

Lynx Testor APP - greenMachine graphic editing features and a more visually straightforward environment.

Rohde & Schwarz unveils new IP solutions - R&S Clipster, workstation for mastering and distributing feature films and episodic TV.
At BroadcastAsia2018, Artel will feature three integrated, end-to-end, IP-centric demo areas specifically designed to address customers’ growing requirements as they migrate toward all-IP or hybrid IP-SDI networks. Artel’s exhibit will showcase the company’s expanding portfolio, including solutions for SMPTE Z2110, AES67 and SMPTE ST 2022-7 hitless protection, as well as ARO Reliable Internet Streaming Transport (RIST) OTT streaming.

A finalist in the Content category of the IABM Broadcast and Media (BaM) Awards for 2018, Artel’s Smart Media Delivery Platform is a carrier-grade, software-defined platform with integrated non-blocking Layer 2/3 switching and routing capabilities. The Smart Platform features four video ports for transporting video, audio and ancillary data, and four GigE data ports bridged to a 10G interface.

USA Pavilion Stand 402-01

Interrea Systems will showcase its approach to QC and monitoring, which ensures the delivery of video on every device. New features on display include QC checks, ABR stream validation, real-time QoE measurements and deep-dive compressed stream analysis. The latest version of Interra Systems’ Baton QC solution leverages AI and machine learning-based advanced algorithms, and includes what the company claims is the industry’s first support for the Vast protocol, hybrid QC workflows, support for HDR content, audio language detection capabilities and more.

Interrea Systems will showcase Baton QC

Interra Systems will demonstrate its live encoding and decoding solutions for IP contribution at BroadcastAsia, with what the company claims is the highest density integrated receiver decoder (IRD) currently on the market. This has the potential to replace half a rack of equipment with a single box.

Interra Systems will showcase smart media delivery platform

Artel to showcase secure media delivery

Artel will be speaking at BroadcastAsia in the Innovation Hub on Tuesday, 26 June on the topic ‘2018 – The Year of IP Video for Contribution and in the Studio’

Stand 402-01

The addition to the Neo product range is near TS Time Delay, a 1U IP-based delay server providing transparent delay of IP transport streams such as DVB/ATSC MPEG broadcast-quality compressed video and audio.

PlayBox Technology marks 18,000 channel deliveries

PlayBox Technology will celebrate its 18,000th product delivery at BroadcastAsia. PlayBox Technology will be represented by CEO Pavlin Rahnev, Asia-Pacific General Manager Dusan Golc, Sales Manager Julian Ionescu and colleagues from the company’s Asia-Pacific office.

The addition to the Neo product range is near TS Time Delay, a 1U IP-based delay server providing transparent delay of IP transport streams such as DVB/ATSC MPEG broadcast-quality compressed video and audio.

PlayBox Technology will mark 18,000 global product deliveries

DVB Smart Media Delivery System

Artel will feature its DVB Smart Media Delivery Platform at BroadcastAsia 2018. The product is a scalable, software-defined platform integrated with standard IT hardware and supporting the latest encoding and decoding algorithms. It is compatible with all transport streams, including DVB Transport Streams and Internet Streaming Transport (RIST).

PlayBox will be speaking at BroadcastAsia in the Innovation Hub on Tuesday, 26 June on the topic ‘2018 – The Year of IP Video for Contribution and in the Studio’

Stand 402-01

The DVB Smart Media Delivery Platform is a carrier-grade platform for all-IP delivery.
IP has been greatly talked about for a number of years, but very few broadcasters are actually taking the leap to IP workflows in studios. Those that are, for the most part, are dipping their toes in the water with some mostly experimental workflows or productions, and they often have some sort of back-up in place.

As these experiments prove more and more reliable, we will begin to see a concerted move to IP studios, enabling broadcasters to properly maximise the benefits of IP. However, this will not be without challenges.

Remote production
Remote production is an interesting scenario for IP. Connectivity is now good enough to backhaul all traffic over an IP network to a studio. This saves the broadcaster vast amounts through not having to have teams of people on-site and all the associated costs.

Live production environment
The live production environment is still very much SDI-based. SDI provides only a single video feed down a single cable. The biggest challenge is the cables, you need lots of them! At the highest size, SDI routers are limited to 1,152x1,152 feeds; facilities’ routers are now filling up, with the current explosion of content.

Benefits of deploying software-based architecture
Although IP is becoming more widely deployed, there are very few broadcasters doing this using software. This seems a little surprising, as it means they are not making the most of what IP can deliver in terms of cost efficiency, flexibility and scalability.

Use of a pure software-based architecture increases flexibility. Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) IT servers can have multifunctional capabilities, running multiple processes such as high-density decoding and encoding in a single chassis.

There are numerous manufacturers offering SDI-based solutions around COTS IT equipment, and a few offering SMPTE 2022-6 and SMPTE 2110 solutions in pure software.

Many traditional hardware manufacturers are treating SMPTE 2110 as the nirvana of IP video, but software implementation is challenging. The SMPTE 2110 series is a complex set of documents with many different profiles. It is likely that the most common timing profile will be 2110-N, narrow gapped. This has very tight timing requirements of four packets (about 40us), which is complicated to achieve in software.

Furthermore, no products to measure compliance of the timing model currently exist. The gapped nature also means the VBI will remain, a long-outdated relic from the past. Unfortunately, all this means that legacy constraints will exist for decades and continue to reduce business agility in the broadcast industry.

It is likely that initial multi-vendor 2110 facilities will be challenging to implement, with some reverting to 2022-6 owing to the complexity. That said, the introduction of uncompressed IP and software into the broadcast environment will be the biggest transition in production since the transition from analogue to digital.

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“Despite proven benefits in remote production, live production and use of software-based architecture, broadcasters are choosing to merely dip their proverbial toes in IP”

Still experimenting with IP?