Industry calls for radical shift in broadcast culture and skill sets
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Welcome

How much do we know about Africa, and more specifically African movies or TV? Perhaps we do have some visibility to content from Egypt and Morocco – maybe also Algeria. But what about Nigeria? The country has a USD 3bn movie industry with 80 films produced on average each week, generating a whopping $610 million annually. By comparison, Morocco makes a humble $4.5 million each year, yet we have probably heard more about Moroccan films here.

I had the pleasure of moderating a panel discussion organized by Canon with three African artists, well-known influencers in their countries, and the discussion was such an eye-opener. If I were a businesswoman with deep pockets, I’d be packing my bags and heading to Africa.

We learned, for instance, that while Morocco produces good films, the country lacks theatres. The only way to watch a lot of movies is on the internet and, sadly, some of that is on pirate platforms. This is perhaps an opportunity for the likes of Vox, and if things are as easy as they seem, we must at least explore the opportunity for mobile theatres.

We also heard that there is very little collaboration between countries in Africa, so each country gets to see its own films but only a few travel – those that do perhaps make it in the festival circuit. Have our regional distributors failed us by only bringing Hollywood and Bollywood and a few Arabic films to this market, and is there a big opportunity here? Is this something our regional broadcasters can explore to bring to the market? Or perhaps OTT service providers?

We continue to remain in the dark about Africa, though this year CABSAT had a panel discussion with African panellists and we will see a dedicated pavilion at DISCOP this month. With broadcasters, suppliers and service providers eying Africa as an important market, it’s time we did more.

Welcome

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director

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Yahlive announced two separate deals at CABSAT, which will see the Abu Dhabi satellite services provider add 35 Pakistani channels and 42 African channels to its offerings.

For the Pakistani deal, Yahlive partnered with DTH operator Entertainment and Reality TV Hub (EARTH). Yahlive also added its first HD Indian TV channel, Minerva, to the bouquet.

“Our goal is to partner with as many South Asian broadcasters as possible to cater to the viewing needs of the audience,” explained Yahlive CEO Sami Boustany. “With the South Asian community in the GCC and its neighbouring countries growing at an exponential rate, we observed a gap in this market and committed to develop premium content to cater to the demand, while keeping in mind the available resources for television viewing and respecting all legal requirements.”

According to Boustany, this is the first time that a satellite TV service provider has agreed to broadcast a Pakistani channel in Arabic.

Yahlive added that the channel will be broadcast in Arabic and English, offering Pakistani content to the multicultural audience in the GCC.

Turk Telekom builds efficient media transport network with DTM

Turk Telekom recently put in place a dynamic synchronous transfer mode (DTM) solution to run over its MPLS network to provide a better media infrastructure for broadcasters in Turkey. Typically, most broadcasters are based in western Turkey, and when they want to cover live events in the east, they have to dispatch OB vans and SNGs at huge cost.

Explaining the predicament of the broadcasters, Umut Udo Keten, Senior Architect, Service and Product, Turk Telekom, said: “Turkey has a vast countryside. Most of our broadcasters are based in the west but we have a lot of football matches and live events in the east. Most of our broadcasters, therefore, had an issue due to country logistics and did not want to risk sending expensive OB vans and SNG vans far away. They came to us to find a solution for their live content.”

Turk Telekom realised that transporting video content or live broadcast over an IP network would be tricky.

“We needed to go back to the basics,” explained Keten. “IP networks have their advantages, but layer 2 technologies are far better, although they are also quite expensive. We had to come up with a creative solution to counter this.

“The trouble with transporting broadcast video over IP networks was having to deal with the challenges of latency, jitter and packet delay variance issues. We started to rethink how we could improve this.

“Our initial test showed that transporting video over IP was hard, but transporting video over transmission networks like SDH or DWM proved to be really good.

“Then again, only using DWM or STH was really expensive. This is when we were introduced to DTM, a time division multiplexing and circuit-switching network technology that combines switching and transport. It is designed to provide a guaranteed quality of service for streaming video services, but can be used for packet-based services as well, and brings enormous advantages.”

In brief: Tek Signals signs USD 3.5 million deal with ARN to deliver end-to-end radio facility in Knowledge Village, Dubai
Discovery opts for Marina

Discovery Networks MENA’s channels are now under the control of a new eight-channel fully redundant Marina system from Pebble Beach Systems. The solution is installed at Du-Samacom. The project was implemented by systems integrator Tek Signals.

Speaking about the installation, Bassem Maher, Head of Operations at Discovery Networks MENA, said: "The install features fully redundant playout and control of all our regional HD channels with Marina automation at its heart, and also comprises Harmonic Spectrum servers, Pixel Power graphics, Polistream subtitling, with transcoding handled by Telestream.”

Samiu Jiblah, Regional Manager for the Middle East and South Asia at Pebble, added: “Together with Tek Signals, we architecture a solution to meet Discovery's advanced channels' needs. We integrated a dynamic automated graphics workflow, and have incorporated archiving of the transmission media to the tape library. With its single database spanning playout and content management, and a simple user interface, Marina drives operational efficiencies and reduces the scope for on-air errors.”

Al Aan TV launches HD channel on Badr-4

Al Aan TV has begun broadcasting its HD channel exclusively on Arabsat Badr-4 at 26° East. Speaking about the deal, Arabsat CEO Wael Al Buti said: “Al Aan TV is one of the channels in the region that has been able to establish itself as a multimedia brand in MENA by broadcasting original, interactive and responsible content with crystal-clear picture quality and sound.”

Maysa Mourad, Director of Content & Marketing at Al Aan TV, added: “Our HD channel will help to enhance our viewers’ experience hugely.”

Stage Tec and Kuwaiti distributor Romco partner

Berlin-based manufacturer of audio mixing consoles and routers, Stage Tec has appointed Kuwait-based Romco as its distribution partner. Commenting on the partnership, Ali H. Al Roumi, MD, said: “We are confident that Stage Tec is the ideal partner to complement our portfolio.”

Alexander Nemes, Head of Sales at Stage Tec, added: “We have chosen Romco because of its many years of experience in the industry, and we intend to grow in the Middle East together.”

Muscat International Film Fest in March

The 10th Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) will take place from March 24-31. The event will include workshops on script-writing, editing and cinematography. Along with premiers and screening of short films from around the world, a competition will be hosted for GCC and Omani filmmakers to encourage them to make better movies.

Luxor African Film Fest invites student entries

The Luxor African Film Festival (LAFF), to be held in Egypt from March 16-22, invited entries for the first National Student Film Competition. The competition is aimed at film students and graduates in Egypt who reside in the country.

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Arab HDTV Group meets to discuss new technologies

The Arab HDTV and Beyond Group gathered for its annual meeting at Crowne Plaza, Dubai last month to discuss the status of new technology adoption including HDTV across the MENA region. Delegates from broadcast, both private and government, and vendors representing the entire technology value chain joined the meeting.

In his opening address, Hassan Sayed Hasam, MD and founder of Master Media and Chairman of the Arab HDTV and Beyond Group, outlined the current status of HDTV across the Arab world. Underlining the rapid growth HDTV has seen since its beginnings in the region around 2009, he said “We now have 342 unique HD channels across the region as of December 31, 2017.”

During his presentation, he highlighted the genre and country-specific origin of the HD channels. While sports and general entertainment dominated the HD scene, a total of 109 HD channels were Arabic channels. A total of 85 HD channels originated from the UAE. Abdul Zoubi, Head of ASBU’s technical department, highlighted the technical activities of the organisation. He announced ASBU’s ambitious plan to cease SD services by early 2019. He also highlighted ASBU’s cloud services from the organisation’s POP in London, its Algiers NDC and its ASBU UHQ in Tunis, to serve customers outside the MENOS coverage.

Dr Faesal Lubbadah, owner of SpaceTech TV Engineering and Vice Chairman of the Arab HDTV and Beyond Group, outlined the 5G path for the media industry, while Hassan Ghord, Director, MENA of ARMM, updated attendees on the latest standards for UHD with a brief overview of the SMPTE ST 2110 suite of standards.

In the feedback session that followed, participants called for anti-piracy initiatives to be discussed in detail at future meetings. In his closing remarks, Abdul Rahim Suleiman, Director General of ASBU, highlighted the growth of HDTV across the Arab world.

“With a new camera being launched every other week, it is challenging for us as lens manufacturers to keep up,” Zellen commented. He added that while directors of photography were the easiest to convince to move to new and improved lenses, the biggest challenge for lens manufacturers was to anticipate what the industry would need in two or three years, “time and cater to that demand.”

“Having somebody like Les Zellan here, for instance, means understanding the technical advancements that were driven by the needs of storytelling. We really need such exposure in the Middle East if we want to be a part of a global cinema industry.”

Lenses 101 from Cooke Optics at AM Studios

“With a new camera being launched every other week, it is challenging for us as lens manufacturers to keep up,” Zellen commented. He added that while directors of photography were the easiest to convince to move to new and improved lenses, the biggest challenge for lens manufacturers was to anticipate what the industry would need in two or three years, “time and cater to that demand.”

The presentation covered topics on how different coatings can bring different looks to lenses, the differences between spherical and anamorphic lenses, how Cooke handcrafts its lenses, and the importance of lens metadata on set and in post. A big focus at the demonstration was the 4K technology; an open protocol available to manufacturers of lenses, cameras and post-production equipment to capture information such as depth of field and focal length, and help save time and money in visual effects post-production.

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME about the Cooke Optics event and other similar events hosted by the distributor, AMT CEO Kaveh Farnam said “Having somebody like Les Zellan here, for instance, means understanding the technical advancements that were driven by the needs of storytelling. We really need such exposure in the Middle East if we want to be a part of a global cinema industry.”

Embracing the cloud

In a heterogeneous world of ever growing and fast moving standards, flexibility and cost are winning factors. R&S®PRISMON is designed from the ground up to allow broadcast and media service providers to successfully solve these challenges:

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ChyronHego appoints Marco Lopez as CEO
ChyronHego has announced the appointment of Marco Lopez as CEO. Former President and CEO Johan Apel will continue serving the company as Executive Chairman of the board. Bringing an expanded focus on the broadcast industry, Lopez joins ChyronHego from Grass Valley, where he most recently served as President.

Colin McLeod appointed GM of Fox Networks Group UK
Colin McLeod has been named the new GM for Fox Networks Group UK, a role previously held by Jeff Ford. Jeff Ford will continue with Fox Networks Group as consultant. McLeod is reportedly starting his role on a part-time basis before transitioning to a full-time role in spring.

Talia invests in Newtec Dialog and more capacity on Arabsat
UK satellite solutions provider Talia has purchased an additional Newtec Dialog platform to provide Ka-band HTS services to Afghanistan and Iraq. The additions will provide access to multiple transponders on Arabsat’s 5C Ka-band satellite, located at 20-degrees East. Talia continues to operate high-quality VSAT and terrestrial services to the African and Middle East regions. In those areas, Talia provides sales and support through local offices in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The HTS Newtec Dialog platform uses small VSAT antennas to create a new lower price point for internet access in the region. This new lower price point for hardware and services helps get people connected to the internet, the release stated, as part of Talia’s corporate social responsibility programme. Speaking about the choice of technology, Jack Buccheri, Talia VP Business Development, said: “This new platform will service both broadband users utilising low-cost, self-install 75cm antennas, as well as enterprise and carriage-grade services at much higher bandwidth.”

The Newtec Dialog platform uses set-top boxes so that customers can self-install the terminals with an app either on Apple’s iPhone or Google’s Android devices.

Scripps channels move from OSN to beIN platform
The battle between the two major pay TV networks in the MENA region is heating up as both vie for exclusive rights to channels as contracts come up for renewal.

Scripps Networks Interactive’s Food Network and Fine Living channels, which were previously available exclusively on OSN are now being shown on beIN exclusively from Feb 1 along with HGTV and Travel Channel.

Commenting on the partnership, Phillip Luff, Managing Director, UK & EMEA Scripps Networks Interactive, said: “We’re delighted to be expanding our partnership with beIN, and bringing those hugely popular channels to audiences in MENA.” OSN has also simultaneously announced the launch of OSN Living HD, a new lifestyle channel that will cover travel, food, design and home-improvement among other areas.

The new lifestyle channel that will feature celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver, will be live streamed on OSN Play, with catch-up shows available on OSN On Demand and OSN Play.

The OSN release also stated that the channel will feature localised lifestyle shows with a special show hosted by actress Polin Karahan that will be fully dubbed in Arabic with English subtitles.

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Rohde & Schwarz and Arabsat establish Tunisian platform

Following the announcement earlier this year of an agreement between Arabsat and ONT to launch a Tunisian broadcast platform on Arabsat’s 24E, Rohde & Schwarz has been selected to design, install and commission the TV broadcast platform, which became fully operational in October. Working closely with Arabsat, Rohde & Schwarz has installed its AVH100 Headend solution for encoding and multiplexing 10 SD and two HD television channels and 24 radio stations. All design, installation, commissioning and training requirements were provided by Rohde & Schwarz’s team of specialist engineers. In addition, Turkey-based SVS supplied the platforms satellite Earth station. This new DTH platform operation enables Tunisian viewers to have direct access from Tunisia to the growing audience encompassing MENA and Western Europe.

A key element of the R&S contract with Arabsat covers the provision of professional services. Rohde & Schwarz will support the installation of the AVH100 encoding and multiplexing solution is fully IP-based.

The initiative in Tunisia is part of the Arab strategy that sees significant expansion of the DTH platform.

Ericsson sells 51% stake in Media Solutions

Ericsson has concluded the strategic review of Media Solutions and Red Bee Media. While Ericsson will retain 49% of the shares in Media Solutions, One Equity Partners joins as a new majority owner. It was decided that Media Solutions assets and staff would transfer to an independent company upon closing, around Q3 of 2018. In this review, Ericsson has evaluated different opportunities for both units, Media Solutions and Red Bee Media, including partnerships, divestments, and a continued in-house development, based on what generates the best long-term value for Ericsson.

Ericsson will continue to develop Red Bee Media as an independent and focused media services business, with the execution of the performance improvement and legal separation activities, initialised in 2017, as top priorities.

MBC completes migration of playout to Marina

MBC Group has completed the process of migrating the playout of all 22 R&S’ SBM23 terrestrial and satellite channels to Pebble Beach Systems’ flagship Marina automation solution. MBC initially deployed a Pebble Beach Systems Neptune playout automation solution several years ago. The phased migration across to Marina automation was completed last year. Nick Barratt, Senior Manager – Broadcast at MBC Group, expanded on the rationale for migrating to Marina, which presents the operators with a single unified operator interface regardless of the underlying technology being utilised.

“Unifying under the common user experience of the technology is part of an extensive and evolving library of API integrations, allowing us to take advantage of the technology changes currently happening in the broadcast world, regardless of manufacturer. We aim to make it totally immaterial to the operator not only what systems underpin the channel they are working on, but also if those systems are physical, virtual or even their location.”

MENA online video revenues to grow annually by 22%

Most MENA markets are projected to grow online video revenues by 22% to 39% annually until 2021, stated professional services firm EY in its report on video consumption trends in the region. As a result, digital’s share of the video revenue pie is projected to rise from 9.6% in 2017 to 17.3% by 2021, according to the report titled “Videonomics.”

Commenting on the findings, Ahmed Reda, MENA Telecomunication, Media and Technology leader at EY said: “The region’s digital consumption growth is among the highest in the world. A large youth population, fast-improving mobile connectivity and a flood of new streaming platforms into the market will continue to drive this growth over the next few years.”

Subscription and transactional revenues comprise a large share of this digital segment at around 45%. Segmented packages across price points and telco tie-ups for billing have helped in this region, but the trend also points to a new generation that cuts the cord and laaphogs directly to digital subscriptions. Elaborating on the way forward, Nripendra Singh, Director, Media and Entertainment, EY Africa, India and the Middle East said: “Digital video revenues and viewship are set to grow to by at least 22% by 2021 in the MENA region. To ride this new wave, content creators will need to focus on multi language offerings, partnerships across the video value chain, analytics and customer centricity.”

MENA’s TV market has long been dominated by FTA channels, and consequently ad-funded business models. The region’s consumers have access to over 900 FTA channels. It appears, however, that the ad market is nearing saturation and recorded negative growth in 2016 and 2017.

Sharjah Media City conducts scripting workshop

The free course, the first of numerous media courses, is a community-led initiative in line with the strategic direction of Sharjah Media City to provide services and support to the media community. Commenting on the initiative, Director of Sharjah Media City Shihab Al Hammadi said: “Sharjah seeks to create a community of media and cinematic production companies. This workshop will help provide the community with material that will serve them in media and film production.”

The courses are open to anyone with no restrictions on age or emirate.

Emirati film to premiere in UAE

Filmed in 2017 in Abu Dhabi, Fan of Amoory was shot with the help of twofour54’s Film & TV Services department, which provided both production and post-production services as well as colour grading from start to finish at twofour54’s post-production facility. The film also benefited from Abu Dhabi Film Commission’s 30% cash rebate on Emirati film productions in the emirate, a strong incentive to support content production in the UAE.

Directed and produced by Amer Salmeen Al Murry, the film features many Emirati cast members. Fan of Amoory shines light on the challenges and obstacles facing junior soccer team players on their journey to professionalism.

Abu Dhabi-based filmmaker Nancy Patton and Hollywood actress Lindsay Lohan will be shooting female-centric feature Frame in Sharjah this September, as reported by the UAE’s The National. The movie, for which the release date is yet to be revealed, will centre around an American football player. Speaking to The National, Patton revealed that the film will be shot in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with a cast and crew made up largely of Emirati and Saudi talent.

Lindsay Lohan to shoot in Riyadh for women-centric film

Abu Dhabi-based filmmaker Nancy Patton and Hollywood actress Lindsay Lohan will be shooting female-centric feature Frame in Sharjah this September, as reported by the UAE’s The National. The movie, for which the release date is yet to be revealed, will centre around an American football player. Speaking to The National, Patton revealed that the film will be shot in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with a cast and crew made up largely of Emirati and Saudi talent.
“Within eight hours of uploading my Christmas video, I had a million views,” UAE national Khalid Al Ameri told attendees at a Facebook panel on content creation moderated by Faees Akkad, Head of Media Partnerships – MEA, Facebook and Instagram. The discussion was one of many at an event hosted by Facebook in Dubai last month to showcase regional content creators and group admins building online communities via the social media platform. Along with panel discussions and presentations by content creators and group admins, technologies demonstrated included Oculus Virtual Reality and 360 video, in addition to a Facebook Live booth to facilitate real-time video interaction. Well-known Emirati influencers Khalid and Salama Al Ameri joined comedy duo Tarek Fahd of Punny Pan Times and Ghobran Bahou of UK-based Goubytube to discuss content creation and the challenges of building and retaining audiences. “We are constantly looking for ways to keep our content fresh,” confided Amman-based Tarek. “We keep a close eye on comments and work on improving our content based on the feedback.” The popularity of the content creators at the event was borne out by a recent report from professional services firm EY on video consumption trends in the region, which revealed that most MENA markets are projected to grow online video revenues by 22-35% annually until 2021.

Video content showcased at Facebook event

MBC’s Al Hadath opts for Vizrt’s Viz Story

Al Hadath, a 24-hour news channel that is part of Dubai-based MBC has introduced Vizrt’s Viz Story into the newsroom as a tool for journalists to create and edit their own stories. “I know what I want for my story and with Viz Story I can take control of the package creation without having to explain my vision to someone else,” said Badh Younes, senior journalist, Al Arabiya and Al Hadath News. Viz Story is a story creation tool that allows journalists to edit videos, add branded graphics, and distribute the finished stories to any location. Part of the Viz Story workflow at Al Hadath and sister network Al Arabiya, is an integration with Reuters for gathering images and stories.

### E-Vision inks deal with Starz Play; launches eJunior app

Content aggregator and subsidiary of the RTL Group, E-Vision, and OTT platform Starz Play, have announced a five-year content deal. As per the exclusive agreement, Etsalat UAE customers will be able to access more than 10,000 hours of Hollywood and Bollywood movies, same time as the US TV shows, documentaries, and series, on their mobiles and tablets. Etsalat UAE is a subsidiary of Etisalat, the region’s largest telecom provider.

Khalid Al Ameri, Head of Media Partnerships – MEA, Facebook and Instagram.

### New EMEA content sales director for CNN

CNN International Commercial (CNNIC) has appointed Roland Nikolaou as Senior Director, Content Sales and Licensing, EMEA, with a remit to grow content partnerships with traditional broadcasters, digital publishers and platforms. He has more than 17 years’ experience in sales and content. Nikolaou reports to Greg Beichman, VP, Content Sales and Partnerships, CNNIC.

### 2G-SDI to Fiber and Back

New FiDO 12G-SDI Mini-Converters

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Handle all of your long-distance 4K/UltraHD video and audio transport needs with AJA’s new FiDO 12G-SDI Mini-Converters. With a transceiver, single, dual channel transmitters and receivers, the new FiDO 12G-SDI Mini-Converters offer AJA’s proven reliability, in a robust and rugged form factor that’s perfect for in the field, truck or facility use. AJA’s family of openGear solutions expands to include a new range of 3G-SDI Multi-Mode fiber cards, perfect for affordable optical transmission and reception, fully compatible with AJA’s openGear 2RU Rackframe. Multi-Mode allows for moderate fiber optic cable runs with cost effective and flexible cabling, perfectly suited for facilities with Multi-Mode fiber cable infrastructure.

### MBC’s Al Hadath opts for Vizrt’s Viz Story

Al Hadath, a 24-hour news channel that is part of Dubai-based MBC has introduced Vizrt’s Viz Story into the newsroom as a tool for journalists to create and edit their own stories.
Cloud adoption was seen, by the participants, as significantly beneficial for the broadcast industry and they explored the challenges of transitioning to the cloud.

While security issues linger and the fear of job losses lurks outside boardrooms, participants at a roundtable hosted by BroadcastPro ME in conjunction with cloud specialist Amagi, agreed that cloud adoption was the way forward in the MENA region.
“Cloud brings amazing agility in terms of delivery and innovation in content”

KA Srinivasan, co-founder, Amagi

“From a challenges perspective, the biggest challenge is the unknown future. Can cloud enable that future?”

Dave Mace, Cloud Specialist at OSN, which has taken its first steps into the future with cloud, took the lead and outlined the broadcaster's approach.

“We are looking at doing everything, from glass to glass. From content coming into the building to content being played out, we want to move the whole ecosystem and leverage the advantages of cloud services as much as possible. Our archive system is up there and now we are looking at OTT. We will then move to DTH, but essentially, everything will run in parallel for us in terms of what we look to move there. We want to automate as much as possible and let our teams focus on the innovation space rather than manual intensive tasks.

“There has had to be a mindset shift within the organisation for us to succeed in this initiative. If anyone asks me should I or should I not go for cloud, my response would be ‘Why shouldn’t you?’ You look around. Everyone is already or has already moved into the cloud for a reason.”

Globally, there are several high-profile use cases for cloud adoption, including Netflix, TTV and now the BBC, where broadcasters have shifted from reliance on traditional IT stacks in owned and operated data centres to the cloud. There was heightened interest around the room in understanding the OSN journey to cloud, and OSN’s Chief Digital Officer Andrew Carney took the cue to explain it further from a business point of view:

“We are bang in the middle of a digital business transformation and we are disrupting ourselves right now, and cloud is obviously a key component. You have to steel yourself for this change. We have overcome the mental obstacle that this is going to be disruptive. We have got to have a laser-like focus on the business objectives as to why we are doing this: Making this move to the cloud calls for a great deal of courage, as it is relatively uncharted territory.

“We are trying to stay well connected to our strategic team, particularly when the content world is already in full disruption. The global picture is evolving very quickly and it is fascinating to observe the latest events from both the FAANG community and the recent acquisition that Disney made of 20th Century Fox which suggests change to the content creation and acquisition landscape.

“Another important perspective is being realistic regarding the return on investment – it’s fair to say that we are expecting the returns to flow after the first 18 months as we prepare and deliver the building blocks and migrate the physical assets, and re-architect the applications and infrastructure.

“I believe there are a series of clouds – not a single cloud. There are different types of journeys for the existing DTH operator as we try to make that content pipeline glass to glass. We don’t want to over commit or end up on a one-way street. It is intellectually challenging, because you are balancing different kinds of perspectives.

“We are doing various small projects as proofs of concept within our technology platform. We are trying to do an end-to-end POC – walk the journey and understand better the cloud component rather than take a universal dive feet first approach. We talk about critical value. It has got to be in that critical value space where I can go, cap in hand, and say, ‘I need some dollars to do this, now that we have made the general breakthrough.”

“From content coming into the building to content being played out, we want to move the whole ecosystem and leverage the advantages of cloud services”

Dave Mace, Cloud Specialist, OSN
cloud for tasks such as archiving video files while keeping other media workflow aspects such as production and editing in-house.

Taking the hybrid path is Iraqi broadcaster Al Sharqiya Television. Iraq’s first privately-owned channel launched in 2004 and a regional heavyweight. Head of Engineering Ahmed Bin Afif described his operations as being number one in Iraq, with an estimated viewership of around 80% of the population.

“We operate two channels currently – Al Sharqiya, which is a mixed genre, and Al Sharqiya News. The channels operate from multiple locations in Dubai, Baghdad, London and Jordan. We are primarily a linear television operator, although we do have an IPTV offering. I agree with a lot of points made in the room regarding cloud adoption. Compared to OSN and MBC, we are a comparatively smaller operation. We are not contemplating cloud for all operations. We do some cloud in the areas of network management for security. We are looking to move slowly and study the options investment-wise. And along the way, we need to change mindsets that insist on having something physical in the building in terms of security.”

The route to cloud adoption is definitely not a one-size-fits-all. While some broadcasters opt for the big-bang approach to migration, others such as Al Sharqiya and Al Majd Satellite TV prefer to adopt cloud on a workload-by-workload basis.

Making his opening remarks, Wael M. Ali, Head of DVB at Al Majd Satellite TV, said: “Al Majd TV has been around since 2001. We have 13 channels over Arabsat and we have OTT operations as well. We are one of the few pay-TV operators in the region, with five FTA channels and eight encrypted channels. Our target audience is Arabic-speaking people, especially in Saudi Arabia.

“I am very intrigued by the OSN initiative. Going for cloud glass to glass is indeed a big undertaking. My question is: what happens to the expensive legacy equipment we have? Shifting spend from CAPEX to OPEX is sold as an advantage of cloud computing.

And we are disrupting ourselves right now, and cloud is a key component. You have to steel yourself for this change. Making this move to the cloud calls for a great deal of courage, as it is relatively uncharted territory.”

Andrew Carney, Chief Digital Officer, OSN MENA experts endorse the high-speed transport protocol that provides the backbone for cloud-based digital workflows but regional broadcasters remain wary.

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Peter Van Dam, Wow! HD

So, in the coming years, will the increase in OPEX be compensated? Given that we have legacy assets currently in use, would it be good for us to go cloud-gadfly?"...  

OSN’s Mace stepped in at this point, advising caution: “In your first year of investing in the cloud, your expenditure is going to go up. You need to let your finance and sales teams know that in the 12–18 months, your CAPEX may go up. You will not see any instant savings with cloud.” Carney added: “It is another moving part to the equation. We are coming to terms with the disruptions in our customer and investment curves. All of that is beginning to take on a different shape, but we understand what is better – the flux between CAPEX and OPEX. That model may very well be dead. The concept of cloud is that it will offer scalability and agility and all of that good stuff, it feels more like OPEX. "Cloud disrupts financial models. The best discipline of all is to look at this as cash in the first instance. Once the cash side is sorted, CAPEX and OPEX can come in due course.”

Amagi’s Srinivasan asked Carney further about “the specific business context that drives cloud as an option,” drawing attention to the two significant disruptions making cloud computing a necessity rather than an option – consumers demanding more choice and fragmented audiences.

Broadcasters need the scalability and flexibility that cloud computing can provide, Carney asserted. “I previously worked in the music industry, which, in part, is to ignore the marketplace and we know the disruption the arrival of Napster and Spotify brought. I don’t think the video and media industry can afford to make the same mistake. The marketplace is extremely dynamic right now and this sits uncomfortably with all the media and service providers. There are so many moving parts in each individual country that the diagnostics on the customer value proposition has got to be near perfect. I have four kids aged between 13 and 20. The top two consume entertainment differently from the bottom two. Even within that short window, they have different patterns and different demands. They don’t care about micro-billing contracts. They are calling the shots, and this is brilliant because it is a form of disruption and it will sort the wheat from the chaff as to who can come to the table with that market dynamic: “That is the ultimate business context. Take your eyes off that dynamic and risk exposing your products, services and experiences. It is understanding that food chain is as quickly as possible through top-class research and intelligence – and the variability in each country is ridiculously different, so we can’t go in with a universal solution. We have to have country intelligence models to give us a clue as to what works best. “So, we are taking POCs and understanding KSA versus Jordan or Kuwait, and building our insights so that we have the flexibility and agility to respond, and that is where cloud can come in. It gives us that dynamic agility to respond to short content pipelines, so we are trying to make sure that the discipline of our business context is a guiding light to what we frame and how we move forward. It’s quite challenging, and there’s an awful lot of variables in the mix to figure out.”

Cloud has finally come of age for the broadcast industry, there is little doubt given the large-scale adoption of cloud globally, Badrem Mahir, Head of Operations at Discovery Networks MENA, added. “We have been here since 2014 after the acquisition of Fatafeat, the cooking channel. We broadcast six channels and as for the rest, we are managing pan-regional feeds mainly coming from London. “We have a deal with Amam Web Services (AWS). We have now moved all our services on the cloud. All the US-based channels are on cloud, which is a total of about 62 feeds including main and back-ups and West Coast delays on AWS, with Kvertra as the interface. In the UK, we are moving our channels by August. Unlike the US, the feeds from London are going globally to the Middle East, Africa and Europe, and it is taking more time in terms of language subtitling, dubbing and continuity issues. The complexities of the channel are causing more time for dual running. Otherwise by end of this year, all our services will be on cloud.”

While experts in the region endorse the high-speed transport protocol that provides the backbone for cloud-based digital workflows that, in turn, make it possible to move, distribute, synchronise and exchange big data from any source to any destination, regional broadcasters remain wary, observed Emmanuel Belleville, Head of Media Vertical at Bradal Digital.

“I have been meeting with a number of TV channels to understand their needs of connectivity and beyond – not the big broadcasters such as MBC, OSN and so on, but the smaller operators. Most of the TV channels have management that come from the world of traditional old-world broadcasting. My sense from speaking to the management of the TV channels is that cloud is something akin to the internet, and from the consumer point of view, they see issues of latency, buffering and so on. “They don’t see cloud as a 100% satisfying experience yet, to watch traditional TV. That is why cloud adoption will still take time. Something that is not satellite-based is still not easily accepted. We also have issues with access to audience measurement for such TV channels. While bigger channels can put in the required investments, TV channels that are currently losing advertising revenues because of viewership shifting to other platforms, including the internet, are not as keen. I don’t believe they are considering that tier 2 is another issue we will have to deal with. At the end, I believe it is all about culture, where our partner broadcasters work together towards mutually beneficial goals”

“A massive difference I have experienced...""In the Middle East, cloud adoption is expected to grow from $887.5 million in 2015 to $2.4 billion in 2020...""
head of corporate IT. When the old broadcast CTO moved out, the IT head took over the technology division of that TV station. This is perhaps where matters are moving. “It is most surprising when you talk to broadcast engineers. They push back against change because they fear job loss. What we don’t realise is how much IP is already deployed in broadcast. While the broadcast IT department in Abu Dhabi Media was a small team at the start, today it is manned by a department of 10. Similarly, the broadcast maintenance team had 10 persons in the past and today, the department has around four persons.”

Offering concrete figures confirming the poor adoption of cloud across the MENA, Abou Moustafa, VP of Managed Services, Broadcast and datamena at du, said: “The broadcast adoption within du is at 3%. While we are at a nascent stage, my expectation is we will follow international broadcasters in adopting cloud. Of course, it will need a shift in mindset in terms of being comfortable having your content in a remote location. “Being in charge of managed services for du, which has a 47% share in the UAE with around 800,000 enterprise customers, I deal with both the broadcast and corporate IT divisions within the same company. At times, it seems like you are addressing two mindsets within one organisation.”

The UAE telco provides fully managed services, including cloud. Straddling the worlds of traditional satellite-based broadcast services and streaming services on datamena, a regional carrier hub, Moustafa believes the broadcast industry in the region is ideally placed to expand reach and revenues through cloud. “It is not just about security fears. IT guys have the concept that to manage it, you have to own it and see it and touch it. One of my lectures at Cloud MENA two years ago was titled: ‘Who moved my data centre?’ The keenness to have dedicated firewalls and dedicated chambers within the cloud defeats the purpose of the cost-effectiveness of cloud.

“In the UK, we are moving our channels [to the cloud] by August... the feeds from London are going globally to the EMEA so it is taking more time in terms of language subtitling, dubbing and continuity issues... by the end of this year, all our services will be on cloud” Bassem Maher, Head of Operations at Discovery Networks MENA
“According to Research and Markets, the Middle East cloud applications’ market is expected to grow from $887.5 million in 2015 to $2.4 billion by 2020, at an estimated CAGR of 22.1% from 2015 to 2020. This is a huge number.

“Almost half of this will be government. It may be used to host the health records of citizens on the cloud. The level of trust shown by the UAE and other governments across the world indicates the acceptance of cloud as a secure platform.”

Srinivasan took up security for further debate in the second half of the discussion: “My usual retort to people is – if you had cash with you, would you keep it in a personal locker or in the bank?”

“With security, it is not just the fear of losing money, but losing valuable citizen data. And these concerns are not limited to cloud implementation alone,” responded Ammar Hina, Broadcast & TV Production Director at the Pro League Committee.

“A friendly hacker once told me that a laptop and USB placed in the toilet of the big firm would give him access to the entire operations of the organisation in under 10 minutes. Security is a big topic and not limited to the cloud. Having equipment in your premises will not make you secure. This is the traditional approach. With the cloud, we are sharing the risks, so this would enable the cloud provider to invest more in security. AWS has not had a single threat to their cloud.

Back to your question. I believe money in the bank is much safer.”

“Most leaks are down to human error and incompetence,” Mace of OSN pointed out. “The tools and technology for security on cloud are widely available and far superior by default than most on-premise security solutions. Broadcasters will be a lot more secure having their content on the cloud than on their premises – if they just build correctly and use the tools out there.”

On testing the robustness of the cloud, Srinivasan drew attention to effective public source programmes such as Netflix’s Chaos Monkey.

“This is a resiliency tool that helps applications tolerate random instance failures. You could run the application to test your cloud at its extreme vulnerabilities.”

Srinivasan then raised the issue of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).

“The two fundamental uses of AI are cost-saving and the possibilities of new opportunities. While the first is a natural driver, the second calls for visionary leadership. How do AI and ML impact your operations?” he queried.

Dave Mace of OSN explained that the broadcaster is deploying AI-powered technology to help with compliance, to offer a personalised experience to the viewer and to conduct security audits on the cloud services.

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Andrew Carney of OSN explained the current plans, still at the whiteboard stage, towards designing a strategic roadmap through the broadcast food chain, keeping the commercial front end in mind.

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that even if 60% of the content currently on tap was passed by AI-powered technology, leaving humans to analyse and check only for accuracy, precious time would be saved in terms of archiving.

Speaking of ground realities, Emmanuel Belleville of Etisalat Digital highlighted the challenges in an economically diverse region. “What’s left from Etisalat offers around 600 TV channels. The number is so large due to the unique demographics of the country. Also, we have different generations of set-top boxes and middleware that need to be updated regularly. While 4K has arrived, not all set-top boxes are compatible. While we have dedicated teams working on AI and ML, the priority for us is revamping our OTT service as well as enhancing the overall TV experience.”

Regarding the resilience of satellite-based broadcast, the participants predictably said satellite is here to stay. Ali of Al Madr TV added: “Internet broadband outside the UAE is not the most reliable. People still prefer linear television to watch matches and programmes during the month of Ramadan, for instance. Satellite-based broadcast is here to stay for a long time.”

As the discussion drew to a close, participants offered forecasts for cloud adoption in the region.

Rassem Maher of Discovery Networks MENA believed that “cloud is a huge opportunity and by 2019, not less than 50% of the channels will be on cloud.” Urging early adoption, Montafof dufeseemed “It would be a risk for companies not to join the cloud. My advice to your technical and management teams is to remove any fear of cloud. One size does not fit all, and depending on your business processes and geographical location, among other factors, you can opt for any number of customised solutions either with shared or dedicated security on the cloud. AI is already a mature technology and will imminently touch every part of the country, not just broadcast.”

Peter Van Dam lauded the initiatives taken by OSN, saying their efforts will help the rest of the industry adopt cloud that much quicker. While Lloyd O’Souza said that satellite will be in the region for a long time to come, he agreed with Ali of Al Sharqiya TV that cloud adoption is inevitable, although initially as a hybrid solution.

Emmanuel Belleville of Etisalat Digital drew attention to the various efforts of TRA to ensure that roles are cloud-enabled. “Not everyone is aware of it. There is a project by TRA initiated a couple of years ago. Now any consumer in the UAE can choose his ISP. It will soon be available for businesses. By the end of the year, Etisalat will begin to offer connectivity to du legacy areas and vice versa.”

While PLC’s Hina conceded that cloud adoption is difficult given the multiple partners to consult, he agreed with Ali of Al Majd TV that starting as an archiving/storage platform in the present, cloud will be the dominant solution in the future. OSN’s Carney asked why the region is not moving faster on cloud, given its rich potential. “While we are fully committed to the cloud, I believe cloud is a huge currency in the region with the potential to open up so many more opportunities for the broadcast industry.”

In conclusion, Dave Mace of OSN said there are no excuses not to get on the cloud and urged participants to innovate and fail fast. He encouraged everyone to tinker with the free and native services on each of the platforms such as AWS and Google.

As for job security, his advice to those who fear job loss is: “Cloud does not mean job loss. One of the things we have done at OSN is ensure that every single person in the technical department is being trained. So, my message is to come on board and enjoy the ride.”

“Broadcasters need to look at the critical issues of skill sets and training”

Lloyd O’Souza, Broadcast and Technical Operations, Fox Networks Group.
From Nollywood’s rapid rise to the relative slump in Egypt and mild resurgence in Morocco, the African filmmakers’ panel hosted by Canon at CABSAT painted a complex but promising picture for the continent.

By telling stories that people of the continent can readily identify with. “I believe our movies are about everyday circumstances and our culture, including family, government and about young people striving for success.”

A veteran of many Egyptian movies and dramas, actress Injy El Mokadem, agreed that content is one of the key drivers of success while also rueing Egypt’s fall from grace as the ‘Hollywood of the Orient’. “In Egypt, movies are a sort of universal language that bring people together. Previously, the topics dealt in Egyptian movies were related to culture, family, history and politics, and everything that is current. Egypt used to be a very big source for scripts and movies that had an impact not only in Egypt but across the world. After the revolution in Egypt, however, the quality of movies has started to go down – and this is because of poor scripts. The film industry used to be the second largest contributor to the country’s GDP after cotton. We are recovering slowly though, with more impactful stories.”

Many observers of the Egyptian film industry have attested to the stagnation since the 2011 revolution. From shifting tastes to financial shortages, the unanimous opinion is that the oldest and most competitive cinema industry in the MENA is a shadow of what it once was. In contrast, the film industry in Morocco has attempted to benefit from some atypical advantages. The Moroccan town of Ouarzazate boasts some of the world’s biggest studios. In 2016, the country earned an estimated $46 million from foreign film and television productions. Despite this international attention, up to a decade ago the Moroccan film industry was not in a good state. But production has increased since then, with about 15 films produced each year. Local films are being funded by the revenues Morocco receives from foreign productions filmed in the country. In addition, the revamped Moroccan Cinema Centre has been helping with funds and useful legislation. Moroccan actor Omar Lutfi, who received rave reviews for the 2009 movie CasaNegra about the Moroccan underworld, is more circumspect about the modest progress achieved. “If films are generated as much as it is important to have strong narratives, it is also important to make commercial movies because this is where revenues are generated. We need governments and filmmakers to collaborate both in the making and marketing of a film. We can then have movies that don’t just have strong narratives but are also commercially viable, and that in turn will drive more production.”

Another trend the panellists discussed was the focus on producing according to tastes.
“I would love to see a more united Africa. If we could take advantage of the sheer numbers of Africans and consume our own content, our film industries would thrive”

Toyin Sokefun-Bello, photographer, singer, Nigeria

Canon African Filmmaking Challenge

Canon initiated a filmmaking challenge for Egypt, Nigeria and Morocco, with aspiring filmmakers asked to submit a short narrative of their idea for a one-minute short film on the topic ‘Live for the Story’. One entry from each country was shortlisted, and each panellist was assigned one candidate to mentor. The films were posted on social media and the winner was chosen by public voting. At CABSAT 2018, Canon played the short videos created by the selected three aspiring filmmakers, with the winner announced at the panel discussion. The Moroccan entry was adjudged the overall winner, with the Nigerian and Egyptian entries second and third respectively.

The first-prize winner received the Canon 5D Mark IV camera, while the other two were awarded a 6D Mark II Canon camera each, to help them launch their professional filmmaking careers.

drama series for the Ramadan period. While this has given the industry a big revenue boost, it has also led to charging out countless sub-standard productions that suffer in terms of both content and quality. Highlighting the exploited nature of investment in television, Mokadem commented: “In Egypt and Morocco, the TV standards in production are trying to rise to the level of cinema production. Preparations for Ramadan productions begin a year in advance. In addition to heavy investments in equipment, actors move from the cinema industry to TV, as do crew members and other support staff.”

While North African markets, like the Middle East, grapple with the peculiar commercial challenges posed by Ramadan, Nigeria’s film industry becoming the second largest in the world is as much a story of accessible technology as of entrepreneurial filmmakers, Bello stressed. “The Nigerian film industry is huge, coming only behind Bollywood. The future of the industry has come, and this is because young creatives are picking up cameras and making films. A decade ago, if you needed to make a film, you would have to film high-quality on celluloid or shoot videos. There were only two options – high-quality or low-quality.”

Around the year 2002, there was no fancy Nollywood. The movies were simply known as Nigeria’s home videos. Nollywood is now available on satellite and cable television channels, as well as on streaming services like Bella TV. While most films have budgets of about $25,000 and are shot in a week, Nollywood now boasts a growing number of films on international platforms such as Netflix. Asked to name one of the key drivers that helped transform Nigeria’s film industry, Bello discussed the entry of DSLRs, which “revolutionised filmmaking and made it possible for younger people to make movies and tell different stories”. At the same time, she said the country has only seen the tip of the iceberg, because of the continued lack of reach of the movies.

“The platforms where this content is seen have completely exploded. Social media and YouTube have allowed people to tell stories outside of traditional platforms like the cinema screen. People are shooting short films and music videos. Nigerian music videos are seen across the world with millions of views. I think more than anything, the growth of the industry will have to do more with inclusion. Africa is a very huge market. Already Sub-Saharan Africa consumes its own content.”

Turning to fellow panellists Mokadem and Lutfi, Bello said: “I would like to see more of your movies in our cinemas and more of our movies in your cinemas. We need collaboration. If we are able to see stars from your countries in our movies and you are able to see what life is like for a Nigerian living in Egypt, stories will begin to come together. I think this will create a stronger pool of audience and also help in terms of monetisation of our content. I think collaboration should be the future.”

On the ground, the burden of collaboration within the continent is being borne by niche festivals such as the Luxor Africa Film Festival. Initiated in 2012 by Egyptian writer Sayed Fouad El-Gennary, the festival is a platform for African films that would not otherwise be screened in Egypt. Apart from the sterilised and slightly elitist confines of film festivals, Mokadem pointed out that pan-African collaboration is almost non-existent.

“There is no African content in Egypt. The only other content that is consumed is perhaps content from Bollywood and Hollywood, apart from series streamed on Netflix. Despite our shared culture and the common language of movies, it is really disappointing that within the African continent, nothing is being shared.
It’s also very disappointing that within the Arab region itself, there isn’t much in terms of collaboration.”

While industry stakeholders from Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana, among other countries, collaborate regularly, the long-term viability of African movies also hinges on cinema infrastructure and copyright enforcement.

The Nigerian film industry loses an estimated $2 billion to piracy each year. As reported in Newsweek in 2015, popular Nigerian actor and award-winning producer Kunle Afolayan was notified that his classic film October I had been pirated and was already being sold on Lagos streets at $3 per copy. The film had yet to recoup the $2 million invested in its production.

Although Nigeria and Egypt and other countries have laws against piracy, it remains a thriving business partly due to poor implementation of copyright laws, almost no prosecution of offenders, and corruption in governance agencies.

“The other hurdle is logistical: a dearth of cinema halls. A large country such as Egypt has about 500 cinemas, mostly in Cairo and large cities. In Morocco, the number is more appalling at under 50 theatres for a population of 100 million. Moroccan films reported perform well at the local box office, consistently recording free of the top ten films each year, but they are critically dependent on the surviving local cinemas.

Lutfi says films have largely received visibility in most parts of Morocco partly due to the internet, but unfortunately most are watched on pirate platforms.

“The internet has helped give people access to movies from all over the world. It has been the only way to reach people in different parts of our country where cinema theatres are almost non-existent.”

Paul Africano, Product Specialist at Canon Europe for professional video and cinema EOS cameras, part of the panel discussion, offered his view on the state of technology in Africa.

“From my limited experience of the African continent, although there’s no denying the amount and quality of content in this region, the problem always seems to be that technology is still a fill bit behind. Today, people are able to film videos with a 5D Mark II. In some countries, the 5D Mark III is used as a primary camera. From a Canon perspective, we are able to put a product into just about every budget. “We have the Canon Academy, which has been running quite successfully in a few African countries. I was in Ghana 18 months ago running a small film workshop teaching the basics in the craft of filmmaking.”

Cherian then asked the young influencers from Egypt, Morocco and Nigeria what their dreams were for the film industry in their countries and the continent as a whole.

Mokadem said she hoped Egypt would one day regain its title as the ‘Hollywood of the Orient’.

“I wish artists would be able to have a big impact the way they used to. I have very high aspirations for the country. I not only wish for collaboration between Egypt and African countries, but I want the rest of the world to connect with Egypt through our cinema.”

Dreaming of a more sustainable future, Lutfi said: “I truly hope, in the coming years, Morocco focuses its efforts on building cinema halls – because the market is there, the movies are there, but unless we are able to commercialise it and monetise it with screenings in cinemas, we won’t be able to move forward. There are big provinces within the country where movies are even shot and produced, but these cities don’t have cinemas, and as a filmmaker and Moroccon, it’s very disappointing. It is a huge challenge but a very reasonable demand on our part to be seeking cinemas in Morocco.”

With the radical dream of converting piracy to a legitimate platform, Bello said: “My dream for Nigeria would be to see more success in the sense that we are able to convert all the ‘monsters’ against filmmaking. Piracy has great distribution channels, and it would be nice to see those channels transformed and legitimised for the benefit of the filmmaker. We are trying to kill piracy, but we should be able to tweak it and turn it around so that the channels which are enemies of filmmaking are turned around. I would love to see more cinemas in more cities too.”

And lastly, the expressive Bello concluded with a fitting end to a lively panel discussion.

“I would love to see a more united Africa. If we could take advantage of the sheer numbers of Africans and consume our own content, our film industries would thrive.”

“"I firmly believe that as much as it is important to have strong narratives, it is also important to make commercial movies because this is where revenues are generated.

We need governments and filmmakers to collaborate both in the making and marketing of a film”

Omar Lutfi, actor, Morocco
Data protection has been a key element of storage system design since the earliest days of video production. For that matter, even the first filmmakers took pains to protect their negatives and edited masters. Today, data protection goes hand in hand with disaster recovery (DR) as a means to ensure the ongoing availability of mission-critical content, no matter what befalls it.

Broadcast and post-production operations – particularly episodic television, commercials and features – are especially contingent on tight schedules, with no room for downtime. For such operations, data protection and DR are the insurance essential to minimizing downtime and staying on schedule and on budget.

Beyond RAID

Reliance on redundant array of independent disks (RAID) has long played a central role in protecting against data loss, but today’s media-centric companies are looking at other ways to avoid loss of precious content. Whether it’s a drive going down or a true catastrophe such as a hurricane, flood, earthquake or fire, content creators must have a way to back up and retrieve digital media that it simply can’t afford to lose.

In many cases, the best way to do that is to maintain storage infrastructure at a second site geographically removed from the primary post facility, broadcast or broadcast station. This location could be in a different part of town, or in another city altogether. The cloud is increasingly a viable option as well.

Whether back-up is at a second site or on the cloud, the value of the data protection and DR model depends largely on timely, accurate synchronisation of content across the primary and back-up systems. Given all the time, effort and money that go into creating an episodic television show, or any other original content, the loss of just a day’s work can be painful, and the further loss associated with potential ad revenues can add significantly to this pain. To prevent this scenario, content creators must have a means of keeping duplicate content up to date so that in the event of a disaster, it is possible to quickly return to a recent version and get back to work with minimal downtime.

Ensuring the availability of content across sites is becoming easier with the maturation of tiered storage and data management technologies. Several key advances are giving media companies the ability to establish robust storage ecosystems equipped with vital data protection and DR capabilities.

Sustainable sync process

Pivoting among these advances is synchronisation of even the very largest file systems across physical sites. It was once necessary for the file system or third-party management tool to query the entire file system before changes could be determined, but this approach became unsustainable as digital media systems and file systems grew to unprecedented sizes – the sync process simply took too long.

By creating a replica of the source file system on the remote destination, however, technology suppliers have gotten around this problem. By constantly monitoring and analysing metadata, the data management system supporting the entire infrastructure can update only the content that needs to be updated. Thus, while initial deployment of a synchronisation solution might take some time, the subsequent incremental changes take very little time and bandwidth, enabling highly efficient maintenance of up-to-date content.

In effect, current data management technology has made multipoint content synchronisation a set-and-forget convenience, says Keith Lissak from Quantum.

Multi-site operations no longer need to rely on third-party file management tools to query the entire file system to determine content changes. A modern approach allows media professionals to automate the synchronisation of data between geographically separated file systems, for greater data protection and collaboration.

In this scenario, a file system at Site A is duplicated at Site B, which could be located down the hall or across the country. Site B, in turn, can share the content with other sites.

Metadata monitoring maintains continuous synchronisation between the sites, with version control syncing only the changed data blocks. The result is the fastest, simplest way yet to track incremental changes and assure data protection across mission-critical operations.

Cloud as an archival tier

Media companies can also choose the cloud as a storage tier supported by data protection and DR. In this case, the cloud – other public or private – can be leveraged much like any physical location. Today’s data management systems make it easy for users to integrate existing public-cloud storage accounts from the likes of Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud, with third-party object storage (private cloud) as a back-up or archive tier.

While it’s true that pulling content down from a public cloud service can be costly, the relatively low cost of storage up until that point makes the cloud a solid choice for maintaining secure, accessible copies of valuable content. The cost of accessing that content will likely be worth it in the unlikely event of a catastrophe.

Disasters can strike at any time without notice, and it is essential that media companies protect their assets. In the era of digital media, those assets are intangible; gone are the days of film canisters hidden away in an underground vault, or videotapes secured in a climate-controlled, fire-proof facility. Protecting content and ensuring that it can be quickly accessed is therefore requires careful planning. Today’s solution relies on highly automated file movement, back-up and management, which together give media companies the valuable peace of mind – confidence that they can continue operations even through a natural disaster or other catastrophic event.

Keith Lissak is senior director, M&E Solutions Marketing at Quantum.
An estimated 13,000 industry professionals attended the 24th edition of CABSAT, from January 14-16 at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC). The event was inaugurated by Sheikh Hasher Bin Maktoum Al Maktoum, Director General of Dubai’s Department of Information.

With brands and distributors vying to offer visitors a touch-and-try experience of their product range, CABSAT 2018 had Arabic potters, Moroccan interiors, bakeries and a dedicated area for members of the Maasai Mara tribe.

“Our goal is to provide a platform for experts and professionals in the industry to meet and explore the cutting edge of technology,” said Trixie Loh Mirmand, Senior VP, Events Management, DWTC.

Sharing their insights during this year’s Content Congress were more than 60 speakers representing Facebook, BBC, iflix, WWE, UTURN, Rotana Media Group, Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN), Turner Broadcasting, Cote Ouest, Cairo News Company, Discovery Networks and Fremantle Media, among others.

With a regional TV market set to reach $15 billion by 2021, the congress also focused on the growth of Arabic content and its role in the region. Those who took part in this discussion on Arabic content were Adam Khwaja, Creative Director, Cartoon Network Studios Arabia; Khulud Abu Homos, CEO, Arab Format Lab; and Mido Shaban, Executive Director, Entertainment and Commissioning, CBC Egypt.
Akamai discusses the changing landscape for OTT delivery in MENA and how to take advantage of the opportunity with emerging technologies at CABSAT this year. Speaking about the trends in the market and what Akamai brings to the table, Martin Heimer, Regional Director, Media, MENA said "the region is extremely innovative and we are showing a lot of new technologies that we have introduced to make online streaming even better than before."

"Our idea is to bring OTT to all people and all devices and for that, we have innovated a lot of technologies not only on the end user side but also on the ingest side so that the whole wave from the encoder to the end user is covered. A lot of customers and prospects are interested in this to build completely new business models that are driving the media industry in the region. This is where we are getting a lot of traction. With viewer consumption habits changing and viewers moving between linear and OTT experiences, there are rising quality expectations and the need for an exceptional entertainment experience. Natalie Billingham, VP, Sales, Media, EMEA for Akamai commented that "the desire for quality is something that we see across the board. A lot of mobile users today are not necessarily using the traditional methods to consume content so they require a different efficiency. The reason we talk about better than broadcast is because our customers are looking for quality and without losing focus on reliability and consistency, which have always driven the broadcast business."  

Heimer commented that Akamai is addressing this need by providing media delivery services with media acceleration efficiencies.

"We are doing this on several fronts. On the ingest side, we are accelerating it to make it more stable and more reliable. On the user side, we have media acceleration technologies that are helping a lot to get the content from different sources in a higher quality. We are serving end users with 30% more efficiency and this is exciting because it enables higher bit rates. HD and 4K can all arrive on the user’s device even under congested network conditions. We could do this before as well but now, we can do it really well. And this is enabling us to provide a whole range of services."

www.akamai.com

"Radio networks will cope better with the coming digital transformation than TV. Radio is a lot more flexible and it has comparatively inexpensive workflows. Those two characteristics are very important to evolve with the digital transformation. In 2018, we will be concentrating on our existing client base and helping them with the evolution. We have 60 clients in 40 countries."

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Akamai promises better quality and reliability with media acceleration technologies

PC OSAAT

Peter Hajittofi, former CEO of Pebble Beach Systems, was at CABSAT this year as CEO of Coral Bay.TV. To showcase the beta release of the company’s cloud-based playout solution, Coral Bay.TV offers a solution that promises to deliver the whole playout end to end, including automation control and video/audio playout with graphics, subtitling and MPEG-2 transport stream encoding. The solution can also be plugged in with third-party components, depending on what the client uses.

"In true automation philosophy, we can work both ways," commented Hajittofi, adding that this solution will work just as well within a facility as in the cloud. While work started in 2016, a beta release of the product will be available this month.

“We will offer the software to a number of select customers in the region for trial. The solution we have is very relevant to this market. It is ideal for large, multi-channel playout operations. We also hope to have 4K played by NAB, with support for H265 and HTML5 support for graphics,” added Hajittofi.

www.coralbay.tv

Coral Bay.TV introduces playout in the cloud

"We’ve expanded our distribution network into more major outlets and electronic stores in the UAE and the region, as well as in some other Middle East countries. At CABSAT, it is not just about displaying our exciting brands and products, but also exchanging information about latest broadcast and video equipment, new technologies and the current trends in the TV and film industry."

Peoyan Farsami, Senior Product Manager, Advanced Media Trading

Wise of 'Script to Screen in 48' competition

The 'Script to Screen in 48' workshop and competition brought young professionals and filmmakers together for a half-day workshop, pitching short film ideas and then, filming the content on-site at CABSAT within 48 hours. The event was hosted by Martin Gava, former SVP of Global Creative Content for 20th century Fox, with participants.

The winners were Akshay Joshi, Rahul Rajpuria, Ankit Sarda, Abhishek Kshirsagar, Rahul Rajpuria with alnoud al Hashmi, also judged the event, along with Alan Dyer, SVP of Global Creative Content for 20th century Fox, with participants.

The winners were

Kamal Shantanu and Donald Rajyaguru, Joe Francis, Atharva Kshirsagar, Rahul Rajpuria, Ankit Sarda and Dubai Production city.

Media city, Dubai Studio city and Dubai Production city.

Prizes included a six-month internship and mentorship programme at m5 Media.

www.coralbay.tv

SPOTTED

AT CABSAT

"We are showcasing our range of switchers at CABSAT including the 7 M/E video switcher, the HVS-2000, the HVS-490 HD/4K-UHD video switcher, and the FA-9600 dual channel frame synchroniser. We’re committed to the MENA region and that is why we opened our Dubai office a few years ago."

Mohammed Abu Ziyad, System Engineering Manager, MEA, FOR-A

With viewer consumption habits changing and viewers moving between linear and OTT experiences, there are rising quality expectations and the http://www.broadcastprome.com | February 2018

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When consumers become fans: Viacom CEO

Raffaele An necchio, President and MD of Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN) Southern & Western Europe, & MEA discussed the future of TV at CABSAT, where he also served as speaker on one of the panels.

“Linear television is having a good moment, but we now have the possibility to distribute our content on many other platforms. As content producers, we spend $1 billion a year on content. While content becomes property, the consumer is the fan. We engage with our consumers through different platforms.

For instance, you can watch Nickelodeon’s PAW Patrol on linear TV via OSN or engage with the brand in the Nickelodeon stores in Dubai Mall, among other platforms. “We apply a ‘glocal’ strategy. The Comedy Central channel that we launched with OSN has featured more than 50 regional comedians in the current season.”

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President and MD of Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN) Southern & Western Europe, & MEA.

Lawo makes inroads with Gulf installations, promotes video component at CABSAT

Lawo had a good year in 2017 with a number of installations, the most recent being at Abu Dhabi Media Radio. Speaking about the recent installation, Klaus-Joerg Jasper, Sales Director – Middle East said: “Lawo had a good year last year and we have seen a steady number of installations in the Middle East go up. Our most recent installation was at Abu Dhabi Media Radio, where we replaced their entire routing system with the Lawo router. Our VSM (Virtual Studio Manager) is now controlling the entire radio system from a monitoring and control point of view. This was commissioned at the end of last year. Our routing system is a hybrid system, which means it offers both traditional and IP support. So Abu Dhabi Media Radio’s old studio will be supported in a traditional manner while the new studios use IP. “The three new studios are equipped with Sapphire compact. This is all IP. The connection between the new routing system and the new studios are all IP. This is why they chose Lawo. You can be safe by connecting the old studios in the traditional way.”

Jasper also highlighted Lawo’s video business stating that this was gaining traction in the market. “People know us as an audio company but we also have a big video component. We have done big projects internationally like in Australia with NEP, which is a big showcase for us. They have 29 venues across the country that are connected to their two hubs in Melbourne and Sydney via IP. They use audio, video and control products from Lawo to achieve this.”

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World debut of Ultrix at Ross Video

CABSAT saw the world debut of the Ultrix routing and signal processing platform from Ross Video. The 16x164 version of Ultrix delivers a fully featured router platform with integrated MultiViewers and FrameSycns in an extremely compact SRU chassis.

“The can replace few racks of equipment with this and it requires less cabling,” commented Stuart Russell, Senior Communications Manager at Ross Video, adding that it is targeted at traditional environments, flypaks and sports venues, among others. Russell stated that the software-defined nature of Ultra is the real disruptor.

The ability to change and update functionality via software licence means Ultra customers only buy what they need, when they need it.

“Broadcasters are conscious of spend in the current climate and want reassurance that any investment in products now will not be compromised by changes in technology. Ultrix provides that security,” added Todd Royg, Business Development Manager, Infrastructure, Ross Video.

www.crossvideo.com

Dave’s picks at CABSAT

Dave Armstrong, Director of Broadcast & Technology at ARN, who was at CABSAT, pointed out some solutions that caught his eye.

“CABSAT provides a great opportunity to see the latest products and discuss possible integration solutions with vendors and get all the answers in one place. Flexibility has become one of the key things I look for in a product. I’m looking for objects that don’t limit our business or its us down to just one manufacturer or system for many years to come.

“One system that brings together many workflows and products seamlessly is IDS Intelligent Display System by IPE. Having the ability to be alerted to a power outage or audio failure on a large monitoring screen, check the room and rack temperature, look at the CCTV picture as you understand what is happening at that location, and call for assistance – all on one small touchscreen and larger LCD – is the sort of thing that puts a product on its own as a market leader.

“Also catching my eye was the brand-new release from Strelitz. The new Video Logger tool is basically a video version of their popular audio logging tool. This will prove a very popular tool in TV channels and production houses that want to quickly take audio that has been broadcast and repurpose it for social media or online use.

“The new audio mixing console from Studer is a fantastic piece of machinery. For large sites, a huge benefit of this solution is the forwards and backwards compatibility with Studer DSP platforms, including Core Live and Infinity Core. There are also great engineering controls that allow admins to restrict the features and functions so that users only see what they need to see and don’t get confused by complicated routing and affects modules.”

www.blazedx.com

Monitoring and monetising with RightsU

Mumbai firm U-TO Solutions showcased RightsU, a solution to enable media organisations to manage content at every stage of an asset’s life. Dheeraj Lilani, SVP Strategy & BD, U-TO Solutions, explained the relevance of the solution.

“The MENa region is starting to catch on to the need for compliance. The critical question with compliance for content owners and providers is knowing the platforms they have a right for. For instance, there are 100 different platforms in which an asset can be consumed – now you multiply that by 365 days and further multiply that by 183 countries and 50 languages. Our platform gives them a tool to manage the legal distribution of content easily.

“Also, for big content owners in the region, we help create seamless solutions from soft contracts for easy validation to watermarking.”

Dr Eng Umberto Asti, VP, ARET

Redefining standards for location lighting

British LED lighting manufacturer Rotlight had a new entry to its stock of LED lights at CABSAT – the Anova Pro Z, a bi-colour LED fixture that outputs 2,770 lumens at a distance of three feet using 44W of power, 94% less than a tungsten light of similar brightness, explained Chairman Rod Gammons.

“In places like Jordan, power costs can be very expensive. If they could use Rotlight instead of traditional tungsten fitting, it saves on 95% of the energy consumption to deliver the same amount of light. Plus, our lights don’t flicker, so they can mix our light with any other form of lighting and it does not cause strobing. We believe the Middle East is a vibrant region with a lot of regional broadcasters upgrading their studios, and we work closely with our regional partners Amanarhine Trading.”

www.rotlight.com

In the 15 to 20 years we have been in the Middle East, customers have switched to HD sometimes even before the European markets, and now they are looking at IP-based solutions. With our own coach-building unit in Milan, we focus on improving the performance of our OB vans, especially in harsh environments such as in this region.”

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“Engaging Arabic-speaking diaspora”

The ATN Media Group was looking to increase the number of channels offered to the Arab-speaking diaspora across Europe and North America. Content Manager, Mohammed Azzam elaborated on the company’s strategy for 2018: “We rebranded Arabic channels to Europe with exclusive agreements with channels such as MBC. We have target audiences in Sweden, the rest of Europe, Canada and the USA.

“Despite the set-top box model, we have an OTT platform and we are now developing an application for smart TVs with the same content. For 2018, we are looking at softwares that will allow us to run commercials during programmes.”

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www.atntnetwork.com
AsiaSat has broadened its satellite and media solutions with the addition of IP-based delivery solutions and OTT service. AsiaSat recognises the demand for next-generation distribution of broadcast content, and evaluated new distribution technologies throughout 2017. AsiaSat is poised to deliver video content through its new IP platform, defined as a hybrid solution combining satellite and IP-based solutions. Satellite delivery is at the heart of AsiaSat’s media solutions. The hybrid nature of the product opens business opportunities for rural areas for village Wi-Fi, communities (bars, schools, airports, etc) or mobility services (maritime, e-flight connectivity), allowing AsiaSat's customers to benefit from ready-to-use solutions. These solutions are fully supported by AsiaSat's Tai Po teleport infrastructure in Hong Kong, with 2G/3G monitoring from AsiaSat's Customer Network Centre.

Eutelsat releases new 7/8-degrees West data

At CABSAT, Eutelsat released new data about the TV channels it broadcasts from its 7/8° West video neighbourhood. Its demand is driven by the growth of HD content, now broadcast on 187 channels at this position. One visible shift can be noticed when it comes to FTA, now broadcasting more than 110 HD channels, a 44% increase from January 2017 to January 2018. This acceleration, which once mainly applied to Gulf countries, now applies to the entire region, especially Levantine and North African countries.

The pace of HD adoption is accelerating in the MENA region. According to Eutelsat’s latest TV Observatory report relating to Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, HD-equipped homes at 7/8° West neighbourhood are now up to 20.6 million (66% of TV homes), up from 10.7 million in 2016.

Azercomos focuses on data connectivity this year

Azercomos returned to CABSAT this year, focusing its satellite services on the region. It provides satellite capacity in various service providers’ broadcast solutions to end users, Azercomos, the first telecommunications satellite operated by Azercomos, provides reliable broadband and broadcast solutions to customers in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. For its 5th year, Azercomos concentrated on building its presence with data connectivity in the MENA region, especially in the field of mobile backhaul and mobility applications. Visitors also had a chance to get acquainted with the services and coverage area of Azercomos’ 2, the second communication satellite to be launched in 2018. Azercomos’ 2 will operate with higher-power Ku-band in Europe, Asia and Pakistan and Afghanistan, West Africa and Central Africa in 1.7 degrees East.

Azercomos also highlighted its video hotspot for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with over four million households connected, and intends to continue growing the business in the MENA region. Fixed Aisiom and Satellite Business Operations Director at Azercomos, said “Azercomos is the exclusive video distribution partner of the leading events and has been successfully broadcasting important sports, political and cultural events in Egypt, Europe and Central Asia, such as the Azerbaijani Grand Prix, Islamic Solidarity Games, World University Games, European Athletics Youth Championships and 2015 Turkish general elections.”

The MENA region is rapidly expanding in terms of new business opportunities in the market growth. MENA region constitutes the core business geography Azercomos, which covers Europe, Africa, Asia and the MENA region, can deliver unique value for customers and international businesses. Aisiom adds “We have several customers in the region, as well as partners from MENA doing business in Africa. El Kazakhstan, Dneva, Dom Telecom and many others are established and reliable partners for Azercomos in the region. As the satellite business is expanding, Azercomos is looking forward to more intense collaboration with service providers, teleports and partners in the region to address the specific business needs of the customers and serve in the IBC market as well.”

Future plans of the company include enhancing the coverage area and spectrum of services by launching a teleport in Central Asia, Azercomos-2 at 43° East in 2018.

Globecast highlights telco services

Globecast highlighted the latest advances in its telco services at CABSAT 2018. To help its customers reach the world’s leading pay-TV and telco platforms, Globecast aggregates and distributes premium worldwide content.

More than 60 TV channels are currently acquired, processed and delivered for broadcast as part of the line-up of several pay-TV platforms worldwide, including tier-one telco and cable operators such as Orange and Virgin Media. Globecast also announced its new cloud channel playout solution for SD, HD and 4K channels. This solution significantly enhances service deployment efficiency, reduces time-to-market and allows broadcasters to reach new international markets with lower up-front investment. With this approach, flexibility is very high. The number of channels can be increased or reduced within days, for particular audiences and events.

Sat-Lite showcases antennas

At CABSAT, Sat-Lite showcased its new 80cm, on case carbon fibre flyaway antenna, as well as its 2m vehicle-mounted SNG antenna with auto locate control system.

Sat-Lite Technologies has quickly established a reputation for delivering antennas and equipment of the highest quality and reliability. The company has a wide product line of vehicle-mounted SNG and transit case-based flyaway antennas, ranging in size from 80cm to 2.4m, as well as the expertise to design, customise satellite antenna products. Also designed and manufactured in-house are RF feed components (horn, OMT) in C-, Ku-, DBS- and Ka-band. Its antennas range from budget-friendly VSAT style to ruggedised high-performance carbon fibre solutions. All highly configurable flyaway antennas are available as manual or motorised auto acquire and are field upgradeable.

Newtec Dialog leverages power of IP

Newtec showcased its solutions for broadcast and mobility that harness improved efficiencies and throughputs delivered by 5G and spot beam technology. This delivers high-quality services for operators and service providers alike.

As mobile operators face increasing demand to extend their services, cellular backhaul over satellite enables connectivity from a region where terrestrial infrastructure is limited or non-existent. While 2G and 3G are still the primary mobile services deployed, 4G’s popularity is quickly growing, bringing significant volumes of data and an added need for efficiency and enhanced quality of experience. Newtec demonstrated its multi-service VSAT platform Newtec Dialog, which offers voice service quality control, ensures a high number of HTTP connections and downloads, and minimises retransmissions in the mobile network. This allows mobile operators to meet stringent service level agreements and offer numerous mobile and fixed services from one platform.

The media landscape is also changing, with modern networking applications requiring a reliable bi-directional IP multiservice communication link atmseable bandwidths to allow those on an location to operate as if they are in the studio. Newtec Dialog leverages the power of IP and offers multiple services on a single platform, providing a solution to the most common challenges faced by broadcasters.

The platform allows the satellite link to dynamically scale to higher bandwidths when terminal bandwidth becomes contested, while Newtec’s Mx-DMA technology combines MF-TDMA’s flexibility with SEPC’s efficiency, avoiding satellite link contention packet loss and space segment fragmentation.

The higher bitrates required to deliver 4K and UHD TV mean increased efficiency.

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2017 has been a busy year for content protection and creativity in the MENA region. Over the course of twelve months, the region has become the next big frontier for all types of video services and is particularly suited to OTT.

With 75 million viewers, the market looks like a great opportunity for OTT service providers. Yet it hasn’t been an easy one to crack for legal OTT services – today, only 2.3 million consumers pay for an OTT subscription throughout the region. Despite an attractive landscape of creative players such as beIN Sports Connect, Iris, MBC Shahid, OSN GO and STARS Play, and international giants such as Amazon Prime Video and Netflix trying to get a slice of the pie, OTT service providers face very basic challenges on the ground: the lack of uniformity in broadband availability across the region, and viewers accustomed to free-to-air channels and pirated content. The lack of regulatory in the Middle East and Africa, and illicit redistribution methods.

In addition, the lack of regulatory frameworks has hindered adoption of subscription-based services. According to the IDC report, Piracy in the Middle East and Africa, illegal content distribution costs the industry in excess of $750 million in lost revenue every year.

For subscription-based services, the challenge is as much about proving the value of their content catalogues as it is about changing the perception that content is free. This approach will enable OTT service providers to start converting the remaining 72.7 million viewers in the region into paying subscribers, though Vidya S. Nath, Research Director at Frost & Sullivan, predicts that subscribers “could potentially grow to 20 million by 2020” in a report published earlier this year.

Building a case with technology

One of the most creative uses of technology to help change mentalities is KidZania Dubai’s 60-second game Copycat Combat, the world’s first content protection virtual reality game, launched by OSN and Dubai Customs last summer. Aimed at children between the ages of five and 12, the game enables players to ‘shield’ OSN’s precious collection of movies, ‘TV series, kids’ shows and sports events from content thieves trying to steal the assets.

The most robust content protection arsenal today consists of three different solutions: conditional access digital rights management, tamper notices and anti-piracy solutions, and forensic watermarking. These enable content owners, broadcasters and OTT service providers to limit access to content to authorised subscribers only, and help identify any source of illicit redistribution once the distribution has reached the viewer.

The UAE-based MENA Broadcast Satellite Anti-Piracy Coalition has been at the forefront of the anti-piracy war since its inception in 2014. According to official statements, the coalition has already helped remove over 86,000 illegal videos from YouTube and Dailymotion, taken down nearly 2,800 advertisements for pirated boxes on online markets, and reported 829 free-to-air channel copyright infringements to satellite operators and distributors.

Earlier this year, a complaint launched by the Coalition in Abu Dhabi also led to the administrator of a pirate website being sentenced to six months in jail and fined $13,600 (AED 50,000) for illegally uploading torrent and facilitating the illegal restreaming of OSN content.

There is more change to be expected from Saudi Arabia with the lifting of the 35-year ban on cinemas. The Satellite Anti-Piracy Coalition has also been a major player in the kingdom, simply by adding another legal service to the current options available to viewers.

The recent initiatives in the region are very promising, and we look forward to working closely with MENA broadcasters, OTT service providers and organisations over the course of 2018.\[1\]

Chrys Paulain is Director of Sales APAC, France, Middle East and Africa at NexGuard, a Kudelski company.

From education and punitive steps to watermarking, MENA demonstrates many ways to tackle the scourge of content piracy

Multipronged attack on content piracy, MENA-style

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