IP roundtable compels industry to challenge existing broadcast norms
Traditionally, December has been a quiet period for BroadcastPro, when we take some time off to be at the Dubai International Film Festival, meet a different crowd, go to the movies, talk to filmmakers and simply drink in the festive atmosphere that builds up during the season. This has also traditionally been our period of recovery from the flurry of activity that takes over in the last quarter of every year with the onset of IBC in September, followed by a host of workshops, press conferences and events galore – with our own golf day thrown in – and all culminating in the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards.

This December, however, we have been busy scouting for the best and most exciting tech stories in the region, interviewing broadcasters and systems integrators, writing out case studies and putting together one of our finest issues for yet another CABSAT, the MENA’s most celebrated broadcast exhibition. Nothing adds greater flavour to a celebrated issue than a roundtable bringing together an unusual mix of senior executives to discuss a topic that is on everyone’s mind, one that is clearly the path forward but still in its nascent phase in the region. Yes, we discussed IP – but not the usual way. We brought together three segments, namely the telcos, the satellite players and the broadcasters, in one room to discuss how this technology will alter their existing relationships and create new ones between them.

But I won’t divulge more. Make sure you pick up your copy of the magazine at our stand at CABSAT, or simply come by to say hello. See you at the show!
Our new contrast medium

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PRO CONTENTS

January 2018

Inside this issue

07 NEWS
Cannes scouts for best TV drama, KSA inks theatre deal, Alrai chooses Imagine and more

18 COVER - IP ROUNDTABLE
Experts on the promising road ahead for IP at the Rohde and Schwarz roundtable

32 4K AT KUWAIT TV
An exclusive walk through the cutting-edge technology at KTV

42 BAHRAINI TRIUMPH
Armed with the RED EPIC, Director Yousif Kooheji delivers a box-office hit

50 OTT IN SAUDI ARABIA
Pathbreaking moves by Saudi Broadcasting Corporation

58 OVERHAUL IN ABU DHABI
Abu Dhabi Media gears up for a future with IP

60 TRUE 3D WORKSPACE?
BMD’s Fusion at par with the beat, says our reviewer

68 TECH TALK WITH STBs
Measuring viewers with the set-top box

72 BREAKING AT SKY NEWS
A new global content contribution platform

76 DIFF SPOTLIGHT
Gulf filmmakers in the spotlight

78 SHURE SOUND
Behind the scenes at Shure HQ

84 CABSAT 2018
Products and innovations will be unveiled

96 NOT JUST ANTI-PIRACY
Nick Fitzgerald of TV2U spells out the larger benefits
Hedbox, a manufacturer of professional lithium-ion battery packs and chargers, is setting up a Dubai-based distribution hub for the MENA and other parts of Asia. Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, General Manager Michael Jones said: “We believe we are the only battery producer that has invested locally in its own office in the region. This is primarily so we can provide much faster support and supply to our resellers. It is vital for camera crews to always be shooting so I believe we can support the market better than our peers.”

The company will be offering regional after-sales support for the products, not available with competing brands, he claimed. Hedbox will be participating at CABSAT, where an exclusive partnership with Dubai-based distributor UBMS will be announced officially.

Hedbox sets up distribution hub for MENA region

New Cannes fest invites drama entries from MENA

MIPTV and Canneseries have opened a worldwide search for the next big global drama hit, selected by a jury of industry experts. ‘In Development’ is a two-day event dedicated to fast-tracking drama series’ productions at an international level. It will be held from April 10-11, 2018 alongside MIPTV and Canneseries. Canneseries is the new television festival set to launch alongside MIPTV. After a first round by a pre-selection committee, an international jury of drama experts will select the 10 projects that will be pitched on stage. The deadline for project submissions is January 8, 2018, and the selected projects will be announced by the end of February.

On the sidelines of DIBF 2017, BroadcastPro ME met with Ted Baracos, Director of Market Development at BroadMIDEM, organiser of MIPTV and MIPCOM.

Looking forward to entries from the MENA region, Baracos said: “This competition is notably around fiction. This has been born out of the fact that audiences love drama series and fiction. It is popular for ratings. The city of Cannes proposed the Canneseries. The added value is that our regular buyers get to look at globally curated content. At the same time, the public can go to the theatres and view the best of drama series from around the world.”

The event will aim at screening new half-hour and one-hour series from all around the world, preferably world premiers, and will only consider first seasons of shows.

iflix hits 10bn mark in streaming minutes

iflix has announced that the video streaming platform has had 10 billion minutes streamed across its platform in 2017. The iflix app also reportedly surpassed 12 million downloads from Google Play and Apple iOS stores.

The company’s localised content strategy focusing on first-run local movies direct from cinema and a slate of original programming has reportedly shown the largest gains in viewership. The company’s first Middle East and North Africa (MENA) foray in originals, Wakhlima Walba, a 60-episode Egyptian TV series, was recently named OTT Production of the Year at the Broadcast PRO ME Awards 2017.

New CEO for Imagine Communications

Tom Cotney has taken over from Charlie Vogt as CEO of Imagine Communications, which is part of The Gores Group. Cotney has spent 20 of his 30-year career partnering, selling to and competing in the telecommunications and mobile technology industries. Charlie Vogt, who held that role previously, is joining The Gores Group as a Senior Advisor to continue to drive M&A development activities at Imagine.

ALTV hires exec producer

ALTV.com has appointed Wafa Loghmari as Executive Producer. Loghmari, 35, who was previously working on the CBC show EL Duplex featuring the internet celebrity Abla Fahita, will create new flagship shows at ALTV.com.

Senheiser’s best performing analogue and digital receiver system in one compact pack.

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Call for original content from MENA

My Film Works, an online platform for independent filmmakers, is inviting original content from the region. The streaming portal based out of Europe presently has more than 1,000 titles from filmmakers of 45 different countries streaming in 38 different languages, according to its Dubai-based founder Sanjay Das. Content on My Film Works covers a wide range of genres including feature films, shorts, documentaries, music video and any other professionally produced film.

“To draw an analogy, My Film Works is LinkedIn and Vimeo combined,” Das said. “You create your page and upload your film. The filmmaker can then connect to all their social media accounts including IMDb and link any funding campaign to the page. Uploading movies is free and we offer the content in six languages including the original language, thus expanding the reach. We actively engage on social media and the 225,000 followers we have on Facebook give our filmmakers added visibility.”

My Film Works is approaching TV channels and portals to market the content. The site hopes to connect filmmakers and commercial brands “to get brands to fund filmmakers or get filmmakers to make content for the brand”, revealed Das.

UK duo wins $50,000 prize for F1 Connectivity Innovation

Tata Communications, the official connectivity provider to Formula 1 and the official managed-connectivity supplier of Mercedes-AMG Petronas Motorsport, has announced UK-based duo Benjamin Lambert and Alexander Gibson as the winners of the US$ 50,000, 2017 F1 Connectivity Innovation Prize.

Tata Communications is also the official Content Delivery Network (CDN) provider of F1.com. Its CDN sees a reported traffic of 50m unique users each year with more than 3.7m hours of video distributed online. Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, Mehul Kapadia, VP - Global Marketing at Tata Communications said: “Approximately 500 hours of effort go into setting up a free setup just two weeks before the Thursday of each race week. It took just three days to install, test and bring the network at Abu Dhabi Yas Marina Circuit.

“At the core, we provide F1 with connectivity services. We connect all the race tracks to their offices in the UK. On that connectivity, they pretty much run everything. Data is transmitted in the blink of an eye (approximately 130 milliseconds) through 12,000km of fibre route across two continents. It helps that more than 28% of world’s Internet routes travel over Tata Communications’ network.”

OSN launches ASLI platform for regional online content

OSN has announced the launch of ASLI, aimed to be a free, curated content publishing platform.

ASLI, which means original in many of the region’s languages, is OSN’s latest strategic offering and will be live in early 2018 through the company’s existing OTT platform, WAOV, and will be free for viewers.

One of the region’s existing content creators who will initially be featured on ASLI are Pasta Planet, Puny Pun Times, Kerning Cultures, The Planet, What Doesn’t Suck, Waastaa, Halla Walla and The Scene Club.

The new ATEM Television Studio HD is a powerful professional switcher with HDMI and SDI inputs, multiview, talkback, DVE, media players and more!

ATEM Television Studio HD is the first production switcher designed for both broadcast and web professionals. You get 4 HDMI and 4 SDI inputs with re-syn, along with multiview, talkback, DVE, an audio mixer, mediaplayers and more. It’s perfect for both traditional and web broadcasters, as a portable AV switcher, or even for covering gaming competitions. Simply plug in cameras, game consoles or computers and start switching live!

ATEM Television Studio HD is a true professional switcher with transitions such as cut, dissolve, split, wipe, graphic wipe and DVE transitions. The DVE can also be used for picture in picture effects, making it perfect for interviews and live commentators. The flash based media pool holds 20 RGBA still frames so you can add custom graphics and logos!

ATEM Television Studio HD also be used for picture in picture effects, making it perfect for interviews and live commentators. The flash based media pool holds 20 RGBA still frames so you can add custom graphics and logos!

Connect Up to 8 Sources

With 4 HDMI and 4 3G-SDI inputs that support all formats up to 1080p60, you can connect up to 8 cameras, game consoles, computers or other sources. All inputs have frame re-synchronization for clean switching between all sources. You also get 4 SDI program outputs with talkback and tally, as well as multiview and aux out, and inputs for RS-422, reference and analog audio.

Hardware or Software Control

You can operate ATEM Television Studio HD directly from the front panel to create HD programs with effects and transitions, without the need for any extra hardware! Also included is a software control panel for Mac and Windows for full switcher control, macro, media management, remote camera color correction and control, plus audio mixing!

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae
New president for 21st Century Fox Asia

21st Century Fox (21CF) has elevated Star India Chairman and CEO Uday Shankar to the post of President, 21st Century Fox, Asia, with immediate effect. In his new role, Shankar will lead 21CF’s video businesses across all of Asia, including Star India and Fox Networks Group, and work closely with 21CF leadership on key regional initiatives.

Brian Sullivan named FNG’s President & COO

Brian Sullivan has been promoted to President and COO of Fox Networks Group. Sullivan succeeds Randy Freer, who was named CEO of Hulu last month. At FNG, Sullivan will serve as the head of revenue and distribution for the TV group. He reports to 21st Century Fox President Peter Rice.

Imagine Communications upgrades playout at Kuwait’s Alrai TV

Imagine Communications has implemented a playout system at Alrai TV, a Kuwait-based channel. The system integrates with existing islands of operations, provided by Imagine Communications, covering production, news and playout.

Content for both the newsroom and the channel playout is stored on a network of Nexio servers. Management of that content, including ingest, quality control and transcoding, as well as redundancy and archiving, is handled by Nexio Motion asset management software. This transparent utility layer links directly to both the ABC automation for channel playout and the Nexio integrated news production playout applications. The deployment also includes multiple Scelio 6800+ processing systems and Imagine Storage.

“We recognised that technology is moving on, and we wanted a fully integrated architecture that supported all of our workflows,” said Tarek Majdalani, Director of Engineering and Operations at Alrai TV, who noted that the Kuwait-based broadcaster is upgrading its broadcast infrastructure with the objective of achieving a full HD transmission.

Disney buys Fox for $52.4bn

Disney will acquire 21st Century Fox’s entertainment assets for a total of $52.4bn. The deal includes Fox’s 39% stake in Sky and the 20th Century Fox film studio. Fox News and Sports will form a new company. Fox is reportedly selling assets including its FX and National Geographic cable channels and media company, Star India. Disney will also buy Fox’s stake in Hulu, giving it majority control of a competitor to Netflix. Hulu is partially owned by Comcast and Time Warner.

Empire International and Synergy Films sign exclusive deal

Film distributor Empire International and Egyptian production company, Synergy Films, have signed an exclusive three-year deal. According to the deal, Empire will serve as the sole distributor of Synergy Films’ lineup of movies in the Middle East. The contract also stipulates that Synergy will provide Empire with nine films every year for the next three years. The announcement was made by Empire’s CEO Mario Georges Haddad, and Ahmed Badawy, GM of Synergy Films.

Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) has announced the signing of a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MoU) with AMC Entertainment Holdings, the world’s largest provider and operator of movie theatres. The agreement builds on the announcement of the General Commission for Audiovisual Media’s (GCAM) decision to grant domestic licences to cinema providers, and directly supports KSA’s Vision 2030 objective of growing household spending on entertainment from 2.9% to 6% of GDP.

“This announcement is an historic moment for the theatrical exhibition industry and a tremendous opportunity to connect AMC’s movie products with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s more than 30 million citizens, many of whom we know are movie fans based on their regular visits to cinemas in neighbouring countries,” said AMC CEO and President Adam Aron.

US cinema major gains entry into Saudi Arabia with first deal

US cinema major gains entry into Saudi Arabia with first deal

Shock ME launches radio station for UAE

Shock Middle East, which launched Dance 97.8 in January last year, is back with another new launch – Heart 107.1 – a radio station that promises daily back-to-back hits from the 90s to today.

Best show: USA

Best encoding and multiplexing: Germany

48-hour film winners receive Canon equipment

The most recent 48-Hour Film Project attracted 29 submissions from filmmaking teams in the UAE. Premiere screenings of the top ten films took place at DIFF 2017. Winner Insomnia Films received a Canon C101 professional camcorder, while the first runner-up J.A.M received the Canon XC10 and second runner-up Pathy Boys, the XA11 camera. Insomnia Films’ winning entry Locked will now compete at Filmalpoza 2018 against winning submissions from other countries. It can also be potentially shown at the Cannes Film Festival 2018 Short Film Corner, where winners from Filmalpoza 2018 will be screened.
UBMS, Vitec conduct Litepanels workshop

Dubai-based United Broadcast & Media Solutions (UBMS) and UK-based Vitec Videocom conducted a day-long workshop introducing Litepanels Gemini, a 2x1 LED panel, to the industry in Dubai.

David Newton, professional photographer and filmmaker, and Richard Lackey, Product Manager of UBMS conducted the workshop.

Attendees were given hands-on demos of building lighting set-ups for video interviews and fashion photography.

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, Sahl Beldi, Marketing Manager for UBMS stated: “We have good attendance from production houses, broadcasters, filmmakers and freelancers. The new Litepanels Gemini is a 2x1 LED panel providing a nice wide soft source of colour accurate illumination. We are conducting this workshop in collaboration with Vitec Videocom and are happy that David Newton, a professional photographer and filmmaker, himself, is conducting it.”

A spokesperson for Vitec Videocom confirmed that the company has plans to host a series of similar workshops in the coming months in the region.

Emirati films lauded at Muhr Awards

HH Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum presented the Muhr Awards to the winners at a celebratory ceremony that took place in the Souk Madinat Theatre at Madinat Jumeirah on the closing day of DIFF.

Winning the Best Director in the Muhr Emirati category was Abdulnassr Almalki for his thrilling film Camera, winner of the Best Emirati Feature went to Sharp Tools directed by Nujoom Alghanem, whilst Escape directed by Hana Alshateri and Yaser Al Neyadi was named Best Muhr Emirati Short. In the Mehdi Short category, Special Jury Prize went to Cyril Aris for The President’s Visit. The Bassel El Ziad Short was awarded to Ulaa Salim for Fædreland, and Dhyaa Joda was awarded the Special Jury Prize for her compelling film Sabyea.

Tedial expands LATAM regional sales director’s role to include Middle East

Tedial’s Regional Sales Director, LATAM, José Luis Montero’s role will also now include the Middle East region. Montero, who has been with Tedial since April 2017, has more than 25 years of experience covering territories including Spain, Portugal and Latin America for Quantel (now SAM) and SGO. Montero will be at CABSAT this month to meet with regional customers.

Five Arab filmmakers were awarded funding and key partnership opportunities with the Dubai Film Connection (DFC). The diverse array of awards, with funding totaling more than $60,000, included the DFF award for $25,000 that was given to the nonfiction project The Syrians by Mohamed Ismail Laouti. The project has been offered an invitation to the Tribeca Film Institute, and also received a nomination for the next round of the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung. The other winning projects were You Will Die at Twenty, The Unwanted, The Alleys and Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous.

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CNBC comes to Abu Dhabi

Global business and financial news network, CNBC, has unveiled plans to establish its Middle East headquarters in Abu Dhabi. The network will begin broadcasting from a new studio at Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM), the international financial centre of Abu Dhabi, in Q1 2018, according to news reports.

The network plans to anchor one of its daily global business news programmes from its new Abu Dhabi base at ADGM, while establishing a stronger editorial presence across the region. Expansion of both the CNBC Europe franchise Access Middle East and the network’s regional event coverage are also planned as per news reports.

ESPN draws EMEA viewers with streaming service

ESPN confirms it has acquired the streaming rights to two films owned by filmmaker Ali Mostafa. Both films are owned by Image Nation Abu Dhabi. The first, Worthy, directed by Emirati filmmaker Ali Mostafa, is the first-of-its-kind 3D adventure movie, and is the first 3D entertainment movie produced in the Middle East and the Arab world.

Discop brings Africa pavilion to Dubai

Discop Dubai, which will take place between February 25-27, 2018, has announced that for the first time, it will host an Africa pavilion at its exhibition hall, owing to the rise of the TV sector in the African market. The pavilion will provide significant opportunities for African content producers and sellers, as well as for governments and other organisations looking to promote both content and co-productions. According to an EDATE report, growth in the MEA TV market is being driven largely by sub-Saharan Africa, which is predicted to be the world’s fastest-growing TV market over the next five years. The figures indicate average annual growth of 5.1%, with sub-Saharan Africa turning in the strongest performance with an average of 5.7% growth per annum. This would deliver a sub-Saharan TV market worth £19 billion in 2021. To support the Africa Pavilion, two Africa-centric sessions will take place at DISCOP Dubai.

Audio brands partner to demo 3D

Sanheissier, Doby, Neumann and Lawo conducted a workshop dedicated to 3D audio capture, processing and mixing. The organisers used the workshop to highlight the importance of 3D audio that, in their view, has been largely overlooked while the capture of 3D video has received due attention. The workshop, which the organisers claim is the first-of-its-kind 3D audio mixing workshop in the Middle East, was extended to a second day to accommodate all registered attendees. Each full-day workshop featured sessions on capturing sound in 3D, mixing, controlling and monitoring immersive sound formats, and establishing efficient encoding workflows for optimum results. Also included were listening sessions designed to expose attendees to audio content originally recorded in 3D as well as 2D, upmixed using Sanheissier’s patented algorithm.

For-A hosts roadmap in Iraq

For-A has participated in a broadcast roadmap event at the Baghdad International Broadcasting Centre, Iraq. The two-day event, which hosted other broadcast manufacturers, was attended by more than 70 professionals from more than 25 national broadcasters. The event covered presentations and live product demonstrations covering a wide range of topics.

Netflix acquires global rights to Image Nation’s The Worthy

After the 2016 acquisition of Zinzina, a spine-chilling plot, directed by Emirati filmmaker Majid Al Ansari, Netflix has now acquired the worldwide streaming rights to The Worthy, directed by Emirati filmmaker Ali Mostafa. Both films are owned by Image Nation Abu Dhabi. The plot revolves around a group of survivors who take refuge near a rain-starved and water-scarce area after a vast majority of the world’s water supply has been lethally contaminated. The survivors are thrust into a deadly game, and must defend their lives from intruders who aren’t what they seem.

OSN ties with edutainment app

OSN has partnered with Arabic children’s entertainment provider, Lamsa. As part of a strategic partnership, OSN will facilitate a one-year free subscriptio to the app on selected subscription packages. The app is ranked at number one in the ‘Kids’ and ‘Family’ categories on iTunes and the Play Store. Neil Marin, Chief Commercial Officer, OSN, said: “Through OSN's partnership with Lamsa, digital natives with Arabic as their mother tongue will be able to engage in valuable edutainment using the easy-to-navigate mobile app.”

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Discovery restructures EMEA operations

Discovery Communications has restructured a major part of its EMEA business and consolidated various geographies under one core leadership team with Kasia Kieli heading its EMEA operations as President & MD. Marinella Soldi, who helped transform Discovery Italy’s streaming business from an exclusively pay TV business to a multi-platform offering, will now featuring more than 100 films). Films from the SEC Storied series, which the organisers claim has been largely overlooked while the capture of 3D video has received due attention. The workshop, which the organisers claim is the first-of-its-kind 3D audio mixing workshop in the Middle East, was extended to a second day to accommodate all registered attendees. Each full-day workshop featured sessions on capturing sound in 3D, mixing, controlling and monitoring immersive sound formats, and establishing efficient encoding workflows for optimum results. Also included were listening sessions designed to expose attendees to audio content originally recorded in 3D as well as 2D, upmixed using Sanheissier’s patented algorithm.

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Rohde & Schwarz focuses on standards and codecs at Technology Day in Riyadh

Rohde & Schwarz celebrated its third Technology Day called ‘Scene to Screen’, which included a series of seminars to educate the broadcast industry on changing resolutions, formats and codecs, and how they can be used to bring better broadcast quality workflows and output to viewers.

The event was held at the Narcissus hotel in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on November 29, and the seminars were conducted by David Smith, Technology Marketing Manager at Rohde & Schwarz.

The first session titled ‘Resolution Revolution’ discussed the evolving resolution of the TV screen, and how 4K is being marketed today by manufacturers as being much better than HD. Smith noted that viewers did not need more pixels but better pixels. He commented that the solution lies in HDR, which offers more brightness, better contrast and a wider range of colours. One of the issues that the industry is facing today, especially in Asia is whether to go with HD, which is cheaper to transmit with HDR, or go with 4K with HDR which is a lot more expensive to transmit.

Although open to question, there is a lot of interest in HD with HDR as opposed to going with 4K with HDR.

The next seminar titled ‘Codecs Next Generation’ discussed how to compress video using different codecs. With raw bitrates being extremely high to handle even within a studio environment, there is a dire need for compression solutions. The contribution side of the business deals with around 12Gbps, which needs to be brought down. There are a number of solutions for this, including a mainframe codec, which can compress the system from 12Gbps to 6Gbps or even less. It can do this very quickly with low latency, which makes it ideal for real-time systems, whilst keeping the same quality, in some cases visually lossless. Coming to transmission, the current standard H.265 brings significant advantages over its predecessors MPEG2 and H.264.

The evolution from 4G to 5G is beginning to happen at the moment, and there are trials being carried out. Broadcasters are now sending small bandwidths much more easily for broadcast services. Carriers can now be dedicated to a broadcast system. People can also send transport streams over the system, which wasn’t possible before. You can also use MMT Media Transport to send video, which is also used in Japan, and this can be sent over 5G for uplink.

This technology also allows broadcasters to now send PTA services without using a SIM. The transport stream can be plugged into a DVB-T2 transmitter which can take that stream and plug it into a 5G interface and they will be essentially doing the same job when they go on air.
As baseband video infrastructure ages, IP islands will expand to take up more space in the broadcast industry workflow although the MENA region is wrought by peculiar roadblocks along the pathway of the IP juggernaut.

IP has been around for a while now and it is often believed that forward-thinking players in the industry have forged ahead with this transition. But is it really that simple or is the migration to IP ridden with challenges that are way beyond the control of the immediate players?

Dr. Marco Lohse, Director of R&D, IP Gateway at Rohde & Schwarz, set the stage for the discussion by questioning the levels of readiness for IP migration among the participants within their respective segments, namely the telcos, satellite and broadcast markets.

“When do you think your workflows will be 95-99% IP-based?”

With more than 17 years of experience in the IT industry, working in research and development and having done pioneering work in the field of transmission via unmanaged IP networks, Dr Lohse seemed the right person to pose that question across to a gathering of MENA professionals from amongst telcos, satellite operators, systems integrators and broadcasters at a roundtable in Dubai last month.

Organised by BroadcastPro ME in conjunction with Rohde & Schwarz, the roundtable was titled: IP-based broadcast contribution – revolution or evolution?

Joining us for this discussion were a mix of experts from the MENA telco, broadcast and satellite sectors including Ahmed Al Muhaideb, VP- Broadcasting and IPTV Services, du; Mohammed Bushehab, Manager/Satellite TV Broadcast Operations, Etisalat; Peter Van Dam, Technical Advisor to the CEO’s office at Live HD; Nader Mokhtar, Director of MCR/DVB and STB technology; Bilal Mohieddine Saab, Broadcast Manager, Yahlive; Yusuf Al Buti, Head of Engineering and Technology, twofour54; Yaser Hassan, Director of Transmission Operations, Arabsat; Eyad Al Alwak, Director of Engineering, Intigral and Rehamul Shaik, Division Manager at Tek Signals, a local system integration company.

“Telcos are already very advanced in terms of IP adoption, which is a good thing because they have to take the lead,” stated Peter Van Dam, Technical Advisor to the CEO’s office at LIVE HD Broadcast Facilities, a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi Media Company.

“Broadcasters are largely in the transition phase deploying hybrid solutions. At IBC for the first time in 2017, I saw IP as a usable tool across the entire chain offering greater flexibility and ease of use within a production environment. Given that situation, I believe in the next two years, we will see more people make the transition to IP. By that time, I hope we can also finalise standards with regard to compression and other critical issues,” he commented, adding that the speed of transition to IP will depend largely on the ease with which the migration to IP can be undertaken, the flexibility it offers and the cost involved.

Eyad Al Alwak from Intigral was sceptical about the two-year time-frame stating that broadcasters typically tend to use their technologies until they stop working to get the best out of their investment.

Among traditional broadcasters, I have seen hardware going for 15 years or more. Why change it if it is working? My guess is it will be a long time before we get to 80-90% IP within broadcast. With regards to contribution, however, we are already there. Today, newsgathering over IP is a common phenomenon. You don’t need to make a big investment for contribution so it’s already happening,” he pointed out.

IP-based broadcast contribution – revolution or evolution?
If there was any scepticism about the reception IP would receive from satellite operators, it was instantly dismissed. The satellite players in the room welcomed the technology stating that it brought several benefits to their business although they agreed satellite was still the primary medium of distribution in most countries. Bilal Mohbardine Saab, Broadcast Manager at Yahlive pointed out that “satellite will continue to be the medium of choice in under-developed countries where broadband remains a luxury.”

“For example, in some of our markets, we still use satellite for contribution to deliver signals to the hub because internet infrastructure – even the open internet, not just fibre – is still not reliable.”

Yaser Hassan of Arabsat highlighted that IP actually complements the offerings that satellite operators provide to their customers while also lauding the merits of the latter.

“In traditional payload, which is the communication system on the satellite, we would receive the signal to the satellite payload, process it, amplify it, multiplex it and send it. So payload configuration on the satellite was limiting the flexibility with regards to high-throughput satellites. But now with the digital payload and IP concept, satellite manufacturers provide more flexible payloads enabling a dynamic frequency plan and better processing on the satellite, where satellite operators can provide a huge capacity with frequency reuse.

“I believe IP is a positive technology for satellite operators. We might lose some of the business because of changing viewing habits, but at the same time, it opens so many new avenues. It’s like having another dish on the dining table.”

From digital payloads to the flexibility of frequency plan and beam coverages done via software, satellite operators are clearly playing their part by coming on board the IP bandwagon.

The discussion then turned to who is driving the change to IP with more viewers moving from linear TV to OTT platforms.

Elaborating on how upgrades are often customer-driven, Mohammed Busbehel of Kzinsat said: “As a telecom company, our business is driven by our customers. We can purchase a system or add new features but we cannot keep it idle for a long time. Some of the local channels are still running on SD. While a lot of big channels are going towards 4K and 8K and we do support 4K, most customers do not require this service so our investment on that front would remain minimal unless we have more volumes. Otherwise, it is difficult to justify the investment.”

Yusuf Buti from twofour54 added that different factors drive the market.

“To some extent, it is the manufacturer. If they decide to stop all the SD equipment and adopt a new standard, everyone else will also be forced to make that move. The consumer, on the other hand, drives the market with their changing viewpoint habits. LiFi looks like it is going to replace WiFi and this may pose some risk for the satellite operator because to move between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, I don’t need satellite to receive signal or data that can be received through the LED light on the street.”

This statement prompted Hassan of Arabsat, to highlight innovations in the satellite sector.

“In some areas, as a consumer, one might not require a satellite for certain applications. But on the other hand, the satellite operator can play a key role in service delivery. We can provide very high throughput because nowadays with the KA-band spot beams and even future Q and V bands, that enables high throughput connectivity, you can enjoy internet through satellite.”

While experts have cooled writing obituaries for satellite operations over the MENA region given the limited coverage provided by fibre, Nader Mohbat, Director of M3/DVR of MBC Group explained that the broadcaster continues to use satellite successfully but has moved some of its operations to

"[Broadcasters] have to overcome their fears … to fully exploit the IP opportunity"

Ahmed Al Muhaideb, VP-Broadcasting and IPTV Services, du
IP for more flexible, diverse and cost-effective delivery. He was, however, quick to add that satellite continues to play a crucial role in the broadcaster’s distribution model.

“During the last five years with MBC, we have moved most of our contribution from satellite to almost all IP. We are right now building a new site where everything, from end-to-end is based on IP. The playlist is sending streams into the encoder and from the encoder to Mux even to the distribution over international fibre to our satellite providers … it is all based on IP. The playout is sending streams into the encoder and from the encoder to Mux even to the distribution over international fibre to our satellite providers … it is all based on IP. The playout is sending streams into the encoder and from the encoder to Mux even to the distribution over international fibre to our satellite providers … it is all based on IP.

The advantage of IP is that channels like shopping channels that want interactive solutions with their audiences can easily deploy them. They have all the signals in the IP format and they can introduce new applications on various devices. Barring rights and subscriptions, you have the broadband and now it is a question of how creatively you apply the technology.”

Although everyone in the room agreed that cost efficiency was a big driver for IP migration, they also agreed that the pricing offered by telcos in the region although they also admitted that it would soon become mainstream. Yusuf Al Buti from twofour54 elaborated. “The advantage of IP is that channels like shopping channels that want interactive solutions with their audiences can easily deploy them. They have all the signals in the IP format and they can introduce new applications on various devices. Barring rights and subscriptions, you have the broadband and now it is a question of how creatively you apply the technology.”

The participants in the room agreed that the transition to IP workflows brought with it the advantages of affordable processing and agility in allocating technology resources. Benefits also included the lower cost of IP when compared to SDI routing, and greater flexibility with regards to workflows. However, the drivers of change were still unclear.

“Are we quality driven or are we vendor driven?” asked Van Dam of Abu Dhabi Media.

“All these HD signals that we are already in are a great step forward… but how do we maintain that quality if we move to IP in 2018?”

Yaser Hassan, Director of Transmission Operations, Arabsat for bandwidth was several times higher than other markets and required significant correction. Everyone agreed that satellite continues to remain the main medium of distribution and IPTV /OTT remains a complementary technology for bandwidth was several times higher than other markets and required significant correction. Everyone agreed that satellite continues to remain the main medium of distribution and IPTV /OTT remains a complementary technology

IP is a positive technology for satellite operators… it opens so many new avenues. It’s like having another dish on the table” Yaser Hassan, Director of Transmission Operations, Arabsat

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Participants in the room agreed that the transition to IP workflows brought with it the advantages of affordable processing and agility in allocating technology resources.
“Satellite will still be on whether we use the current ARS packaging or we go IP all the way. In my opinion, it is easy to convert the contribution feeds to IP technology that’s already happening but at the other end, to my STB to go as IP feed, that will take time because IP scares broadcasters with regards to quality. It is a wrong notion, but viewers do not tolerate flickering, loss and buffering on the satellite receiver. Not all broadcasters have the confidence that we will not face these problems on IP-based feeds.”

Van Dam added that it is paramount that decision makers buy into the concept. “Last year with du we did a proof-of-concept on a playlist. The playlist was a combination of du’s teleport facility, Huawei for storage and Imagine Communications as a software-defined playout provider and it was a success. It did everything it had to do without a glitch. But we are now waiting on decisions. The challenge is the proverbial Mercedes versus Tesla debate. We are still launching channels the traditional way but more advanced IP-based technology gives us new opportunities to scale up and launch channels at the switch of a button or scale down when we don’t require them. IP gives us the opportunity to pay per use.”

Dr Lohse concurred and said broadcasters will be willing to make the transition once they are convinced that IP can provide the same level of quality as existing technologies.

Ibrahim Sleiman, Division Manager of Tek Signals elaborated on the inherent scalability of Ethernet providing a future-proof solution for the industry. “If you look at the market, the consumers are the driving force behind data throughput. Ethernet is the delivery mechanism for high throughput. If you look at any telecom operator – they have moved from legacy PDH to SDH to ATM and now Ethernet. The next big jump in Ethernet speeds will be to 400GbE – also known as 400 gigabit Ethernet, or 400G. Whether you go over fibre, IP/MPLS network or satellite or microwave as contribution, this is only a medium of transmission. With satellite technology today, when you start IP, the input to the modem is Ethernet. The input to the telecom network is also Ethernet. So, Ethernet, in my opinion, is going to dominate and is the future. If you want to continue with the data throughput requirements exponentially rising, you need to go with this technology. For choice of medium of transmission, you have the triangle of price, practical/efficiency and quality determining the most viable engineering solution. In some places, the situation and price would make IP more viable and in other scenarios, satellite or microwave would be more appropriate.”

The discussion then turned to standards and which would be the most appropriate to follow. In this regard, Mohammed Bushehab, Manager Satellite TV Broadcast Operations at Etisalat, pointed out. “I recall 10 years back, we used to work on DVB-H and standardisation killed that project. I believe that the rapid change in standards is good especially when it results in the reduction of cost of technology for broadcasters and consumers. When HEVC encoders came, the cost of MPEG4 encoders reduced and when the 4K screens came, HDDT became less expensive as did the receivers. The beauty of IP is you can use the same platform for both OTT and DTH. An IP-based system gives you the privilege to decide seamlessly the quality you want to maintain per channel. As telcos, we have changed our operations, Etisalat decided to go forward to provide more throughput and capacity and more penetration.”

Intigral’s Aldwaik and LIVE’s Van Dam pointed out that the question about standards becomes irrelevant within a software-defined environment. “We should just buy licences, comply, plug in and move on. The medium is critical, not the standard. Is the medium reliable enough to carry my signal?” Aldwaik asked.

Ali Butt of broadcast54, offered his perspective: “Organisations such as Dubai Media City or twofour54 wish many different customers that have their own standards. With broadcast, you can decide on which standard you want to adhere to. In a multi-client environment, it is difficult to enforce it.”

“Having said that, IP has delivered on the promise of both quality and trust. We recently conducted a successful experiment with the BBC where we had to cover some of the football in Abu Dhabi. We wanted to have very quick uplink to London. And we did it through 4G with contribution to our facility in Abu Dhabi and from there, an uplink to BBC. We trust this technology because each time we
have tried it, both the technical and management teams have been impressed with the flexibility, price on offer and matchless quality.”

With IP on the table, the issue of security is never too far away. Here, one of the questions posed by the organisers of the roundtable regarding managed versus unmanaged IP networks, found resonance. Questioning the notions of redundancy, often a roadblock to IP adoption, Van Dam of ABSMedia Media said: “When a French channel was hacked to such a level that IP addresses on the mix were changed and the channel was unsteerable for 12-14 hours, it was essentially the worst fear of every broadcaster come true. Is the IP-based playout solution secure enough?” I believe yes. But I am usually in the minority when I say this. Having backups in the same office does not make it immune to fire or water damage. Cloud-based redundancy is more secure. I believe playout should go to a cloud-based environment and for that, both management and the legal departments need to adapt.”

“During the last five years with MBC, we have moved most of our contribution from satellite to almost all IP”

Nader Mokhtar, Director of MCR/DVB and STB technology

Elaborating on the issue of redundancy, Mokhtar of MBC observed: “We contribute to Arabsat as well as Eutelsat over a fibre circuit. It is a managed circuit. However, beginning of 2017, we partnered with Etisalat and generated MBC+ elite over an internet circuit — unmanaged. I think it is better to have two different internet circuits from two different internet providers to make sure you have a full redundancy. On a managed circuit, you will definitely achieve 99.95% reliability, and this is our experience with our current fibre circuit provider. Even if you have a problem with the main fibre, you can switch to the backup and route the signal to your destination and that is the beauty of IP.”

Offering an interesting innovation from the satellite industry, Bilal Saab, Broadcast Manager of Yahlive believes satellite operators can offer services to OTT players in areas that are not served by fibre connectivity or at times when data demand is high. “In the case of millions of viewers accessing the same content, the cost based on usage as offered by satellite providers is helpful coupled with the optimisation of technology on the ground. With small return paths through the 3G network or with push Video-on-Demand (VOD), satellite operators can help DTH providers

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in regions that have limited fibre to provide “Catch-up TV” or even OTT to their top consumers. It takes just 10 minutes to download a full HD movie through push VOD. It is still early days and it can be a solution.”

The OTT issue evolved some contention from Mokhtar of MBC who stated that the primary distribution for OTT will always be over the internet just as the primary distribution for broadcast has been satellite than before. The latter half of the roundtable focused on issues of IP over unmanaged networks and the critical need for collaboration among broadcasters as well as telcos and satellite operators. While Van Dam spoke of the important role regional advertising enabled by IP-based workflows play in increasing revenues to broadcasters, Hassan of Arabsat spoke of the value-added role IP plays for satellite operators in the area of HTS satellites. Van Dam also brought attention to the flexibility offered by IP through the ease of launching pop-up channels that are time-specific. Ali Buti of twofour54 said in his concluding remarks: “Looking at the big picture, we will definitely move forward in terms of adopting IP because more manufacturers will produce IP-based products and solutions. What needs to be seen is how the channels use the technology creatively — ranging from production to metadata and all other processes. TV can get smarter with creative applications. For instance, broadcasters should be allowed to display as a layer on the television, promotions and deals to be had and this information can be distributed geographically based on the IP address of the Smart TV. IP should now drive creative ideas and applications because data can be manipulated for required ends.”

Bushehab of Etisalat highlighted the vote of confidence telcos have given IP over the years, when he said: “Most of the telcos, for some years now, have been changing their workflows to IP-based platforms till the end of the transmission chain before the RF point. Satellite will definitely be there as long as they generate revenues. More applications and features will be IP driven. The

“Without digitisation, we cannot maintain the three pillars of capacity, penetration and cost”
Ibrahim Sleiman, Division Manager at Tek Signals

the distribution side of the workflow. The role of IP within broadcast will become increasingly important with time, but how fast the transition to IP takes place will depend significantly on ease of use, the flexibility of integrating technologies and the cost of installation. Broadcasters around the table agreed that they would prefer to have a one-stop shop for all their distribution and contribution needs rather than moving between satellite operators, ISP providers and telcos. They called for greater integration between the three players so as to provide a more efficient and streamlined service to customers. It was also agreed that for IP to be successful in the region, the quality of its delivery must be on par with what satellite provides now.

Emphasising the need for creative applications, Ali Buti of twofour54 said in his concluding remarks: “Looking at the big picture, we will definitely move forward in terms of adopting IP because more manufacturers will produce IP-based products and solutions. What needs to be seen is how the channels use the technology creatively — ranging from production to metadata and all other processes. TV can get smarter with creative applications. For instance, broadcasters should be allowed to display as a layer on the television, promotions and deals to be had and this information can be distributed geographically based on the IP address of the Smart TV. IP should now drive creative ideas and applications because data can be manipulated for required ends.”

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Stressing that IP is a satellite operator’s friend, not foe, Hassan of Arabsat said: “What I can see, based on what we have discussed so far is that IP offers added value for satellite operators because it will enable us to provide HTS satellites. The amount of capacity we are going to lose as satellite operators in contribution is going to be compensated by the high throughput capacities that we are providing directly to the IP. Satellite and IP complement each other in different areas. In comparison to the traditional satellite we can do frequency reuse. We have more flexibility in payload, design and coverage that will allow us to offer huge capacity at the same cost, making depreciation and amortisation of the satellite assets more sustainable.”

Responding to the question put forward by the roundtable organisers

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about broadcasters looking towards a future with IP, Mokhtar of MBC said: “I believe that a one-stop shop is the way forward. We need some collaboration between the telecom and the satellite operators. As a broadcaster, either I go to du for example and request, in addition, services on Ashalat or vice versa (this is in case the uplink site is not in the same country as the broadcaster). There should be collaboration between both companies to deliver signals from end to end and manage it for the broadcaster, thereby streamlining our task of achieving connectivity.”

Recognising the varied levels of development in the MENA region, Saab of YahLive said: “While IP contribution will take over and satellite will remain, I strongly believe that in future, IP and satellite will complement each other and having the same models on different mediums will remain. It will be improved in some places faster than other places but both will coexist.”

Van Dam of Abu Dhabi Media offered a reality check when he said: “We forget how much of IP we already use in our everyday lives. I can’t imagine that we do not have a file-based solution within many of our premises. IP is the way forward on a technical level to guarantee service to our end customer, the viewer at home, with maximum redundancy and security and flexibility — parameters that we cannot achieve today.”

A veteran of many such discussions, Mohandal of du, recognises that 10 decades of traditional telecom will not give way easily to five decades of information technology though the path towards an all-IP telecom is now not that improbable. “Definitely IP is a boon to the satellite industry as well. Mostly, in my view, the customers, i.e. the broadcasters have to be convinced. They have to overcome their fears around security, quality, redundancy and other issues to fully exploit the IP opportunity.”

Underlining the fact that IP is a solution for increased efficiency, Sleiman of Tek Signals said: “As a transmission engineer, I believe IP will prevail. It is a form and means of digitisation. Without the digitisation, we cannot maintain the three pillars of capacity, penetration and cost.

“IP will continue because it serves a purpose. In broadcast, we use MPEG as a standard for compression and DVB as a standard for transmission whether S2, C2, T2, etc, depending on what the application is and medium of transmission in that region is. IP is the standard for the telecom GIGE network, creating unprecedented throughput and effectiveness.”

In response to a query by the moderator about whether 100% of customers can be reached even on the edges of the network via public internet or even competitors’ lines, Aldwai of Infranet observed: “This is not early days for IP delivery. The delivery has been there for a while and standards have evolved allowing for a higher quality of delivery.

“Eventually, you have to go to the customers wherever they are. Here in Dubai, with my headend in datamena, we use du’s network and offer guarantees. Once you step outside the UAE, the quality of service cannot be guaranteed unless you have multiple routes towards your customer. The last mile is the last mile. If the customer’s bandwidth is bad, his experience will be bad. But you can do your best to deliver the content in the highest quality possible until the last mile.”

“Telcos play a big role and different ISPs can always peer with each other. Peering is another solution, allowing the exchange of data between two networks that is basically free of charge. It is early days for peering in this region.

“We have done some tests with amazing results. The more people step out of their silos and work in collaboration especially between ISPs, the more we can look forward to a different but sustainable business model going forward.”

“Satellite will continue to be the medium of choice in under-developed countries where broadband remains a luxury”

Bilal Moheddine Saab, Broadcast Manager at YahLive

“Broadcasters [need to be] convinced that IP can provide the same level of quality as existing technologies”

Dr. Marco Lohse, Director of R&D, IP Gateway at Rohde & Schwarz
KUWAIT TV

SALES

NEW HEIGHTS

Kuwait’s national broadcaster offers a first look at its new cutting-edge 4K news studio and production workflow, in an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian

State broadcaster Kuwait TV has been upping its game with two parallel projects that make it the first in the region to undertake a massive, multi-million-dollar 4K infrastructure revamp at its news studio, alongside the integration of a Tedial MAM system and EVS IPDirector for its production environment.

Integrated by local systems integrator, INC System Integrations, the two projects brought together a consortium of manufacturers including Avid, SAM, Calrec, SGL and Vantage on the newsroom side, and EVS and Tedial on the production side. Both projects have been completed, although the state broadcaster hasn’t yet gone to air with them.

“Kuwait TV has always led in terms of technology investment,” Meshaal Megled, Undersecretary for Engineering at Kuwait TV, proudly says. “We have always invested in emerging technologies and have been the first to capitalise on them. We were the first to build an HD OB van in the Middle East and the first to invest in a fully-fledged archive project including restoration and digitization. We also wanted to be the first to have a completely ready 4K infrastructure for both news and post production. Of course, having an infrastructure alone is not sufficient. It is very important that our staff understand these technologies and are able to maintain and operate them.”

The Kuwait TV News project, which includes the revamp of Studio 300 as a 4K production studio, saw the deployment of an Avid newsroom system along with a 4K Snell Kahuna video mixer, six 4K cameras and a 4K Avid graphics system. Two phases have been completed in this three-phase project, while a tender is out for the third, which will aim to change the entire look and feel of the studio floor by changing the décor, and introducing a new video wall system and fresh lighting. Phase one saw the introduction of a tapeless environment connecting the studio and the news production areas, and phase 2 saw the upgrade of the whole production system from HD/SD-SDI to 4K production with Avid news. A significant part of this project is the deployment of a full Avid production asset management system that controls all of the steps of the news workflow.

“Avid Interplay is the PAM tool, which is used to manage these steps from feed and file ingest, to high and low-resolution editing, playout, and finally, to archive,” explains Abbas Dashti – News Engineering Manager, Kuwait TV. At the ingest stage, Avid Interplay capture controls the baseband feed ingest using Airspeed 5500 servers. 4K Media Composers, however, are used to ingest the 4K feeds and the final live programme.

“Media Director is responsible for the files ingest process. Media Director is capable of ingesting all known file formats and transcoding them to AVC-I 100, which is the house format of Kuwait TV,” explains Dashti, adding that Telestream is also used to transcode news feeds, which are then available to journalists to help them create their reports.

Dashti explains that Avid’s Media Central brings a wide
range of benefits to Kuwait TV’s journalists, enabling them to create their reports, and add their comments for the high-res editors. The journalist has the ability to add voice-over as well to their reports.

“Media Central has an option to publish the materials directly to social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter with a simple click,” explains Dashti. “Once the material is ready as per the rundown created by the chief editor, it will be sent for playout. Video, story, as well as the graphics related to each news will be synced and ready for the director to start his bulletin. Here, the Interplay command will take over the control for the playout and ICommand will control the playout ports of the Airspeed 5500 as well as the master graphics channels in order to run it as per the Inews rundown that has been created.”

Once the bulletin is broadcast, Avid Access, the media management tool, will keep the storage clean and ready to receive new materials for the coming bulletins. The system intuitively undertakes a house keeping process to delete unnecessary materials. Based on the rules set at the beginning, the system either deletes unnecessary material, moves them to an archive by connecting with Interplay archive or coordinates the archiving process with HSM to store the materials in LTO.

For the archive part, SGL HSM and Oracle LTO work together. “SGL HSM brings many benefits to this system, such as project parking and a rounded integration with Avid Interplay Environment, which provides the simplicity and time efficiency required to store/restore materials in and from the Oracle LTO,” explains Dashti.

The new system “is integrated with the previous news system in a way that allows both systems to exchange material.”

“KTV has always … invested in emerging technologies and has been the first to capitalise on them. We were the first to build an HD OB van in the Middle East … the first to invest in a full-fledged archive project … We wanted to be the first to have a ready 4K infrastructure for both news and post-production”

Meshaal Megled, Undersecretary for Engineering at Kuwait TV
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The Tedial integration allows for more effective use of logs, says Azzam Salahat – Technical Manager INC.

between each other”.

“This meant that we did not have to undertake any migration.”

Parallel to this project, Kuwait wanted to put in place a modern production infrastructure that centralises many of its operations. This entailed implementing a file-based production workflow that would allow it to streamline its operations and create easier shared access to recorded content between its eight channels. This was something completely new, as the broadcaster wanted to cut its reliance on tapes. Consequently, the Kuwaiti broadcaster began speaking to INC System Integrations about implementing such a workflow.

EVS was brought into the picture to deliver the 27 XS3 media production servers, its IPDirector content management suite with over 30 workstations, an IPLink for Adobe, the Xsquare media orchestrator, the Ingest Funnel and operational and technical training both at EVS and on-site. Working alongside EVS was Tedial as both companies have had previous integrations. Solutions from Tedial included its Evolution enterprise MAM system with Tedial Augmented Storage (AST), a storage virtualisation system that claims to provide content owners with a safe, reliable and cost-efficient storage system for cloud workflows and hybrid scenarios as it virtualises file locations. The result is an enterprise MAM system integrated with IPDirector PAM System along with a SAN storage system from DDP. The project included the installation of all major post-production software — Adobe, FCP, Edius, Pro Tools and DaVinci.
This integrated solution provides Kuwait TV with a transparent way of acquiring content so that it can easily process content, using metadata and logs generated in EVS, which enables it to efficiently package content, use it in production and post-production and then archive it. The two companies’ technologies enable live content created in the EVS environment to be automatically added to archive workflows managed by Tedial systems. Kuwait TV is the first user to adopt this joint solution,” explains INC’s General Manager Adeeb Abed.

“This whole solution will help streamline their workflow rather than work in silos. By integrating the metadata, Kuwait TV will become more efficient because all their sub-systems are integrated, which means they don’t have to use different user interfaces for different elements of the workflow.”

Adeeb Abed, GM, INC System Integrations

EVS X83 servers allows Kuwait TV to ingest multiple feeds, which are encoding natively in XAVC-Intra HD and XAVC-Intra HD codecs, and to playout content in its studios during live production. With 27 servers, it benefits from up to 76 I/O channels in HD. The servers are also linked together with the EVS XNet live media sharing network, giving any operator to instantly access content recorded on any of the 27 servers.

The IPDirector enables operators to schedule the ingest, browse recorded content, manage associated metadata and create playlists for playout. The Tedial system enhances the IPDirector solution, which provides the front end for Kuwait TV. The broadcaster uses IPDirector for its acquisition and management tool along with other EVS tools.

“The Tedial integration allows for more effective use of logs. It pairs the speed and reliability of EVS technology with the secure nature of the Tedial system. It removes unnecessary additional steps from the production workflow and allows Kuwait TV to operate much more efficiently,” explains Azzam Salahat – Technical Manager INC.

The IPDirector solution from EVS allows editors working on Adobe Premiere Pro stations to swiftly access content recorded on the EVS servers. Xsquare lets users manage the transfer of content to multiple in-house platforms. And with Ingest Funnel, operators can transform, legalise and master all ingest formats in the production chain. This is especially valuable for ENG material.

While this project required no metadata migration was required in the newsroom, in this project, significant migration took place from EVS IPDirector into the MAM. Both companies provided operational and technical training to make sure the operators were comfortable with the new workflow.

“The production system now runs on a standard IT platform, which runs on a standard IT platform, which
means all expansion opportunities are open to Kuwait TV including virtualisation, cloud, and any future technologies. The standard within Tedial Evolution is the ability to host on the cloud, or host on a mixture of on premise or virtualised system. There are no limitations,” explains Salahat, adding that both projects have been designed for scalability in the future.

While the newroom system took six months to implement, the production environment is in the final stages of commissioning before the entire system goes on air this year.

The project was not without its challenges, explains Adeeb Abed. “This was a significantly large project, where we had to work closely with Kuwait TV to set the technical vision and design philosophy that directed the engineering design, project scheduling, costing, quality control, and on-site move in and installation. We also had to be very careful when introducing new technologies, especially the 4K workflow as operating such a system is different from operating traditional HD systems.

“In addition, handling two projects in parallel meant that we would have to manage many stakeholders, a number of major suppliers — so many different departments at the broadcaster’s — while also ensuring that all systems are integrated and aligned. And like any project today, requirements change and this impacts both the schedule and the budget. “However, we had the resources and mechanisms in place to address both issues. We were able to preempt technical conflicts and bring them to the attention of Kuwait TV with solutions and cost savings,” adds INC’s Adeeb.

Abbas Dashti is News Engineering Manager at Kuwait TV.

The Kuwait TV News project included the revamp of Studio 300 as a 4K production studio.

Key suppliers for Kuwait TV Production:
- EVS
- Tedial
- DDP SAN storage
- Post-production software: Adobe, FCP, Edius, DaVinci, Pro-tools

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Armed with a RED Camera and years of planning the perfect cinema debut, director Yousif Kooheji tells Supriya Srinivas how he ensured Taffash’s box office success was not just a stroke of luck.

Box office triumph in Bahrain and beyond

In June 2017, when Arabic comedy-adventure Taffash and the Forty Thieves was released on Eid Al-Fitr in Bahrain, the Hollywood movies showing were Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales, Wonder Woman, Despicable Me and Transformers – The Last Knight. According to figures endorsed by Bahrain Cinema Company (Cineco), the second Taffash film topped the box office for two whole weeks, selling more than 140,000 tickets in Bahrain alone. It is reportedly the first Bahraini movie to cover its costs.

“This was a record for any GCC-based film,” asserts Bahraini Director Yousif Kooheji.

“We are extremely proud to have vindicated the trust of the investors and the cinema owners who allowed the screening of the movie during the very busy period of Eid Al-Fitr. Taffash and the Forty Thieves was screened across cinema halls in the GCC during Eid and the movie remained in theatres for more than three months in all.”

In an hour-long conversation with BroadcastPro ME, Kooheji insists that it wasn’t luck that brought about the unprecedented Gulf-wide success of Taffash and its sequel. Armed with a degree in directing from the New York Film Academy in 2007, a young Kooheji had a production company to fall back on. The Hawar Centre, established by his father Ahmed Kooheji in 1993, specialises in Arab film distribution and providing content for inflight entertainment. Kooheji, however, decided not to plunge into filmmaking.

He recalls: “We began with TV episodes initially. The plan was to generate publicity and to create stars who could later market any film that we were planning. At the time, with less than 10 films having been produced in Bahrain, we lacked famous actors who could be considered as stars. After producing Taffash and the Forty Thieves topped the box office for two weeks, selling more than 140,000 tickets in Bahrain alone.

Comedy adventure Taffash and the Forty Thieves, produced by AK Studios Bahrain, went through a three-month pre-production phase and a 40-day shoot - 10 days in Bahrain and 30 days in Tunisia – followed by two months of post-production.

- **Director:** Yousif Kooheji
- **Script:** Ahmed Kooheji
- **Cast:** Ali Al Ghorair, Khallil Al Romaithi, Ahmed Isa, Abdulla Wolaid
- **DP:** Ahmed Jelboush
- **Music:** Rabii Zammouri
three seasons of a popular TV series and having achieved a degree of success with the audiences, we decided we were ready for cinema. We were not depending on luck. We had reached a point where we had confidence in our technical abilities and equipment and we had the stars to market the film.”

Yousif Kooheji, Director, AK Studios

“We were not depending on luck. We had reached a point where we had confidence in our technical abilities and equipment, and we had the stars to market the film”

Kooheji offered a brief synopsis: “While the first movie revolves around the adventures of the male protagonist as he leaves his village to seek a cure for his sick wife, the sequel has the wife being kidnapped by pirates. The male protagonist is caught up in the pirates’ adventures, by pirates. The male protagonist is

part two was shot between Bahrain and India. For part three, we want to present something totally new – in short, the entire package.”

Why did audiences endorse the movie in droves, we asked Kooheji. “The audience feedback was overwhelming. The general feedback we got was that the audience felt that they had watched a film with production values comparable to any A-grade Hollywood film, and not another TV series converted to a film. We, on our part, offered a cinematic experience of international standards in terms of sound, direction, acting and storytelling – in short, the entire package.”

The camera played a central role in getting the team technically prepared for their first feature film. Kooheji explains that the choice of camera was critical. For the first Taffash movie, they used a RED EPIC with DRAGON 6K sensor, hired from a company in India. The camera’s capabilities were a revelation for Kooheji and his team. “We shot the first film on 6K. After viewing the results on the big screen, I was absolutely amazed at the camera’s capabilities from its wide dynamic range to very high colour sensitivity. For the second movie in the Taffash franchise,
we bought a RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor camera from Dubai-based Advanced Media, a company that has been very helpful in terms of advising us on equipment. It was the first Gulf feature film to be shot in 8K.

“We started shooting in February 2017, and the camera had just been released a few months prior to that. We were very lucky to be one of the first companies in the region to try the camera.

“There were a lot of reasons why we chose the EPIC-W camera over and above any competitor in the market to tell our story. With the EPIC-W, we were shooting raw, but the file size was compressed. Not only did this allow for efficient storage, but shooting raw gave us a lot of flexibility with colours in post-production without losing any details in the image. That is a big advantage. Moreover, the dynamic range of the camera was impressive. Overall, the results on the big screen were absolutely fabulous.

“When it came to editing, initially we edited raw footage and the system began to lag slightly. We then transcoded it offline and once editing was over, we took the offline to the DaVinci Resolve platform and converted it to the online version to do the colour correction. This was literally a click of a button and there was no complication.

“One of the big reasons why we chose RED was because the technology was brand new, the sensor having been released early in 2017. And with all the upgrade programmes from RED, we are future-proof.

“There was a huge difference between the earlier RED camera and the RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor in terms of comparative noise levels. There was noticeable noise with the RED EPIC DRAGON 6K although it could be tackled effectively in post-production. And the result in the cinema was perfect. But with the EPIC-W camera and the OLPF (optical low-pass filter) that we installed, we were shooting in pitch darkness and there was absolutely no noise at all. The OLPF helps provide excellent colour and tone reproduction in dim environments.

“My DOP was amazed at how the camera was dealing with noise in such low-light conditions.”

“With the RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor camera … we were shooting in pitch darkness and there was absolutely no noise at all”

Yousif Kooheji, Director, AK Studios

Apart from the RED cameras, another element in production was customised lighting solutions. Kooheji elaborates: “For production itself, we used a mixture of Taffash and the Forty Thieves was the first Gulf feature film to be shot in 8K.

“Taffash and the Forty Thieves was the first Gulf feature film to be shot in 8K.

“With the RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor camera … we were shooting in pitch darkness and there was absolutely no noise at all”

Yousif Kooheji, Director, AK Studios

Screen were absolutely fabulous.

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Yousif Kooheji, Director, AK Studios

Screen were absolutely fabulous.

“Taffash and the Forty Thieves was the first Gulf feature film to be shot in 8K. World’s Largest Radio Deployments Rely on Nautel

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of lighting, ranging from ARRI HMIs to a new line of LED lights from India-based Canara Lighting. They manufactured the lighting according to our temperature specifications, and it was refreshing working with a company that offered customised solutions. For post, we used solutions from Avid and we did colour correction in Egypt with DaVinci Resolve. “For audio, we used Pro Tools. It was the first movie made in Bahrain with surround sound. The mixing was done by us at our own AK Studios facility in Bahrain, a production house we established in 2013 for television and advertising content creation.”

Optimistic about the possibility of Arab content finding a global audience, Kooheji underscores the importance of studying the market before plunging into filmmaking. “We have the writers and producers, but we need to study the market in terms of what genre will work. The audience does not go to the cinema hall to watch problems, be it political or domestic; that they face anyway in their everyday life. If we deliver entertainment, there is a big market out there. We need to think outside the box to deliver a message while being entertaining.”

Financing future editions of Taffash or other movies is happily not a problem for Kooheji, with the success of the first two movies. “We have had three offers, from the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, to produce films. The stories from the Gulf are waiting to be told. “As Arab content creators, we are still at the beginning. Hollywood enjoys more than 70, 80 or even 100 years of experience. With Taffash, we have managed to win over the trust of the audience. Now it is the time to continue and deliver.”

**Kit list**

The equipment (for Taffash and Forty Thieves) was provided by AK Studios in Bahrain and included:

- **Camera:** RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor camera
- **Lights:** ARRI HMI, Film gear, Canara LED Jet, Kinoflo
- **Audio:** Pro Tools HDX, Surround Sound Mixing
- **Editing:** Avid Media Composer
- **Colour Correction:** DaVinci Resolve

“**My DOP was amazed at how the camera was dealing with noise in such low-light conditions”** - Yousif Kooheji.
KSA PUSHES BOUNDARIES

The fully customised end-to-end OTT solution for SBC’s nine HD channels and six radio channels is not just a technical feat; it represents a radical shift in audience engagement.

Last year, Saudi Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) went online with a number of high-profile live video streams covering US President Trump’s visit to the Kingdom, the annual Hajj and Saudi National Day, among other events. The live streaming element was another feather in SBC’s cap as it marked six months since the launch of its annual Hajj and Saudi National Day, among other events.

The live streaming element was another feather in SBC’s cap as it marked six months since the launch of its HD channels and six radio channels. The solution includes a headend/encoding platform from Ateme, middleware developed by CMT and a fully customised content delivery network (CDN) for SBC.

“Our mandate was to provide a fully customised 360-degree platform that supported various client applications including iOS, web, Android, Blackberry, LG and Samsung Smart TVs, with the ability to scale in the future and add new features,” explains Hisham Arafat, Managing Director of CMT Technologies.

SBC boasts a customised CDN solution, which promises faster content delivery and minimum latency.

“The result is a fully customised end-to-end OTT solution for SBC’s nine HD channels and six radio channels. The solution includes a headend/encoding platform from Ateme, middleware developed by CMT and a fully customised content delivery network (CDN) for SBC.

“The platform is also provided with alternative payment options including operator billing, credit card payment or other payment methods such as mobile payments. Everything has been considered when building this platform.”

At the beginning of the workflow is a state-of-the-art headend transcoding solution to provide the best quality video on even the slowest of internet connections”, according to Arafat. CMT says it is not a box shifter and explains that a number of elements within the chain were developed in-house, including the middleware and the bespoke CDN solution.

“We developed a complete middleware backend system for SBC, with redundant transcoding solutions, a complete disaster recovery element, a fully integrated Content Management System and a fully optimised, cloud-based CDN service”

Hisham Arafat, MD, CMT Technologies

“HS-1500T is an easy to use mobile production studio with support for 3 HDBaseT sources. Those are connected to the main unit and directly without the use of separate power supplies. This ensures the end user of a very quick build up time, often in minutes.”

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One of the big elements of this installation was the CDN solution. CMT took a multi-CDN approach, so the customer could be served from the nearest available CDN site based on location, while providing uninterrupted service in case of failure on one of the CDN servers.

“A content delivery network is an absolute necessity when it comes to delivering bandwidth-hungry content over networks that are more and more selected. Without optimising its resources, an operator cannot support the huge amount of traffic at stake over managed networks as well as over open internet networks. In SBC’s case, it has viewers distributed across the globe, so it was imperative that we take a multi-CDN approach and develop a solution to minimise the delay and ensure full service availability,” explains Arafat, adding that this is where the local company’s CDN know-how enabled it to create a unified CDN manager capable of addressing any number of content delivery within a single product.

“We provide a turnkey multi-CDN solution that enables businesses to gain more out of their CDN set-up. We combine the strongest points of multiple CDNs into one big network. The full network can easily be controlled through a user-friendly graphical interface or a simple API. “The CDN we have developed is designed to unite the delivery of managed and unmanaged content, combined with virtualised cloud-based content delivery over fixed and mobile networks by leveraging CMT’s advanced capabilities with converged cache, combined with new management and service exposure layers for intelligent control and business model enablement.

“We went with the multi-CDN approach with SBC. It is the latest technology in content delivery. At SBC, the CDN is designed to identify the public IP and route the traffic to the server CDN-PoP near the client which originated the request. This will help in faster content delivery and less latency. In case of failure on the primary PoP, the service will be restored from the back-up CDN,” explains Arafat.

One other big element at the SBC installation is its live streaming capability. A streaming engine streams video and audio files on demand to any screen.

“This streamer was used to make live events in KSA available to SBC’s viewers on any device and any network in a straightforward and cost-effective way,” explains Arafat.

“The built-in transcoding feature transforms live streams to adaptive streams, dynamically adjusting resolution and bitrate to match each viewer’s bandwidth, thus providing the best possible streaming experience for everyone.”

Hisham Arafat, MD, CMT Technologies

“...thus providing the best possible streaming experience for everyone”

**Snapshot**

- **Location:** Saudi Arabia
- **Client:** Saudi Broadcasting Corporation
- **Objective:** To develop an end-to-end OTT platform
- **St. CMT Technologies**
- **Key suppliers:** Ateme transcoders, HP & Supermicro servers, Cisco switches, Cyberaam firewall, Barracuda load balancers and CMT middleware

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Arafat claims. “The system efficiently fetches on-demand content from the centralised storage to edge servers, using our built-in media cache package for immediate streaming and playback from the local cache.”

One of the big challenges with this installation was addressing the client’s security needs, explains Arafat. “The SBC network has a lot of security policies in place, so integration with their network required a deep understanding and detailed study of their existing technology.”

Basic operations and maintenance training was provided to monitor and troubleshoot the issue at first level. The solution is fully scalable and further integration is possible with other elements such as subscription, billing and service delivery platform in the future. Owing to the success of the project, the solutions provider has also secured a five-year contract to manage operations, maintenance and content management for SBC’s OTT platform while also undertaking regular upgrades and enhancing it with new features.

“A content delivery network is an absolute necessity when it comes to delivering bandwidth-hungry content over networks that are more and more solicited”

Hisham Arafat, MD, CMT Technologies

Key components of the platform
• Live-TV receiving & decryption using existing SBC system
• Reporting system
• Ateme transcoders
• Native client applications for Apple iOS devices, Android devices, connected TVs and web browser-based PC/MAC devices
• IT equipment (HP & Supermicro servers, Cisco switches, Barracuda load balancers, Cybersam network firewall, KVMs, CMT middleware and client applications)
• 65Tb storage for VOD/Offline content Infrastructure management systems (NMS)

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Building for the future

After ten years, Abu Dhabi Media finds itself at the crossroads with legacy infrastructure that needs to be replaced. For this exclusive Broadcast Pro Middle East interview, Ahmed Al Menhali, Director of Projects at Abu Dhabi Media talks about new deployments at the facility that are software-defined and geared towards a future that has all the right buzzwords including IP and cloud.

Abu Dhabi Media burst on to the scene 10 years ago, building a complete broadcast centre in the capital, as part of the emirate’s programme to develop its media industry. Today the campus, as well as multiple studies and extensive post production facilities, is responsible for the delivery of 15 HD channels.

Ten years down the road, Abu Dhabi Media is now confronted by a hardware-based technical infrastructure which is moving towards the end of its life. Sensibly, it has taken a managed, long-term approach to the process.

“Imagine Communications has been a trusted partner for playback systems from the beginning,” said Ahmed Al Menhali, Director of Projects at Abu Dhabi Media.

“And now it is time to refurbish and upgrade.”

Abu Dhabi Media, therefore, studied some of the emerging technologies in the market and made decisions on the capabilities of new concepts. At the extreme, it meant throwing out broadcast infrastructures and moving everything to the cloud. In the time right for such a bold move?

“Today, the technology is looking ahead to software-defined solutions, and away from hardware,” Al Menhali says.

“The concept of software-defined technology is helping everybody. We can rely on major IT manufacturers like HP and others to deliver the hardware, and use the expertise of specialist vendors in achieving the targets in the application layer.

“Imagine, alongside other big names, are also following that direction. This serves the roadmap that we have planned to roll out.”

The first-generation systems installed at Abu Dhabi Media came from Imagine Communications, so it was natural that they were on the list when the broadcaster was reviewing its options.

Anas Hantash, who heads Imagine’s MENA operations says that although the company has been working closely with ADM for over a decade, “that relationship has intensified over the past 18 months as have our discussions about how we can help them to migrate to IP”.

“We know they have been attending NAB and IBC and looking at all the major players. We have been extremely impressed with the initiatives ADM has undertaken to transition their business towards IP, software-defined solutions and virtualised environments. They wanted to be sure that IP was a coherent route for the future and with Imagine, they feel that this is being delivered.”

The conclusion was that software-defined technology was the way to go, if it could be achieved without throwing out existing, non-life-expired hardware and without changing the established workflows and working practices on which the broadcaster relies.

Cloud

The transition towards IP connectivity is seen as an important part of this future roadmap. The other element is to create applications in a way in which they can readily be virtualised, and eventually moved to the cloud. Abu Dhabi Media has already completed a full POC for its disaster recovery service with du Media Cloud.

“The use of its cloud services is set to expand. One element of the current refurbishment project saw the implementation of an Imagine Broadcast Master and xG Schedule system for traffic and programme scheduling. xG software is built using microservices, and is likely to be the first part of the operation to see primary software migrated to the cloud in the coming years.

In general, though, the Abu Dhabi Media approach to the cloud is positive but cautious.

“We might consider moving everything to cloud,” is Al Menhali’s view.

“Cloud is the new world interest and is being talked about everywhere. However, practically speaking, I think they are still far from having their systems populated in cloud. It is important to work with a partner who shares a similar vision and is following a similar roadmap,” he continues.

“At the moment, we trust only some big names who share our thoughts. Maybe after three years, it will be different. We are currently faced with a big challenge as everyone is claiming to have cloud solutions. But when it comes to practicality and testing their platforms, we see that there is still room for development and they still have some distance to cover before becoming a complete software-defined solution. Imagine, however, has been different in this regard.”

Interoperability

The other important consideration is interoperability. The Abu Dhabi Media campus provides a one-stop-shop for production and post as well as delivery. It makes sense to minimise the movement and handling of content.

As part of the refurbishment programme, Imagine is installing an ingest and asset management system. This uses Versio server networks, which are actually software instances running on Hewlett Packard Enterprises (HPE) workstations. This will talk to other systems including the EMC Isilon central storage, and the post production section.

“It was very important to us that the new hardware be supplied by HPE,” Al Menhali says.

“We are not restricted to a single technology supplier. All the big names are doing the same.

“It makes the system open to multiple vendors, and that was an essential requirement for us. We need to be able to connect any popular editing platform – like Avid Media Composer, Premiere Pro and Final Cut Pro X – seamlessly; to minimise the movement of content for finishing.

“We are still in the process of identifying whether we will have a single choice of editing system, or we will provide multiple systems and allow editors and producers to choose. What is important is that the storage solution will support any edit workstation, allowing

Anas Hantash (l) from Imagine with Ahmed Al Menhali (r) from Abu Dhabi Media and shots from inside the broadcaster’s facility.
“What makes it interesting is that we are taking what works today and protecting it for the future – and whatever challenges that may bring – by moving to a modern, software-defined platform”

Ahmed Al Menhali, Director of Broadcast Technology, Abu Dhabi Media

“IP - The future
This brings us to the obvious central question: Do such major overhauls of the key technology platforms, including central storage, asset management and a completely software-driven playout architecture, mean that Abu Dhabi will be moving wholesale to IP connectivity? The answer is not yet. “We have to be realistic about upgrades,” says Al Menhali. “We have invested in the SDI domain and we need to give it some more time before starting up again. It is a massive investment, moreover, our SDI infrastructure and routers are working perfectly for us and for our workflows. “Our approach is slightly altered in this regard. We are looking forward to the next maybe four years. In that time, we may need to address new technical formats like 4K or a higher definition. We will align ourselves to the industry and consumer demand as we go along. “Our technology roadmap is linked to that. The evolution from SDI to IP will be driven by the move from HD to 4K or beyond. Especially now that the SMPTE 2110 standards are ready, we will move to an IP infrastructure when we need to. “Currently, we do not feel the need to invest in replacing existing infrastructure,” explains Al Menhali. “We have the HD-SDI infrastructure in place, and we intend to continue with this infrastructure for routing until we decide to move on – maybe in four years – to the 4K platform. When the time is right, we will evaluate whether that will be for playout, for production or post-production.

“Within the next three or four years, we will remain with HD, until the new UHD is fully developed, the industry is fully geared and the prices have gone down. That is when we will consider the switch, which will, of course, comply with the industry and audience’s preference to go for UHD or beyond. For the next four to five years, we have to wait and see. “The important thing is that what we are building now will survive the coming four or five years, but capable of shifting the underlying routing from SDI to IP without changing anything else.”

Transition
As a busy production and playout centre, delivering premium content, stability is key for Abu Dhabi Media. While this project is changing out some mission critical systems, extending functionality and providing transparency between SDI and IP sources, the day-to-day work has to continue uninterrupted. At the same time, these are major upgrades for the entire broadcast chain from Traffic & Scheduling System (Broadcast Master/SD) Schedule with all its Modules) to more than 22 video servers with 132 HD ports. Three independent full automation systems (Main/Backup) provide redundancy as well as preview services, in addition to channel branding, master control switching, and ingest/asset management functionality. All of this has to be implemented in a compact timeline starting at the beginning of 2018 and going live in May.

Talking of the decision to go back to Imagine Communications for the next-generation systems, Al Menhali says: “The workflows that are currently set alongside the fluency of operations made it very easy for us to make the decision. It would be difficult to change given these factors. “We have been running these systems for the last 10 years and we have found them to be reliable,” he says, pointing also to the ready availability of local support.

“We feel we are moving in the right direction; we are moving towards a software-defined solution. And through this all, our currently set optimised workflows and work processes stay exactly the same. We are using the latest technology and are ready for the future; therefore, we do not see the need for us to invest more for the time being, given the existing infrastructures are serving their purpose well. “We are refreshing and upgrading our systems, so this is inevitably a large project,” he concludes. “What makes it interesting is that we are taking what works today and protecting it for the future – and whatever challenges that may bring – by moving to a modern, software-defined platform.”

Accessing, protecting and delivering content: the key to a successful broadcast workflow

For-broadcast solutions and services, our customers are served by following the ecosystem approach. This approach is at the core of our broadcasting solution strategy.

The ecosystem approach is a comprehensive strategy that embraces the complete lifecycle of a broadcast solution. It begins with identifying the business objectives of the customer and ends with the successful deployment and operation of the solution.

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The ecosystem approach is a comprehensive strategy that embraces the complete lifecycle of a broadcast solution. It begins with identifying the business objectives of the customer and ends with the successful deployment and operation of the solution.
It’s been almost 15 years since I last set my eyes on Fusion. I was working at AV Productions, one of Dubai’s oldest and most reliable post-production houses. The company had acquired a fantastic but short-lived new edit suite, Dps Velocity Q, which came bundled with a light version of Eye on Digital Fusion.

The Fusion software was accessible via a direct timeline link within Velocity Q. To use the Fusion software to its full potential, there was an option to buy individual nodes for $25 each. Basic nodes like scaling and simple colour correction were included, but more advanced nodes like the Chroma Keyer had to be purchased on a pay-as-you-need basis.

At that time, few products offered a workflow like this, with Avid DS the only other that springs to mind. Basic nodes like scaling and simple colour correction were included, but more advanced nodes like the Chroma Keyer had to be purchased on a pay-as-you-need basis.

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At that time, even Autodesk Flame and Smoke didn’t offer fully functioning round tripping between an editorial timeline and compositor. Like many products, Fusion suffered from problems, which hindered its development. It was also only available for Windows, which meant it missed out on a huge number of Mac users.

In 2014, Blackmagic Design acquired Digital Fusion, now known as Blackmagic Fusion 9, and set about redeveloping and marketing it. Nothing new to Blackmagic, which did the same for DaVinci Resolve, turning it into the most popular colour grading system on the market.

Blackmagic Fusion comes in two versions, the free version and the $299 studio version. For the review, I will stick mainly with the studio version.

Post-production specialist Alistair Rankine tests Blackmagic Fusion 9, previously known as Digital Fusion, and believes it has the potential to reclaim its status as the go-to compositor for the visual effects industry.
is also an activation dongle in the form of a USB stick. I like the idea of the activation dongle, as it helps to prevent piracy; however, I also have an activation dongle for DaVinci Resolve. This is great when I am on my HP Workstation, where I have plenty of USB ports, but can be problematic when jumping over to my MacBook Pro, which has only two ports. As soon as my dongle is plugged in, I am limited to using only the Thunderbolt ports. I hope that in the future, Blackmagic provides a single dongle option for dual product users.

For anyone new to Blackmagic Fusion, it is a node compositor. Instead of using layer-like systems such as After Effects, it uses individual nodes to represent individual changeable parameters. This has pretty much become the norm in compositing software, with products such as Flame, Nuke and Mistika all implementing nodes to carry out complex compositing. Unlike products such as Flame, Fusion is stand-alone software. It doesn’t have its own internal editorial timeline, and the interface strongly resembles that of Nuke. It can, however, work directly in conjunction with DaVinci Resolve via a clip link, similar to the link between After Effects and Premiere or Nuke and Nuke Studio (Hiero). Combine DaVinci Resolve and Fusion, and you have a very affordable high-end finishing suite. It can also be used in conjunction with Avid via the Avid Connect plug-in.

Alistair Rankine, post-production expert, UAE

I download the software, insert my dongle and jump straight in. At first glance, the interface looks very similar to the version I used back in 2005. I wonder what has changed. Going in deeper, I realise that a great deal is different, not just the toolset but also the under-the-hood performance.

For anyone who has never worked on a node compositing system, the initial opening of the software can be quite daunting. It just looks like a blank canvas. As there is no footage loaded, there are no nodes in the flow graph and no parameters open in the controls area. Coming from a Nuke and Flame background, I am not too bothered by this and start to load some footage into Fusion to see where it takes me. It isn’t long before I start to find my way around the software. If you come from a node-based compositing background, the interface is fairly intuitive and it shouldn’t take too long to figure out the basics.

I think one thing Blackmagic will need to do, regardless of how good Fusion is, is to heavily invest in producing online training videos. In a world where you can go online and learn everything A great deal is different, not just the toolset but also the under-the-hood performance.

“A great deal is different, not just the toolset but also the under-the-hood performance”
you need to know about After Effects, Nuke and Flame, from the basics to the professional. In order to keep up workflows and pipelines throughout their facilities. Alistair Rankine, post-production specialist.

A little like 3D movies – it seems One of Blackmagic’s selling points has been added, too many to mention here, but I will cover the most important ones.

Virtual Reality
One of Blackmagic’s selling points on the Fusion software is its ability to handle virtual reality. VR is a little like 3D movies – it seems to have come and gone over the years. This time around, it appears to be here to stay, perhaps not in the film industry but definitely in other areas of entertainment.

Fusion 9 comes with a new panoramic viewer and is able to work in true 3D space by way of a new 360-degree spherical camera, which also supports stereoscopic VR, allowing scenes to be rendered quickly and easily. It works with all major VR headsets on the market. The great thing about Fusion’s toolset is that it is all self-contained, limiting the need to jump in and out of other programmes in order to complete your VR workflow.

Planar Tracker
Like many people out there, my favourite planar tracker is Mocha. Even since Flame included its own planar tracker, I still find it hard to beat Mocha. So how does the planar tracker on Fusion compare?

After a couple of hours of testing, I am fairly impressed. It seems to work better than I expected. I do find that strange, as it would do the same, as it would make more sense to have the more useful settings as default. Training session over – back to tracking. I put the tracker through its paces using some footage I have tracked before in other applications, and I have to say it is excellent. I do receive errors along the way, but that is to be expected.

The more I use the 3D tracker, the better I believe the results will be. It certainly holds its own next to trackers in Nuke and Flame, and from the quick tests I carry out, it certainly doesn’t seem to throw up any more errors than I would receive in each of these products. I suppose the interesting thing is that both Nuke and Flame are vastly more expensive than Fusion and come with large yearly support charges in order to receive upgrades and tech support.

With Fusion, as with Resolve, there is a one-off payment and free upgrades. It will be interesting to see what level of tech support is available for Fusion compared to Flame and Nuke, which both offer 24-hour online and telephone support.

Delta Keyer
Or all the nodes I have mentioned so far, the Delta keyer has to be my favourite for ease of use and initial performance. Having spent years working and teaching on Flame, I have always been exceptionally biased towards the Flame keyer. Just love the way it works and how quickly I can pull and refine a key. Moving over to Nuke and After Effects, I eventually got used to the Keylight keyer, which doesn’t pull as good an initial key as Flame but balances that out with some remarkable refining tools.

I would say from my initial testing on Fusion that the Delta keyer is as good as if not better. It pulls an excellent initial key, and provides similar parameters to Keylight to help refine the key. It also incorporates the clean plate function, which helps to balance out imperfections and variations in colour of the blue and green, for easier refining of problem areas.

I will be interested to see how it handles more complex keying tasks with badly lit green screen. That will be the true test of how the Delta keyer holds up. If the initial test is anything to go by, there shouldn’t be any issues.

Studio Player
The studio player has been added to allow collaborative workflows between multiple users by way of Blackmagic hardware. It provides the software with a multi-shot timeline, version tracking and annotation notes. From what I can see, the idea is to match the functionality of Nuke Studio and Hiero, neither of which I have been a huge fan of in the past.

The timeline allows users to create storyboards from the shots they are working on, allowing access to all the metadata information on the shots and letting the user write annotations for either the compositor who will work on the shots or the editor, director or producer who will review. It will basically allow anyone with the Fusion software on their system to review and track the job every step from start to finish, adding comments when needed.

The studio player will come into its own in an environment where there are multiple users and artists all working on the same project,
allowing the project to be monitored at each individual step along the way. From what I can see so far, it certainly has the necessary tools to achieve this, but I would like to put it through its paces with a large team of users to see how well it works in reality.

My initial thoughts on Blackmagic Fusion is that it is an excellent stand-alone node composer. It has an excellent keyer, 3D tracker and VR toolset. Some areas still need tweaking, such as some of the default parameters on various tools. That said, it is a remarkable product and for a price tag of $299, it will be hard to ignore.

Although the nearest product to Fusion is Nuke, Fusion offers something Nuke doesn’t – the option to connect directly to DaVinci Resolve, combining both products to provide a full editorial, effects and grading system. I certainly plan to incorporate it more and more into my everyday workload.

Do I see Fusion replacing Nuke? Not in studios that already have Nuke.

The Good
Delta keyer

The Bad
Dougie. I would prefer a different activation method.

Wish List
More training courses available from Blackmagic, from Fusion 101 to more complex compositing.

Large VFX studios invest a great deal of time and money setting up workflows and pipelines throughout their facilities. It would be counter-intuitive to suddenly abandon that workflow. There is also a huge Nuke user base out there with thousands of talented artists, all of whom know the product inside out.

That said, I think Fusion certainly stands side by side with Nuke and I can see it being used more and more in smaller boutique studios or newly opened studios with less established workflows. I can also see it used in a broadcast environment in conjunction with Avid via Avid Connect, or Resolve via the connect tab. One area where Blackmagic is pushing Fusion is that of 3D motion graphics. This will help Fusion establish itself within a broadcast environment and compete with After Effects for market share.

Alistair Rankine is a multi-skilled post-production compositor and colourist based in the UAE.
Fifteen million satellite receiver set-top-boxes flood the MENA market every year. They are the cheap and powerful bits of electronics that serve 99% of MENA TV viewers with their video content. These boxes know every channel watched in every household. They know when viewers zap to another channel or satellite. They know when a USB stick is attached to record an episode of a hit drama series, and they know when viewers fast-forward through advertisements on play back.

From $200 to $7 in 15 years

Satellite STBs sold in MENA in the early 2000s could scan multiple satellites and had the capacity to store thousands of channels. Users could sort, filter and arrange these channels as they wished into a handful of lists. The RPU could display a two-week grid full of rich programme information. PVR models with 40GB hard disc drives offered instant replay and powerful bits of electronics that serve 90% of the MENA market every year. They are the cheap external USB sticks that can be bought at any corner store.

Unlike computers and mobile phones, where prices and margins have stayed roughly the same for decades, the functionality of satellite STBs in MENA has stayed roughly the same while prices and margins have plummeted. That is both the best thing about satellite TV in MENA, and the worst; and it may offer the key to solving the data void of MENA and, thereby, unlocking a new and more prosperous era of satellite broadcasting in the region.

Price elasticity

Ipsos, Frost and Sullivan and others have released research during the past year indicating that over 90% of TV households in MENA get their TV via satellite dish and receiver. That’s approximately 50m TV households. No other region in the world comes close.

That success is due, in large part, to price and convenience. Complete satellite systems including 60cm dish, LNB, cable, HD receiver and installation can be bought retail for $20-40. Point that dish at the 7°/8° West orbital position and watch hundreds of free-to-air (FTA) TV channels broadcasting the most popular content in the region. Picture quality on most channels is superb. Electricity is the household’s only bandwidth charges: that value proposition is hard to beat. In fact, some of the richest data in TV comes from satellite operators.

Every click of the remote

Not all satellite TV markets are as devoid of audience data as MENA. In fact, some of the richest data in TV comes from satellite operators. Back in the late 1990s, Dish Network in the US was one of the first satellite operators to realize it could get more value out of its rapidly growing population of satellite set-top-boxes. Working closely with sister company EchoStar, it figured out that any click of the remote control and any operation of the satellite set-top-box could easily be logged for analysis. Zap from CNN to the BBC at 7:01pm, watch until 7:25pm, then tune in to Fox for 10 seconds, and back again to CNN until 7:09. All of that could be registered down to the split second. Then a very small portion of those STBs activated their dial-up modems to transfer the logged data back to the central data centre.

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The long tail of TV
Ratings methods and processes were developed and refined during the early years of television in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, when viewers had access to a relatively limited number of channels. With diaries and later on with people meters, companies like AC Nielsen in the USA and BARB in the UK gathered, analysed and published the hard data that connected the value chains between TV channels, viewers and advertisers.

Digital compression changed TV dramatically in the 1990s. Squeezing a handful of digital channels into the bandwidth of a single analogue channel made it possible to deliver channels to viewers at a small fraction of what it used to cost. In many markets, this drove explosive growth in the number of TV channels. Data and other pay-TV operators in the US and Europe added dozens of channels a year, and by the mid-2000s many operators carried over a thousand channels. Similarly, in MENA the channel count mushroomed from a few dozen in the early 1990s to well over a thousand. But while the traditional ratings companies had always focused on the top channels, now there was a need to monitor the popularity of the many hundreds of channels that made up the very long tail of a digital satellite TV channel list.

That’s where the capabilities of satellite STBs dovetailed nicely with the huge subscriber volume of the pay-TV giants to bring high-quality data to channels far down the tail.

STB phone home
Dial-up modems were the normal way for satellite STBs in a pay-TV environment to deliver data back to the operator. Call charges were paid by the operator and done in the wee hours of the morning to avoid tying up the home-line. During the past decade, broadband connections proliferated and made it easier and cheaper to collect data from more and more STBs.

In developing markets, pay-TV operators have innovated other techniques to gather data where broadband penetration is low. One solution is to select households which agree to supply viewing data and attach a 3G dongle modem to the STB. Alternatively, the STB can generate a QR code summarising key viewing parameters. Viewers are then incentivised to take a picture of the QR codes with their phone and submit via SMS or WhatsApp.

Switching on the lights with a $7 STB
The lack of audience measurement in MENA is a fundamental weakness in the satellite TV broadcast ecosystem. It has a negatively impact on the ability of channels to provide all their viewers with the best TV experience, and makes it impossible for channels to earn advertising revenues that correspond to their full viewership.

This problem is hardly unique to MENA. But with more than 60 million TV households, it would be hard to find a larger TV market where less is known about the viewing behaviour of the vast majority. This lack of effective audience measurement is boilsplate preamble, referenced regularly by speakers and panellists in MENA TV industry forums. The problem is well-known, significant and seemingly immune to the attention of traditional audience measurement companies, but can be resolved with a new STB-based approach which builds on the technologies and processes explored many years ago by satellite pay-TV companies.

Today’s satellite STB in MENA may come out of the factory at bargain basement prices, but technical capability in terms of processor power and memory easily surpasses the specs of the early 2000s. Today’s 57 satellite STBs are capable of logging all actions of the STB and reporting back via either 3G modem or QR code.

While this is certainly no replacement for the rigorous research processes of international audience measurement companies, it at least starts to shine some light into markets that have not benefited from regular viewer research. It is a first step to strengthening the broadcasting ecosystem in MENA to better connect the value chain between viewers, content suppliers and advertisers.

“The basic FTA value proposition has humbled a slew of regional pay-TV players over the years as they struggle to attract and hold on to subscribers”

Robert Lakos, Founder of Deleel TV

“protech
Robert Lakos is Founder of Deleel TV.

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Robert Lakos is Founder of Deleel TV.

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When SNA wanted to replace an old global contribution system, it specified a solution that would establish two-way contribution links over a terrestrial network, using IP/MPLS as an underlying technology while using the internet for back-up. The Abu Dhabi broadcaster shares details of the technology it chose with BroadcastPro ME.

“The Nimbra VA solution has been installed at each of SNA’s news bureaus, as well as its HQ in Abu Dhabi.”

SNA recently put in place a new global content contribution platform to connect its 12 global news bureaus, including Washington, DC; Cairo; Istanbul; Osterley and Millbank (Westminster) in the UK; and Ramallah, Gaza, Dubai and its DR centre with its main hub at the twofour54 site in Abu Dhabi.

To provide greater flexibility at a reduced cost, SNA wanted to establish two-way contribution links over a terrestrial network, using IP/MPLS as an underlying technology while using the internet for back-up. The Abu Dhabi broadcaster shares details of the technology it chose with BroadcastPro ME.

Its challenges: Even with the strictest QoS classes, an IP/MPLS grade network is prone to jitter, delay and packet loss — which raises the risk to a much higher level than most demanding broadcasters are ready to accept.

Implementing high-quality services on top of an IP/MPLS network is complex and requires a large degree of configuration to ensure that the different types of traffic do not conflict with each other. Another big challenge is to offer greater flexibility while optimising bandwidth and reducing the operational cost for providing video services.

The main goal for SNA was to establish uninterrupted communication between all its bureaus, to enhance the quality of contributions and ensure its journalists could break news as soon as it happened.

SNA already used Net Insight’s ScheduALL for resource scheduling and its interoperability platform, ScheduALL-Chorus, to enable independent control systems to effectively communicate and work together. In 2016, SNA went one step further and selected Net Insight’s media contribution over internet solution, the Nimbra VA series, to connect its 12 news bureaus globally. It also implemented Nimbra Vision, for easy at-a-glance overview of the network, service health and performance.

So when it needed to bridge the gap between the internet and the reliability and quality requirements it had, SNA sought out Net Insight again.

“We specified a system that would be able to switch seamlessly between IP/MPLS and the standard internet as necessary while guaranteeing high-quality service”

Suresh Kumar, Director of Technology, Sky News Arabia

“When looking for a new solution, our main requirement was ultimately that the link should be operated on the public internet — at the same time, we are under no illusions about the shortcomings of the public internet at this time,” explains Suresh Kumar Nair, Director of Technology at SNA.

“That’s why we decided to deploy an IP/MPLS link as the initial primary link. While providing a clear gain in OPEX over satellite, IP/MPLS is not perfect either and is prone to buffering and latency. So we specified a system that would be able to switch seamlessly between IP/MPLS and the standard internet as necessary, while guaranteeing high-quality service.”

Net Insight worked with SNA to specify and install 27 units of the Nimbra VA 220 at each of the remote news bureaus, and at the broadcaster’s head office in Abu Dhabi. These units combine the advantages of an MPEG-4, encoder and decoder, together with an integrated video transport solution. Built on the same rugged software baseline as the Nimbra MSR family, the Net Insight VA series offers reliable operations and tools to quickly understand if any issues occur in the network.

This union aims to provide the operational simplicity of one point of management, as well as reduced network complexity —
Suresh Kumar says SNA’s plan is to eventually move to the public internet as the broadcaster’s main contribution link.

The implementation of ScheduALL has streamlined the increasingly complex environment of a modern file-based workflow at SNA’s News Operations Centre. ScheduALL prevents duplication of data, in turn reducing human error, automating workflows and giving a small team of operators the ability to process large numbers of bookings through a wide range of complex machines. This enables Sky News Arabia to react to breaking news stories faster than ever before.

“We are able to automate a lot of processes at our News Operations Centre because of the system,” says Kumar. “The solution allows us to be flexible and to get the most out of the hardware and software, so that we can be more effective with our resources.”

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With the new software, journalists, editors and producers anywhere in the SNA facility are able to find out when feeds are scheduled, and check real-time status. This is in addition to improving awareness of feeds for production, improvements in the workflow and reporting, easing the burden on control room staff and administrators.

The ScheduALL core system has the ability to interface with back-office human resource and ERP systems, creating a 360-degree cost control and reporting functionality that drives business analysis and increased efficiencies. Nimbra VA lets the broadcaster build, launch and manage broadcast-quality, cost-efficient media transport over the internet. The Nimbra VA uses a combination of SNA’s IP/MPLS infrastructure and the internet to provide a reliable, flexible and bandwidth-efficient protection scheme for the video services brought to the news centre from the remote offices. Nimbra VA is an IP-based system that uses a combination of SNA’s IP/MPLS infrastructure and the internet to provide a reliable, flexible and bandwidth-efficient protection scheme for the video services brought to the news centre from the remote offices.

“They plan, in time and when the technology is proven, is to make the public internet our main contribution link,” confides Kumar. “We are at that stage yet, but this is the direction of travel. Previously we experienced a lot of issues with our IP/MPLS feed. The new installation has helped us see an immediate improvement in performance. It has improved the availability and quality of our global bureau production. The major achievement has been uninterrupted feeds from our bureau.”

“Since this technology is not off-the-shelf, it required a lot of interaction between our technical team and Net Insight’s team to architect this solution,” comments Kumar. Interoperability platform Chorus allows SNA’s independent control systems to effectively communicate and work together, from initial feed request to ingest control. The advanced automation supported by Chorus includes a complete bi-directional path that sets up the communication between disparate systems like Miranda, Broadcast Bionics and Paradigm NMS across the facility.
COMING OF AGE OF THE GULF FILMMAKER

DIFF 2017 saw the screening of 140 films from 51 countries, accompanied by red carpet flamboyance, but the real takeaway was the coming of age of the Gulf filmmaker.

Quizzing the director after the screening of a film is one of the privileges of attending a festival as meticulously planned as DIFF. Asked what drew her to the script for Mary Shelley, Saudi director Haifaa Al Mansour cited the English novelist’s independent streak and philosophical bent of mind. And while the lavishly conceived film does not measure up to Al Mansour’s brilliant directorial debut Wadjda, it was not lost on the audience that a Saudi-born female filmmaker had received genuine acclaim beyond politically correct tokenism.

And the accolades kept coming, with Hollywood actress Cate Blanchett presenting the sixth IWFF Filmmaker Award to Al Mansour for Miss Cartel. In addition, the Muhr line-up showcased Arab films refreshingly bold in concept and execution. Winner of Best Emirati Feature went to Sharp Tools, directed by Nujoom Alghanem, conceptual and execution. Winner of Best Emirati Feature won the Muhr Award for Nujoom Al Ghanem (r).

 Winning Best Director in the Muhr Emirati category was Abdullah Aljunaibi for his psychological thriller Camera. Aljunaibi spoke to BroadcastPro about the making of his debut feature, and more importantly his mission to help create a commercially viable Arab film industry in the country. Camera will soon be released in theatres across the Gulf.

Further affirmations of Gulf talent were the gala screenings for Waleed Al Shehhi’s Dolphins and Mohammed Rashid Buali’s The Sleeping Tree, both among the 17 films supported by Dubai’s Enjaaz funding programme.

Celebrating its tenth anniversary, the very busy Dubai Film Market (DFM) presented 25 Arab films from 12 different countries, five of which had their world premiere at DIFF 2017. Among some 30 new titles acquired for distribution, Programme, aimed at supporting the release of Arab cinema. Under the initiative, free distributors have pledged to acquire at least one title from the DIFF line-up and release it in the region. VOX announced the acquisition of Emirati filmmaker Waleed Al Shehhi’s debut feature Dolphins, which premiered at DIFF.

Local distributors are also actively building their portfolio for the coming year. Shock And Awe, which tells the story of how the media set the agenda before the Iraq war, was among some 30 new titles acquired by Dubai-based pan-Arab distributor Front Row Filmed Entertainment.

Film distributor Empire International and Egyptian production company Synergy Films announced an exclusive three-year deal at DIFF 2017. Empire will serve as the sole distributor of Synergy’s movies in the Middle East.

“This marks the first time that an Egyptian Studio is collaborating with a Middle Eastern distributor on a regular basis, which is quite uncommon for Arab studios,” commented Empire’s CEO and Chairman Mario Haddad. Film analyst Alaa Karkouti and the CEO of pan-Arab distributor MAD Solutions presented 25 Arab films from 20 different countries, five of which had their world premiere at DIFF 2017, while 15 films were screened at the Dubai Film Market (DFM).

Outside Ebbing, Missouri and McDonagh’s Three Billboards achieved their commercial objectives. Front Row Filmed Entertainment. According to the agenda before the Iraq war, is earning its reputation as one of the festivals for Oscar contenders. And as at previous festivals, legends of the film world were honoured. The 14th edition of DIFF presented lifetime achievement awards to veteran actor Patrick Stewart, Bollywood actor Irrfan Khan and Egyptian writer Wahid Hamed.

The Saudi government’s imminent opening of movie theatres created a buzz among the regional film fraternity at the festival. While questions remain about the role of censorship, there was general consensus that the move creates a larger talent base for future editions of the annual festival.
Receiving a press release about a product launch is one thing – seeing some of the action that goes into bringing a product to life is quite another. BroadcastPro ME visited the Shure headquarters in Chicago recently and came back with a deeper understanding of what goes into the making of wireless systems, and the new spectrum challenges manufacturers contend with.

Late last year, Shure announced the launch of its Axient Digital wireless system, conceived in response to the mounting RF spectrum pressure in the market. What made this launch different from the many other releases that come into our inbox was the fact that we had the opportunity to take an intimate look at the behind-the-scenes action and the challenges the development team went through.

At the impressive and spacious Shure headquarters in Chicago, a seven-floor, 32,980sqm glass building, no photography is permitted. That’s understandable, since Shure’s US headquarters does not just serve as a traditional office setting but also houses its Research and Development department – a number of torture labs with various testing devices to put the company’s mics, cables and other components through various endurance measures before they finally pass the quality test and make it to the end user. These rigorous testing centres include automated dropping of the mics, sweat testing, continuous cable yanking and a special team that even conjures up new forms of torture to test products.

The tour of the facility included a walk through a hall exhibit showcasing the origins and milestones of the company when Mr and Mrs Shure first began their journey, the evolution of Shure...
mics in their various avatars over the years, and posters of musicians who use these devices. By the end of the two-day trip, we came back with a newfound respect for wireless devices, especially microphones, and a deeper understanding of the many challenges manufacturers face with the diminishing RF spectrum in the market.

Shure President and CEO Christine Schyvinck, who delivered the welcome address, started off as an engineer and has been with the company for more than 28 years. The agenda included the announcement of the launch of the Axient Digital Wireless System.

We were at the facility, however, to gain a deeper understanding of the meticulous planning and extensive R&D that goes into developing a product before it finally comes to life. The new launch, developed from scratch, has been six years in the making, experts conceded.

“We spent almost three years just assessing and developing the technologies, because these products were built from scratch, and lay the foundations for a whole new portfolio,” commented John Born, Product Manager, Wired Microphones – Shure Incorporated.

“We spent almost three years just assessing and developing the technologies, because these products were built from scratch, and lay the foundations for a whole new portfolio,” commented John Born, Product Manager, Wired Microphones – Shure Incorporated.

“Starting from scratch is sometimes a necessary evil. It’s a help and a hindrance, but being in a nice established company has meant that we also have the support of the management and the resources to extend a development for seven years, although we didn’t plan for it to go on that long.”

The next three years were spent developing the product itself, optimising the design and putting it through rigorous testing measures, and then beta testing with high-profile end users who use the product in some of the most challenging conditions before it actually sees the light of day.

There is no better example than the launch of Axient Digital to demonstrate this.

Michael Johns, Product Manager with Shure Incorporated, commented that Axient Digital was born of the demand for wireless.

“All over the world, wireless spectrum is changing rapidly. We have gone through two massive instances of the repurposing of the UHF spectrum in the US and a lot of UHF reallocations have happened in the UK, Japan and across the world. Because of that, this wide band of RF spectrum that we could Previously...
The challenge is that there’s going to be less RF spectrum available, and we have tried to address this by creating technology solutions with high density mode. With the flexibility of digital and being able to change the parameters in the modulation scheme, we are able to accommodate more frequencies.

Michael Johns, Product Manager, Shure Incorporated

use to operate wireless microphones on has become reduced, because they have been sold off to telecom players and manufacturers for the most part, so there is less spectrum for companies like us to operate with.

“We, therefore, had to develop a wireless system that is very linear and spectrally efficient so we are not occupying more space than we need to. This allows you to keep away from interferences and get more channels on air at the same time. Stability is another big element in a wireless device. Wireless mics are used more and more on stages across the world – it was important to develop rock-solid wireless systems, because any artist or musician doesn’t expect a wireless mic to sound any different from a wired mic and they don’t expect to have any drop-outs either,” he explained.

Ten years ago, Shure started its wireless journey, it became cognizant of the need to put together an engineering team that understood the various nuances of developing wireless technology.

“Almost ten years ago, we assembled a whole engineering team that could do digital wireless, and that includes me and several others here who have assisted with the development. This new engineering team took up the challenge of making this, and what we have here today as a result is Axient Digital, a combination of new technology with several form factors and features that we have identified and implemented, based on feedback from users and customers, to create a full package,” Johns said.

At its core, Axient Digital features a receiver compatible with its two transmitter offerings, the AD Series and ADX Series. Axient Digital with ADX Series transmitters promises a high level of core product benefits, including: exceptional RF performance, digital audio and networking. ADX Series transmitters also incorporate ShowLink, which provides real-time control of all transmitter parameters with interference detection and avoidance, and include the first mic bodypack with an integrated self-tuning antenna, enabling greater concealment and comfort.

“These are the key benefits. It was paramount to us to have a digital radio that could be very robust in the presence of high interference,” commented Johns.

But lofty claims are nothing if they can’t be seen in action, and we had the opportunity to do so the next day at the huge 61,500-seat Soldier Field American football stadium, with listening tests from various positions. This included testing the clarity of sound from a mic in the underbelly of the stadium, shot off from the rest of the world by a metre-wide concrete wall, and from the farthest corner of the stadium. Shure delivered on its claim of "maximum signal stability.

“Audio quality is very important. We have used a digital architecture that provides a digital transport mechanism that sounds just like a wire,” commented Johns, speaking about Shure’s patented Quadversity receiver technology, which significantly mitigates the potential for signal fades or interference that can cause dropouts.

“Quadversity mode allows users to place sets of diversity antennas in different zones, or double the number of antennas in a single zone, to improve RF signal-to-noise in challenging environments. High density mode increases the maximum simultaneous system channel count from 17 to 47 per 6MHz TV band (from 23 to 61 per 8MHz TV band), while maintaining exceptional audio quality,” he explained.

In terms of audio-quality, Axient Digital has a 20Hz-20kHz range with a flat frequency response and accurate transient response. It also boasts wide dynamic range, AES-256 encryption and 2ms latency from the mic transducer to the analogue output.

Johns pointed out that the wireless system includes new Shure features named Dante Cue and Dante Browse, which seem to be associated in the industry with great flexibility to control output and high-fidelity headphone monitoring of audio output from any Dante-enabled connected device. A Shure-developed iPHONE app, ShurePlus Channels, can also be used to control and command the wireless system. One of the things the team has had to keep in mind is the ability of this system to talk to other systems.

“It’s very important for customers to be able to mix and match these products with other AD or ADX components. With Axient Digital, we wanted them to be able to leverage their existing investment and use our products,” said Johns.

We also had the opportunity to hear in the room a whole mix of experts at one time, who worked with the development team. This included experts who worked directly with very high-profile sports organisations for broadcast and those who have worked with some of the world’s best musicians in order to produce the quality of sound they are looking for.

Speaking about the challenges the market will face in the future, the Shure team pointed out that with frequencies being less available, priorities are changing for those allocating them, especially the farmers of who has access to the frequencies.

“That’s the first glimpse of the impact and how it could change our world,” said Johns.

“The challenge is that there’s going to be less and less RF spectrum available, and we have tried to address this by creating technology solutions with high density mode. With the flexibility of digital and being able to change the parameters in the modulation scheme, we are able to accommodate more frequencies. This has been specifically addressed with the Axient Digital launch.

“With wireless, our strategy is to keep pushing the envelope with regard to spectrum, efficiency and diversity. We have looked at alternative spectrums taking the same product and same benefits, and checked how to provide the same experience.”

Michael Johns says a whole engineering team was assembled ten years ago to develop Shure’s digital wireless products.

Mics are put through rigorous testing before they make it to the end user.
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An Antik solution from Sawa Media

Dubai-based distributor Sawa will demonstrate its knowledge of IP Transcoding solution allowing TV networks to deliver content up to 4K HEVC channels per 1U Transcoder and capable of transcoding H264/HEVC as well as H262 and earlier video codecs. The Antik Nano three-set-top-box is the latest STB product, with full 4K HDR that can handle both H264 and H265/HEVC video codecs.„

This year at CABSAT, Sawa will showcase the Antik TR256, a transcoder with capability to transcode up to 24 HD channels per 1U Transcoder and capable of transcoding H264/HEVC as well as H262 and earlier video codecs. The Antik Nano three-set-top-box is the latest STB product, with full 4K HDR that can handle both H264 and H265/HEVC video codecs. The Antik Nano Nano for hotel or a large FTTH-based telecom operator.

Stand CD21-22

Riedel signals change with Bolero

Riedel Communications will demonstrate the Bolero wireless communication system. It is integrated into Riedel’s Artist digital matrix intercom platform. Other features include Riedel’s Advanced DECT Receiver (ADR) technology to improve RF robustness by reducing sensitivity to multipath reflections, next-generation communication technology for Touch&Go

The DSP-2312 Desktop SmartPanel is the smallest full-function desktop panel on the market, the release states, and the newest member of the Riedel SmartPanel family of intelligent user interfaces. The Desktop SmartPanel has 12 keys, two TFT touch screen LCD displays and integrated power supply. Riedel Communications Middle East GM Ahmed Magd el Din said: ‘At this year’s CABSAT, we’re looking forward to showcasing our new and innovative solutions and technologies that allow a smooth path to the future.’

Stand ZB5-A10

UBMS to announce partnerships at CABSAT

Dubai-based distributor UBMS will use CABSAT to announce exclusive regional partnerships with fire manufacturers including Axix, HEDBOX, NOVATIV, Depchine and PolarPro. The distributor will also announce a partnership with Digital Projection, an AV major.

One key launch at the UBMS stand will be the new S-360 Skypanel from ARRI. The S360-C has expanded ARRI’s LED soft light range with the largest and brightest SkyPanel to date. The S360-C is powerful and packed with a number of features that make it one of the most versatile LED fixtures on the market. Features include full colour control, lighting effects on a huge aperture, wireless DMX built in, a carbon fiber yoke, and much more. The S360-C is a beast of a light. A six-channel, 1.9GHz DECT-based intercom system.

Stand ZB5-C80

Ross promises agility with SDP family

Ross Video will be launching the latest addition to its Software Defined Production ecosystem at CABSAT. SDP is a new and growing family of products based on the view that broadcasters should be free to choose the transport that is most appropriate for their project. SDP delivers adaptability, scalability and agility to broadcasters by moving away from single-function devices that mostly sit idle towards a post of flexible resources that are able to meet production needs as they demand. A six-channel, 1.9GHz DECT-based intercom system.

Stand ZB5-A20

ARRI to promote cross-disciplinary competence

ARRI will be showcasing its LED luminaires and decades of expertise in theatre system solutions for the broadcast industry across the region at CABSAT. The company celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2017. Besides its camera and lighting solutions, ARRI hopes to showcase its knowledge of modern studio design, which influenced the features of its L-Series. The company claims that cross-disciplinary competence is what sets the System Group apart from its competitors. ARRI will feature the comprehensive services it offers for projects of any size, from small-scale system upgrades to complete turnkey installations for multi-studio facilities.

Stand ZB4-D 21

CreateCtrl introduces cognitive asset services

CreateCtrl, which provides specialized software solutions for the media industry, promises a plethora of ways to manage TV, IPTV and VOD services in a simple and flexible manner. OTT providers, TV channels and radio broadcasters use its applications to manage, plan and settle licences and programmes. The company will be at CABSAT to demonstrate artificial intelligence (AI) in its new cloud-based MAM solution, CreateCtrl WebSuite. It will demonstrate how features such as search and localisation, speech and vision recognition and other aspects make content discoverable to both content providers and their clients.

Stand ZB4-C12

More Blackmagic from Mediacast

At CABSAT 2018, Mediacast’s booth will have a dedicated Blackmagic Design area showcasing the very latest products designed to deliver UHD 4K content for broadcast, live production and post-production markets across the Middle East. Visitors will be able to get hands-on with the latest updates to Blackmagic’s range of digital film cameras, including the URSA Mini Pro, with an open protocol that allows customers to create their own remote control solutions via Bluetooth.

Visitors will be able to get hands-on with the latest updates to Blackmagic’s range of digital film cameras, including the URSA Mini Pro, with an open protocol that allows customers to create their own remote control solutions via Bluetooth. For web broadcasting and streaming professionals, Blackmagic Design will also be showing its range of compact streaming products, comprising the ATEM Television Studio HD and ATEM Television Studio Pro HD, with integrated panel, the HyperDeck Studio Mini and Web Presenter. DaVinci Resolve 15, the biggest release in the history of the product that represents a revolution in post-production will also be showcased.

Stand ZB5-A10

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Fujinon brings lens into focus

In addition to having 16 lenses around the show, Fujinon plans to showcase the UA107’s 4K UHD lens, which provides 4K optical quality across the entire zoom focal range. The UA107’s optical quality has been engineered using Fujifilm’s optical simulation software to model the UA107’s large diameter aspherical elements.

John Macdonald, Sales Manager, Nautel.

Fujinon’s new MK series of cinema lenses for E-mount cameras offers T2.9 speed across the entire zoom range, enabling a shallow depth-of-field. MK lenses are designed to maintain consistent colour temperature with all Fujinon cinema lenses, which simplifies colour grading. The 16-35mm Cabrio™ ZK2.5x lens is designed using the latest proprietary optical simulation software.

Stand ZB3-E30

Axel renews with Oxygen

Having participated in CABSAT for 10 years, Axel Technology will be showcasing its digital console and its graphic and logo generator.

Commenting on the theme, a company spokesperson said, “Renew is the theme. We’re fine tuning and upgrading a lot of our products, both hardware and software.”

The Oxygen 3000 Digital has been designed for both on-air and production studios. It is based on digital technology with DSP audio processing to deliver quality, the latest features and flexibility. Competitive in terms of quality-price ratio, it features 10 faders, meters for each single channel, built-in 7” display for settings and a range of connectivity and accessories in a steel chassis. With a client list that includes BAIXTV, the company spokesperson said: “We celebrated 20 years in 2016. We’re looking for new distributors and resellers in the MENA.”

Stand ZB6-D40

Dubai Studio City hosts competition at CABSAT

Dubai Studio City will sponsor the ‘Script to Screen in 48’ competition, where contest participants will be provided with coaching, mentorship with InfMedia to provide access to film and editing equipment for new entrants. Dubai Studio City is set to play a prominent role in the event as a Strategic Partner of CABSAT, which will bring together many regional and international attendees.

Commenting on their role, Majed Al Suwaidi, Managing Director, Dubai Studio City said: “This region has seen a substantial growth in the demand for films and production. Dubai has succeeded in becoming a film hub and we are honoured to have contributed to that vision. Our success has been a result of the solid ecosystem that we have cultivated, comprising one of the largest regional soundstages, world-class production services, cutting-edge facilities and unique training opportunities for local and international talent.”

Al Suwaidi added: “Digitisation, be it of content, services or production is redefining go-to-market strategies and is changing customer demand. For example, it is leading the emergence of a whole new breed of cloud-based, ‘mobile-first’ start-ups, plus the set-up of regional offices for international players.”

Stand ZB3-A20

Aveco drives automated workflows

Aveco, with its theme of create, deliver and monetise, will be showcasing its digital console and how it integrates with a variety of third party devices, technologies and workflows, and hides the technical differences behind a unified GUI.

According to a company spokesperson, Aveco solutions help in making live production cost efficient, visually attractive and error free. Bi-directional information exchange with social media as well as automatic publishing to the non-linear online world is facilitated through Aveco solutions.

The company aims to demonstrate how their solutions reduce OPEX, ensure automatic end-to-end workflows and allow a streamlined flow of media and metadata throughout the facility. This and more will be shown at its partners booths at CABSAT Dubai.

Rehbe & Schaurer ZB6-A20

Harmonic Inc. ZB6-B40

Stand ZB3-C70

Nautel will promote radio transmitters at CABSAT

Nautel will promote its full line of radio transmitters at CABSAT, including its V5 Series (300W-2.5kW FM), GV Series (3.5-60KW FM), NX Series (1-2,000kW AM/FM) and its digital broadcast solutions.

“The Middle East continues to be a very dynamic market for Nautel, with several countries investing in their digital broadcast infrastructure and recognising the long-term value of installing state-of-the-art transmitters,” commented John Macdonald, Sales Manager Middle East & Central/South Africa.

“CABSAT gives Nautel an opportunity to meet together with customers and visitors, and have a mix of both business and personal discussions. It gives show visitors the opportunity to see full-size products, live demonstrations and get technical details and recommendations one-on-one from Nautel experts. It is our experience that many broadcstators visit CABSAT to make decisions about critical elements of their infrastructure. Given the strategic nature of these decisions, we’ve learnt that broadcasters value the ability to see both Nautel’s products and company representatives face to face.”

Nautel has established a spare parts depot in Dubai to support the scores of Nautel customers in the region., added Macdonald.

Nautel has worked with some of the world’s largest radio broadcasting projects including All India Radio, which uses the Nautel NX Series 100W, 200W and 300kW DRM-enabled AM/FM transmitters. It also recently supplied Sharjah Media Corporation, SMG purchased an NXIO51 2+1 system and a VS2.5 2+1 system.

Stand ZB6-D11

Witbe drives video quality

After a successful exhibition last year, Witbe will showcase solutions to control video quality on multiple devices: mobile, computer and TV.

The company will highlight the monitoring, testing and validation of services on mobile video services, with a solution to monitor both Apple and Android devices, as well as the main set-top boxes in the market. Jean-Michel Planche, co-founder and Senior Vice President Strategy, said: “Streaming video through OTT is revolutionising the AV industry with about $80 million at stake by 2020.”

Stand ZB3-E30

Redefining in-room TV with Exterity

Exhibiting for the fifth time at CABSAT, Exterity will showcase the latest developments in its end-to-end IP video and digital signage solutions portfolio. CABSAT attendees will get a first look at Exterity’s new interactive portal for accessing TV, movies, guest services and more, all from the in-room TV.

The solution will focus initially on the hospitality market. Built from the ground-up, the new portal will provide an intuitive in-room guest experience.

Eleuterio Fernandes, Sales Director Middle East, Africa and India at Exterity, said: “Exterity has always recognised the importance of the Middle East, and opened its local office in Dubai several years ago, especially with events such as Dubai 2020 on the horizon.”

Stand ZB3-C11
Quantum innovates for demanding workflows

First introduced at the 2017 NAB Show and making its European debut at IBC 2017, Axtelis Foundation, a new entry-level scale-out NAS platform, which delivers storage performance and scalability in a cost-effective Ethernet-based appliance. The company will also feature Xcellis Foundation, a new entry-level scale-out storage system specifically designed to address the technical and budgetary requirements of small- to medium-sized post-production facilities and video departments and their unique workflow needs.

Massive powers multiscreen video ecosystem

First-time exhibitor Massive will showcase technology to centrally merchandise multiscreen video services across all devices.

Intelligent Prompting from Vitec

First introduced at the 2017 NAB Show and making its European debut at IBC 2017, Autoscript’s Intelligent Prompting is an IP-enabled, end-to-end teleprompting solution.

Harmonic addresses OTT video delivery

At CABSAT 2018, Harmonic will demonstrate the cloud-native VOS cloud media processing software solution and VOS 360 managed service, enabling operators to launch broadcast and OTT services.

At CABSAT 2018, Quantum will present its latest innovations for demanding storage workflows, including new enhancements in its Xcellis workflow storage family and the StorNext shared file system and data management platform. It will also showcase its new Xcellis Scale-out NAS platform, which delivers storage performance and scalability in a cost-effective Ethernet-based appliance. The company will also feature Xcellis Foundation, a new entry-level scale-out storage system specifically designed to address the technical and budgetary requirements of small- to medium-sized post-production facilities and video departments and their unique workflow needs.

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Avid will showcase next-generation tools and workflow solutions to create, distribute and optimise media at CABSAT 2018. Attendees will see MediaCentral | Cloud UK, a connected, task-oriented graphical user interface that runs on any operating system and device and handles collaboration across teams and locations. It will appear alongside MediaCentral | Production Management, which provides customizable workflow and file management for mid-sized to large production environments, and MediaCentral | Editorial Management, a new media asset management tool that enables users to collaborate in secure and simply configured media workflows without a media server. Avid will also display Media Composer, alongside the Avid Artist | DMO interface, which offers format support and captures, monitors and outputs 4K, UHD, Pro Tools | S3 and Pro Tools | HD 12.8.2 highlight Avid’s next-generation audio offerings. CABSAT attendees will also find Avid at the booths of its alliance partners, including Glissando and x-news.

Tek Signals and Ooyal offer flexibility

Tek Signals will showcase the Ooyal Media Logistics platform. Ooyal’s Media Logistics and orchestration layer — named Filex — allows customers to quickly adapt to changes by designing workflows and metadata schemas in house. These workflows can plug into the customer’s current infrastructure, streamlining its operation and maximising investment, the company says. On top of this platform, applications can be added, such as review and approval, full featured MAM, monitoring and analytics and integration in the online video world.

Stand ZB-5-A50

Infomir to present Ministra TV platform

Infomir will present the multi-screen TV platform Ministra. Ministra reportedly works with the most popular devices: STBs, smart TVs, mobile devices and personal computers. The platform facilitates the launch of interactive services within acceptable time frames, and the micro-service architecture of the product allows more flexible updating, the company claims. To add two functionality, the user will need to update a few application packages (NPMs), not the entire system. This TV platform is meant to become the TV operators’ assistant and facilitate their process management efforts.

Ministra supports the entire line of MAG STBs, including the latest models MAG322 and MAG324, which will be presented at CABSAT 2018. The advantages of the new STBs are the Broadcom CPU and support of HEVC technology.

Stand CD11-CD12

IHSE showcases Draco solutions

IHSE will exhibit the Draco terra compact UNI matrix switch, which provides the option to switch any combination of 3G-SDI, USB 3.0 and UHD KVM using an SFP modular design. The Plura 4K Xpress video processor. It is a tool for all UHD/4K and 3G broadcast systems. The platform is built around a Xilinx FPAO chipset.

Future-proof expansion will be implemented in the future via the Ethernet interface. The commanding bi-directional 120-SDI ports and HDMIAK source/sink architecture make Plura 4K Xpress video processor a solid platform to be customised for formats and protocol conversion applications.

President Ray Hals said: “We started noticing some 4K projects inquiries, design and implementation beyond film production and into more broadcast-centric production workflows, particularly sports. Our 4K long-term initiative and planning will be especially valuable to our customers that lack affordable options for wide range 4K solutions.”

Stand ZB6-A40

Open BroadCast Systems to demo IP workflows

Open BroadCast Systems will demonstrate its latest encoding and decoding solutions for IP contribution at CABSAT. All its solutions are software-based, running as apps on standard IT hardware. This means it can deliver cost efficiencies to customers as well as build bespoke solutions in very short timeframes, the official release stated.

At CABSAT, Open BroadCast Systems will demonstrate the highest density integrated receiver decoder (IRD) currently on the market, the company claims. It allows 16 channels to be simultaneously decoded on a 1U chassis, potentially replacing half a rack of equipment with a single server.

Managing Director Kieran Kunhya said: “IP is not a future wish, it is already a cost-effective and vast amounts of video content every day. Not only does switching to IP deliver cost efficiencies, but it also reduces the complexity of broadcast workflows.”

Stand ZB6-C31

Plura introduces 4K Xpress video processor

Plura Broadcast, a manufacturer of digital broadcast and video production solutions, will introduce a new 4K Xpress video processor.

The Plura 4K Xpress is a multi-format, multi-protocol video processor. It is a tool for all UHD/4K and 3G broadcast systems. The platform is built around a Xilinx FPAO chipset.

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Stand ZB6-B20

IHSE will exhibit the rugged LDMOS power transistors. GM Lutfi Aysan said: “We are very active in the MENA region. We have new contracts in Turkey (Havusian), Pakistan Radio, Skype FMI, Afghanistan (Jahan Radio and TV, TV Media), Iraq (Sada Madia), and showcase 25W-20KW FM LDMOS digital transmitters.

Onair Medya Communication Ltd is exhibiting under the mantra “Buy new technology pay less.” The company will demonstrate Onair Medya transmitters that can be controlled via the Internet, and showcase 25W-20KW FM LDMOS digital transmitters.

Stand ZB6-099

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Managing Director Kieran Kunhya said: “IP is not a future wish, it is already a cost-effective and vast amounts of video content every day. Not only does switching to IP deliver cost efficiencies, but it also reduces the complexity of broadcast workflows.”

Stand ZB6-C31

Plura introduces 4K Xpress video processor

Plura Broadcast, a manufacturer of digital broadcast and video production solutions, will introduce a new 4K Xpress video processor.

The Plura 4K Xpress is a multi-format, multi-protocol video processor. It is a tool for all UHD/4K and 3G broadcast systems. The platform is built around a Xilinx FPAO chipset.

Future-proof expansion will be implemented in the future via the Ethernet interface. The commanding bi-directional 120-SDI ports and HDMIAK source/sink architecture make Plura 4K Xpress video processor a solid platform to be customised for formats and protocol conversion applications.

President Ray Hals said: “We started noticing some 4K projects inquiries, design and implementation beyond film production and into more broadcast-centric production workflows, particularly sports. Our 4K long-term initiative and planning will be especially valuable to our customers that lack affordable options for wide range 4K solutions.”

Stand ZB6-B20

IHSE will exhibit the rugged LDMOS power transistors. GM Lutfi Aysan said: “We are very active in the MENA region. We have new contracts in Turkey (Havusian), Pakistan Radio, Skype FMI, Afghanistan (Jahan Radio and TV, TV Media), Iraq (Sada Madia), and showcase 25W-20KW FM LDMOS digital transmitters.

Onair Medya Communication Ltd is exhibiting under the mantra “Buy new technology pay less.” The company will demonstrate Onair Medya transmitters that can be controlled via the Internet, and showcase 25W-20KW FM LDMOS digital transmitters.

Stand ZB6-099

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Stand ZB6-B20
Guntermann & Drunck’s KVM solutions will be demonstrated at CABSAT 2018. The company’s latest product, the DP1.2-Vision, an extension system that extends video signals with resolutions up to 4K at 60Hz, will be showcased. The system consists of a computer module and a user module. It is fully compatible with almost any existing QD and G&D devices.

JVC cameras with an eye on IP

JVC KENWOOD will have its own stand at CABSAT. The theme for CABSAT 2018 is live production with a focus on IP connectivity for both field-based applications and studios. Among the JVC cameras on display is the GY-HM200ESB, a compact camera with video capabilities.

Manfrotto’s range of video heads on display

Manfrotto will display an assortment of video heads designed to provide performance for the type of videography equipment and usage required, while supporting the widest array of configurations. The Befree Live Fluid video head is the smallest and most lightweight in the Manfrotto range, balancing the latest DSLRs and mirrorless cameras with video capabilities.

Optimised IT deployment from G & D

The company will also demonstrate the new KVM extension system DP1.2-Vision XG, a KVM extension to extend high-resolution 4K and 8K video signals at 60Hz – uncompressed, latency-free, pristine and fail-safe, the company claims.

Red Bee Media to showcase Piero Sports Graphics

At CABSAT 2018, Red Bee Media will showcase its Piero Sports Graphics solution with particular focus on its data visualisation and touchscreen analysis capabilities. A highlight of the show will be the expanded set of football graphics to support the 2018 World Cup broadcast. Piero is a sports graphics solution designed to enhance analysis for broadcasters and TV service providers.

The system adds tie-to-pitch 3D graphics to sporting footage to support analysis, commentary and storytelling. It is reportedly used by more than 50 broadcasters around the world to deliver fast visuals on sports programming and to enhance high-profile sporting events such as the Football World Cup, NFL Super Bowl and the Olympics.

The Piero Sports graphics portfolio consists of Piero Broadcast, Piero Augmented Reality and Piero Club.

Piero Broadcast was developed specifically for the needs of broadcasters who require fast clips turn-around and a reliable video-based graphics solution, the official release stated. It offers bespoke modules for a wide variety of sports, from tennis and sports, and baseball to motor racing and Australian rules football.

Piero Augmented Reality is an industry-first technology, the company claims, that enables broadcasters to overlay 3D graphics in real-time during live studio productions.

Spectra powers digital asset management

Spectra Logic Corporation will showcase its digital asset management solutions at CABSAT 2018. The company is deploying NDIO technology to provide low-latency monitoring for its virtualised Orca software-defined integrated channel solution.

Akamai focuses on the individual viewer

Akamai Technologies will be exhibiting its portfolio of security solutions tailored for the needs of the media industry. The company’s theme for CABSAT 2018 is the Audience of You – an individual experience for every OTT viewer, your experience, tailored to you, controlled by you.

Along with its media Acceleration solutions, we are excited to show our security solutions this year at CABSAT. The MENA region is key to Akamai. We’ve invested heavily in our local office in Dubai, from where we support many of the biggest broadcasters across the region.

In addition, Akamai will demonstrate how media companies can defend their operations against cyber attacks using the company’s multilayer defence services. A company spokesperson explained: “Trusted by the world’s largest media companies to protect their assets, Akamai defends against more than nine million cyber attacks every day. Our solutions range from safeguarding data centres to preventing personal information theft and protecting websites, all of which any newsorganisation can offer to any media company.”

Enhancing automation with Pebble Beach

Pebble Beach is showcasing a series of enhancements to its range of automation and channel delivery products at CABSAT 2018. The company is deploying NDIO technology to provide low-latency monitoring for its virtualised Orca software-defined integrated channel solution.

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Broadcasters have been fighting an ongoing battle with content piracy, with mixed success. The MENA Broadcast Satellite Anti-Piracy Coalition celebrated a bumper summer this year, shutting down 36 pirate TV channels in the region and ordering 26 more to stop violating copyrights. However, a recent report estimates that illegal content distribution in the MENA region is costing the industry more than $750 million annually.

One particular technology has, for many years, been the illegal streamer’s weapon of choice. The VPN has allowed users to circumvent a content provider’s content restrictions and access film or TV shows they would ordinarily have to pay for, or which wouldn’t normally be available due to their location. Broadcasters have fought back in response, adopting various fraud prevention strategies. For instance, many online streaming services now have a blacklist of suspect IP addresses. They monitor those accessing their services and automatically cut a viewer’s connection if it appears on this list.

Other OTT providers have harnessed geo-blocking tools to overcome the VPN challenge, but just as there will be IP addresses which are not flagged on a blacklist, there will also be many who are able to overcome the geo-blocking restrictions. Netflix – and likely, many others – took a different approach, and in the past actually allowed users to access its content via a VPN. The now-giant OTT player was able to gather a wealth of consumer data, which subsequently helped it to shape its marketing and growth strategy.

Despite some progress being made, a recent report on the viewing habits of consumers from across 30 countries revealed that over half of adults still watch pirated content. So what should broadcasters be doing to ensure that their content is not accessed illegally, and that their revenues are not affected as a result?

Moving beyond the IP address as a means of identifying a viewer or their location is now possible. Streaming platform providers are now able to offer end-to-end content delivery, allowing full visibility of and control over an individual user’s access. This unique technology places a token on a viewer’s device, which allows the broadcaster to track and identify individuals, pinpointing their location. Data can then be gathered on who’s watching what content, the user’s identity can be authenticated, and a firewall pinhole can be deployed to filter out illegitimate traffic. The broadcaster is alerted to any security breaches, meaning the content being streamed to that individual can be cut quickly without affecting the experience for other users.

Content piracy may never be completely eradicated. Yet the technology is now available to allow broadcasters to keep pace with illegal activity, enhance security and ultimately, deliver a more personal, engaging viewing experience.

Nick Fitzgerald is Chairman of TV2U

In addition to tackling content piracy, end-to-end visibility provides broadcasters with a comprehensive insight into viewer behaviour and preferences.

Addressing piracy, advancing personalisation

As the industry faces the challenge of managing new standards and multiple formats for an ever-increasing number of complex delivery platforms, we continue to offer the most advanced solutions such as IP, HDR/WCG and Multiview available today. We pioneer ever-more reliable, cost-effective and space-saving solutions that have a big impact in your broadcast infrastructure environment.

We will be present at Cabsat to discuss recent ground-breaking projects and can give you an update on our latest technologies. Make your appointment via www.axon.tv/cabsat to learn how our infrastructure products and solutions can make your life easier!

We are looking forward to seeing you in Dubai!

Jan Eveleens (CEO) & Mark Barkey (Sales Director ME)