CRACKING THE MAM CODE

industry leaders discuss how to make MAM systems more open, intuitive and efficient
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ILTACON 2015 ITIL Conference in Orlando

As this issue of the magazine makes it's way to your desk, CPI Media Group's Broadcast team will be in Singapore for BroadcastAsia. Asia is a market that never fails to fascinate me. I believe it Exodus a different sort of energy to what we have witnessed in Europe, the Middle East and the US. The broadcast industry itself is very different, and the challenges and solutions we hear about from Asian broadcasters always makes it a huge learning experience.

In the meantime, I would like to draw your attention to Media Asset Management — the subject of much debate last month at a roundtable we hosted in association with Avid. When we initially looked at bringing industry leaders together to discuss this topic behind closed doors, some sceptics questioned if there was anything more to discuss about MAM. After all, it was a case of been there, done that. But I assure you, all of us were in for a surprise. Under Peter Ennis' expert moderation, that roundtable could have gone on for the entire day without anyone blinking an eyelid. There was genuine disappointment when we had to conclude the roundtable at midday. Around eight broadcasters sat with the Avid team to discuss some of the challenges they face with their existing MAM solutions or why they were reluctant to invest in it.

Can we really have a MAM system that is intuitive and searches for things we don't know exist in our archives; can it be integrated with existing workflows and new workflows on the fly?

Were the broadcasters asking for too much? Were vendors promising too much, or is such a MAM solution really that easy to build? Some of it did sound like it had the makings of a sci-fi movie. I won't give it all away here. I think their debate makes for a super-interesting read.

It's the best roundtable we have hosted in the last five years. That's right! We have been around that long. More than 150 people from the broadcast community joined the BroadcastPro ME team at Andereas' Grand Habtoor to celebrate our collective success last month.

Until the next issue, Ramadan Mubarak!

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director

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PROINTRO

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Feras Al-Sulaiti, formerly manager of Media Operations, has been promoted to Director of Network Operations at Al Jazeera Media Network, BroadcastPro ME can reveal.

Al-Sulaiti, who was part of the launch team at Al Jazeera, has more than 15 years of experience in media production and broadcasting at the network.

Based in Doha, Al-Sulaiti will head a division of 750 staff across the globe delivering multiple TV outputs for various Al Jazeera channels. He will also head the bureaux and broadcast centres in Washington, DC and London.

Al-Sulaiti will lead the operational change management programme for transformation, centralisation, restructuring and integration of network operations. He will be responsible for centralising the operations for all of the channels, including Al Jazeera Arabic, English, the Balkans, America and Al Jazeera Mubasher.

The main challenge for him will be redefining the strategies and deliverables of the network’s operating model.

In his former role as Manager of Central Media Operations at Al Jazeera, Al-Sulaiti looked after media ingest, media management, editing, archive and transmission across the entire network. He also led the media unit within the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation team and was responsible for operational design, workflow and delivery of the Global Media Management System – including file-based media management and digital archiving.

Selevision has announced the launch of its new codec, Nukodec. Designed to replace the H.264 and H.265/HEVC (High Efficiency Video Coding) codecs currently in use by the industry, the new technology will be made available to industry players across the globe, allowing them to migrate into an advanced HEVC algorithm engineered by Selevision.

“Selevision introduces Nukodec,” commented Dr Raed Khushaim, CEO of Selevision. “As a technology and content provider, we are constantly innovating behind the scenes to develop products and services that improve access to content. Our Nukodec algorithm enables access to full HD quality content at a lower bandwidth, which is particularly significant for those living in remote areas where telecommunications services are limited.”

Telcos and online operators will benefit by saving on both storage and streaming costs and increasing their customer base, allowing users using 2mbps bandwidth to stream full HD content.

Sharjah TV announces Ramadan line-up

Sharjah Media Corporation has announced a host of new dramas and religious programmes alongside the return of seasonal favourites this Ramadan. Popular Syrian drama, Bab Al-Hara, will return for its seventh season this Ramadan. Gulf drama Hal Manayer will premiere on Sharjah TV 1 on the first day of Ramadan.

As part of its religious programming, SMC will also broadcast Inaha Al Nabuwa, which highlights the different characteristics of Prophet Mohammed, while La Na’if Al A’la will focus on daily prayers.

Dr Khalid Omar Al Midfa, Director General of SMC, said the corporation’s channels “have prepared the necessary programmes to support their tireless efforts and care for spreading cultural awareness in the community while taking the aspect of meaningful entertainment into consideration.”

“The Ramadan programmes will be competitive and will continue SMC’s success in supporting the Emirate’s position as the capital of Islamic culture and a safe oasis for families.”

Dr Khalid Omar Al Midfa.
Telesstream has announced the deployment of a Vantage transcoding farm at Al Jazeera Media Network’s London news gathering, current affairs programming and live news output facility. Designed and installed by international systems integration specialist Danmon Systems, this file-based technology upgrade sees the relocation of Al Jazeera’s European news headquarters to London.

Danmon Systems, working with Al Jazeera’s in-house specialists, has created a fully redundant file-based workflow. It integrates Telesstream’s Vantage Transcode Pro Connect, Analysis and Avid Advanced options running on GPU accelerated Telesstream Lightspeed servers alongside an Avid news system and Arvato VPM3 media asset management (MAM) system. The Telesstream Vantage transcoding farm is used to ingest media into the news production workflow; the operation allows Avid editors to start editing while still ingest news feeds. Both media and associated metadata are ingested, transcoded and delivered to Interplay PAM via web services, enabling staff to edit stories very quickly, referencing valuable metadata and growing H.264 proxy and hi-res media files.

“The workflow at the London facility is completely new and re-writes the rule book in terms of design, operation, speed and efficiency,” commented Sven Braun, Operations Manager at Danmon Systems Group.

“Vantage’s ability to very rapidly ingest media into the Avid system enables Al Jazeera staff to start editing stories and get them on air in the shortest time possible,” Vantage’s ability to present a growing media file to the Avid newsroom system is a key component in achieving this.

Danmon Systems started installing the news production and output system in the last quarter of 2014, and the system went live in February this year.

Image Nation Abu Dhabi to finance The Circle

Image Nation Abu Dhabi has announced a deal to fully finance James Ponsoldt’s forthcoming feature adaptation of Dave Eggers’ novel The Circle.

The film will be presented by Image Nation in association with Parkex MacDonald Productions.

The feature adaptation of The Circle has been written and will be directed by James Ponsoldt (The Spectacular Now). The film is being produced by Tom Hanks and Gary Goetzman. Alicia Vikander (EX Machina) will star alongside Tom Hanks.

The Circle marks the latest project in a long-term collaboration between Image Nation and Parkex MacDonald. Shooting on The Circle will begin in August 2015 in California.

IN FIGURES

97%

Global digital TV penetration by the end of 2020, up from 40.5% in 2010 and 67.2% in 2014

Source: Digital TV Research

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*GFX includes shows, advertising and some TV.

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Twitter has announced plans to open its first office in the Middle East and North Africa. The social media company plans to set up its MENA base in Dubai.

Commenting on the move, Shailesh Rao, Vice President for Asia Pacific, Latin America & Emerging Markets at Twitter, said: "The MENA region is a key strategic market for us and our new Dubai office will serve as the focal point to help our development across the region. Dubai is a regional hub for many brands and advertising agencies. We are excited to build a team on the ground here who can work with partners directly, helping them get the most out of Twitter."

The MENA region is one of the fastest growing markets for Twitter worldwide and this announcement comes as part of the company’s increased investment and commitment to the region. "Globally, in 2014, we’ve seen user growth across our markets aligned to key cultural moments. In the MENA, for instance, TV was a significant catalyst — we saw a 200% increase in TV conversations between 2013 and 2014,” explained Rao.

Several factors have contributed to Twitter’s growth in the Middle East, most significantly the changing demographics. More than 30% of the MENA population is now between the ages of 15 and 29, representing more than 100 million youth who have grown up with the internet and social media. Twitter’s latest data shows 88% of the Middle East’s online population uses social networking sites daily and 76% of their MENA’s Twitter account holders are active daily.

Abu Dhabi Film Festival to be discontinued

The Media Zone Authority – Abu Dhabi has announced that the Abu Dhabi Film Festival (ADIFF) is being brought to a close. The authority will now focus on future-targeted initiatives to further support local and Arab filmmakers and attract more film productions to Abu Dhabi.

Noura Al Kaabi, CEO of Media Zone Authority, said: “Over the last few years, we have built a strong foundation for a self-sustaining film and television industry. "It is now the right time to deepen our commitment and further develop programmes to take the local industry to the next level.

“We attracted several major international and regional productions to shoot in the emirate over the past two years alone, which brought large-scale investment, further built the film industry infrastructure in the region and created significant opportunities for local talent.”

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TECOM offers opportunities for content creators

Deloitte’s recent TMT Predictions 2015 highlight growth opportunities for content creators across the MENA region, focusing particularly on short-form content and Digital Islamic Services.

In line with this, Mohammad Abdulrah, MD of TECOM’s Media Cluster has called for content creators to join

The integrated system for the theatre uses a Crestron processor to control the video system with a Christie projector and a Da-Lite screen.

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UAE-based AppyKids, known for creating culturally relevant edutainment content for children, has partnered with streaming service icflix to introduce *The Adventures of Zee* to icflix subscribers. The series, aimed at children aged seven and below, follows the adventures of Zee, a bright young Arab girl with a passion for exploration and discovery who is influenced by the great Arab explorer Ibn Battuta.

Dinesh Lalvani, CEO, Growl Media, AppyKids' parent company, said: “Zee has a fantastic spirit of adventure, and our partnership with icflix is a great adventure for us. We care passionately about our audience, creating quality content that parents trust and are happy to allow their children to watch. The series explores universal themes such as teamwork, cultural tolerance and climate change in fun and engaging ways, with original Arabic and English songs.”

“Children will enjoy watching Zee, which will not only help them learn Arabic but also give them an insight into Arab culture,” commented Carlos Tibi, CEO, icflix.

“As there is also a large expat population across the region, there is an English-language version available, which will appeal to all nationalities,” he further added.

Season One of *The Adventures of Zee* is available on the icflix web site and through the dedicated icflix kids app available on all Android devices.

### Sheraton Doha deploys Sennheiser

Sheraton Doha has leveraged Sennheiser’s solutions to roll out a wireless conference and translation system across its entire meeting and conferencing facilities.

The project saw the deployment of 120 Sennheiser 3000/5000 series microphones with Neumann KK-104 capsules. Also used were 400 ADN-W wireless delegate units for the portable conferencing systems, as well as 600 Sennheiser MME-2020 receivers and 21 SR-2020 transmitters for the translations systems, the largest and second largest global deployments for the Sennheiser conference and translation systems, respectively.

Q2 Advanced Technology Contracting LLC and Sennheiser Middle East managed to plan, supply, commission and test all these systems in a five-month timeframe, according to Ryan Burr, Technical Sales Manager for Sennheiser Middle East.

“We flew in experts from our headquarters in Germany and scaled our production to meet the project demands. One of the key challenges of the project was that it had to be delivered within a tight timeframe. The system is being used for daily events at the venue,” he added.

### BBC Global iPlayer to close down

The BBC has confirmed that the global version of its iPlayer on-demand service will close this month. The corporation had charged users subscription fees to watch programmes via the app in Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

BBC Worldwide, the broadcaster’s commercial arm, first announced it intended to pull support for the Global iPlayer app in October 2013, saying it would instead focus on making material available via the BBC website.

The corporation repeated the point in its annual review last July, but only recently announced that the service will close down on 26 June.
MBC Chairman is Media Personality of the Year

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, presented MBC Group Chairman Sheikh Waleed Al-Ibrahim with the Media Personality of the Year Award, as part of the Arab Journalism Awards, held at the 14th Arab Media Forum in Dubai.

The award marks Sheikh Waleed’s quarter-century of achievements in the media industry, considered one of the most dynamic and creative sectors, as well as his leading position as trustee of the biggest private Arab media group. In a brief statement at the awards ceremony, Sheikh Waleed paid tribute to the importance of the award.

Arabsat launches TV Everywhere with Globecast

Arabsat and Globecast have announced the launch of Arabsat TV Everywhere, a new multi-platform OTT TV service with five streams of Arabic channels. Powered by Globecast’s OTT live solution, Arabsat TV Everywhere is an expansion of the Global Arabic Bouquet (GAB), a grouping of premium Arabic channels from the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU).

The new service, which is available to watch for free from almost anywhere in the world on PC as well as iOS and Android smartphones and tablets, will enable more people to view the content that GAB has to offer at home and on the move.

Globecast, which has been ARABSAT and ASBU’s partner for worldwide distribution of the GAB since 2004, designed and developed the complete TV everywhere service. The end-to-end solution, which includes content preparation, content management, application design and development, delivery and player, will enable Arabsat to deliver a seamless experience across all devices.

Since the launch of their partnership, Globecast, ARABSAT and ASBU have expanded the Global Arabic Bouquet’s potential viewership and footprint, offering a single global coverage to ASBU members. Arabic-language channels are now able to join the bouquet and reach viewers on all five continents free-to-air.

Arabsat commented that the service is part of its commitment to help Arab viewers stay connected with their roots and culture from anywhere in the world.

Disney and Kudelski tie for patent licensing

The Kudelski Group has entered into a multi-year patent license agreement with The Walt Disney Company. This agreement provides The Walt Disney Company with a licence to the Kudelski Group’s patent portfolio, subject to certain limitations.

“The Kudelski Group continues to invest heavily in developing technology and intellectual property that help enable industry leaders like The Walt Disney Company to deliver their video and entertainment platforms to the market through streaming video properties, such as ESPN.com and ABC.com,” said Joe Cherniwsky, Senior Vice President of Intellectual Property and Innovation at the Kudelski Group.

Egyptian film Factory Girl to screen in France

Egyptian film Factory Girl will be released in French cinemas by the French distribution company, Ocean Films Distribution, during Q4 2015. The film was released in 19 Swedish cities last month.

This was announced during the second edition of the Arab Cinema Centre (ACC), organised by MAD Solutions at Film Market, Cannes Film Festival.

Commenting on the deal, Alaa Karkouti, CEO of MAD Solutions, said: “The French market is still the most important European window for Arab films. That is why we’re planning to organise a premier screening for Factory Girl, which will be attended by the film’s director Mohamad Khan and actor Yasmin Rais.

African Movie Channel to launch AMC Series

African Movie Channel (AMC) has brought its AMC Series channel to the StarTimes DTT and StarSat DTH African platforms. AMC Series will be a premium African entertainment channel showcasing TV soaps, comedy and drama from Nigeria, with other TV series from all over Africa, 24-hours-a-day for family audiences.

The carriage agreement allows StarTimes’ five million subscribers across 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa to access the 24-hour linear channel for the first time. This second channel from AMC complements the African Movie Channel that has been on the StarTimes DTT and StarSat DTH platforms since 2012, providing premium African TV programming.

Arabsat commented that the service is part of its commitment to help Arab viewers stay connected with their roots and culture from anywhere in the world.
Abu Dhabi based twofour54, which in the last few years, attracted several Hollywood and regional productions to the UAE capital, has now revamped its post production facilities. Alongside a 30% rebate and the availability of a local talent pool, twofour54 now offers multi-purpose suites with editing, audio and colour grading equipment at its Khalifa Park campus. Another key addition is an 18-seater screening room with a Christie True 4K cinema projection and Dolby surround sound.

Paul Baker, Executive Director of twofour54 TV and film production services, says these facilities have been fit for purpose and functional. “Now we are moving to the next stage to provide a creative and comfortable environment. It’s ideal for projects that need end-to-end solutions. We have in-house and freelance editors on long-term contracts to cater to these needs.”

“Twofour54 post-production claims to give filmmakers and editors a home away from home while they are working through the last stages of a project, in an environment conducive to creativity and collaboration. "The focus is on creating an international standard post-production house in Abu Dhabi, where we can attract the region’s best talent. The revamped edit suites also offer breakout areas for professionals where they can network and collaborate with peers. "We want to attract big dramas to make Abu Dhabi a central drama hub. With that, we want to increase the quality of Arabic production to create content that would travel to non-Arabic viewers as well.”

The post-production facilities have 15 HD server-based, multi-use post-production suites and the region’s only Baselight and DaVinci colour grading facility, which allows producers to choose the best colour grading solution for their project. The Baselight suite was upgraded to Baselight 2 last year, making it suitable for longform projects and CGI work. DaVinci Resolve is a new addition to the edit suites because of its popularity in the region.

“DaVinci Resolve is more affordable and is widely used. Whilst you can say that you have the only Baselight in the region, you should be able to offer what the market needs, the tools that talent wants to use. Our primary form of grading is on DaVinci now,” adds Baker.

There are two Avid suites and two dual systems with both Avid and Final Cut Pro. The smallest suite is equipped with Final Cut Pro. Most of the hardware in the revamped facility has been used for the last five years, with regular upgrades to the software. The graphics suite features four stations with Nuke, Creative Cloud and Illustrator. In each of the systems, the machines talk to each other, as the media grid is interconnected across the various edit suites.

Highlights of the new facility
Existing and new equipment at the post-production facilities at twofour54 include:

- **Editing suites**: 19 x Final Cut Pro and 5 x Avid media composer 13 x Mac Pro 2.7GHz 12-Core Intel Xeon E5 / Memory 32GB 1867 MHz DDR3 ECC / Graphics AMD FirePro D700 6144 MB
- **Online and finishing suites**: 2 x Avid Media Composer, 5 x Avid Pro Tools, 2 x Autodesk Maya, 2 x Softimage, 5 x Autodesk 3D max and 20 Adobe CS suite
- **Storage and servers**: Isilon 39TB, Avid Unity 74TB, Omneon Media grid 116TB
- **Rhozet Farm**: for format conversion
- **Doremi Cine Assets**: for digital cinema package creation
- **Alchemist**: for Basepan standards conversion
- **Diva archive & capability to handle LTG-4 & LTO-6**
- **FTP with upload & download capability of 100mbps**
- **Digital output capability in various formats**
- **Tape output capability of HDCAM-SR, HDCAM, DIGIBETA, MPEE-JMK, DVCAM, DVC-PRO, XDCAM, BLU-RAY, DVD, etc**
- **4K high-res projector and Baselight management**
- **Brand-new DaVinci suite for high-end colour grading**
Industry leaders gathered in Dubai last month for a closed-door meeting to discuss some of the challenges around a MAM implementation and how best vendors can support them. Vijaya Cherian brings you the highlights

Media Asset Management is a subject that has continuously challenged vendors owing to the complexity and uniqueness of the requirements at each broadcast facility. Although discussed endlessly, it appears that most MAM solutions in the market so far have failed to adequately address the evolving demands of broadcasters, who not only have tonnes of undigitised tape without metadata but also now work across multiple platforms and need a solution that is flexible and can be easily integrated with their existing workflows. Some vendors, of course, argue that they have addressed broadcasters’ needs but it requires agility and responsiveness as needs change.

This served as the premise for a high-level, closed-door discussion on Media Asset Management between some of the tech experts in the regional market and Avid, who sponsored the roundtable, hosted by BroadcastPro Middle East.

Joining us for the discussion were Saleh Lootah, Deputy General Manager – TV & Radio Support, Head of TV and Radio Engineering at DMI; Dominic Baillie, CTO of Sky News Arabia; Robert Taylor, Programme Manager for Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project; Mark Billinge, CTO of OSN; Omar Almutibi, Engineering Systems Senior Manager, DMI; Peter Van Dam, Senior Manager, Off Planning at Abu Dhabi Media Company; Laurent Tescari, Director of Product Development, E-vision, Etisalat; Bassem Maher, IT and Technical Manager, Takhayal Entertainment FZ LLC; and Craig Dwyer, Senior Director Global Centre of Excellence at Avid Technology.

The roundtable was moderated by Avid’s Director of Strategic Solutions, Peter Ennis, formerly Executive Director of Technology and Broadcast with Al Jazeera Media Network. Ennis, having worked in the regional landscape and being a respected name in the industry, encapsulated some of the pain points surrounding MAM in the region and engaged the tech heads to speak about their biggest challenges, with possible solutions to address them.

Ovum Research
He began the conversation by sharing some of Ovum’s preliminary research findings, which Avid has also supported. The research, conducted among senior executives including CEOs, CTOs and tech heads within the broadcast industry, showed that 40% of the respondents highlighted poor integration of broadcast systems as the primary pain point in a MAM implementation.

The research indicated “poor integration, constant search for different middleware formats, and the break in the chain if one element is replaced” as significant causes of concern. Likewise, trying to reduce the unit costs of media assets on site was cited as a significant point. This included storage and retrieval costs and optimizing ROI in that asset – essentially, being able to find the asset so it can be reused when necessary. With consumers now dictating how they watch content, broadcasters clearly have considerable challenges ahead of them.
**THE TECHNOLOGY - Why implement MAM? Possible goals, challenges and solutions**

As Al Jazeera has already invested in a MAM solution, Taylor pointed out that the implementation was based on “the premise that our assets could be managed, accessible, controllable and available to the wider population at the network.” The history of Al Jazeera is that it is still partially tape-based. It has vast libraries of unique material to which the network had no access because we didn’t know where it was and were not sure what each tape had. We were told MAM would be able to do that.

“The second reason for investing in a MAM solution was the ease it could potentially manage everything automatically for everyone. The ingest people would ideally press a button and it would appear in the central room player. That is the vision our news executives and senior executives had.”

Peter Emnns, having overseen the project for a while at the network, added that the need to access and use any of that content across different repositories in different countries was a key requirement of the Doha-based network.

Mark Billingos, CTO, OSN, however, commented that his team foresaw deploying a MAM system at the pay TV network’s facility as being hugely challenging. “Our perspective is very different from that of a news organisation,” he clarified.

“We still handle a lot of content through a fast-growing dynamic workflow and I guess that’s one of the reasons we haven’t integrated an overarching MAM system. I think to try and overlay on top of what we have would be incredibly difficult and measuring that ROI and what it gives you is very hard to do.”

He added that OSN currently finds existing MAM systems hugely restrictive given that the pay TV’s current workflow, which has grown significantly to accommodate its evolving VOD and online platform requirements, already places huge demands on his team.

“We have grown rapidly over the last five years and the workflows have changed enormously to be able to support the on-demand platforms... I’m not sure we would have achieved that in the ways we have if we had the limitation of a MAM system”

Mark Billingos, CTO, OSN

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**“We have grown rapidly over the last five years and the workflows have changed enormously to be able to support the on-demand platforms... I’m not sure we would have achieved that in the ways we have if we had the limitation of a MAM system”**

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He added that OSN currently finds existing MAM systems hugely restrictive given that the pay TV’s current workflow, which has grown significantly to accommodate its evolving VOD and online platform requirements, already places huge demands on his team.

“We have grown rapidly over the last five years and the workflows have changed enormously to be able to support the on-demand platforms... I’m not sure we would have achieved that in the ways we have if we had the limitation of a MAM system”

Mark Billingos, CTO, OSN

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**“The second reason for investing in a MAM solution was the ease it could potentially manage everything automatically for everyone. The ingest people would ideally press a button and it would appear in the central room player. That is the vision our news executives and senior executives had.”**

Peter Emnns, having overseen the project for a while at the network, added that the need to access and use any of that content across different repositories in different countries was a key requirement of the Doha-based network.

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Saleh Lootah, Deputy GM - TV & Radio Support, DMi

already started doing something along these lines with Azure and the cloud. “You may start to see competition from the likes of Azure and the cloud," he cautioned. "I also think customers are still not able to define their requirements clearly and likewise, vendors are not able to cater to customers fully. “Moving from tape to tapeless and from linear to non-linear is a big transition that requires a lot of skills upgrade, and training can’t always achieve it. We need vendors to provide a MAM that can add value to each process in the workflow and also utilise fully existing resources efficiently and effectively.”

CMS vs MAM
This led to a discussion on CMS systems and one participant queried if CMS and MAM systems were not duplicating functions. ONS’s Billing also commented that most CMS systems can indeed do 90% of what a MAM solution can do although he added that the pay TV network’s existing CMS system left much to be desired. “I would like to see the CMS system go much deeper into the broadcast workflow and interact with the hardware and other systems in the workflow. That’s the direction in which we want to go,” commented Billing.

Craig Dwyer, who heads Avid’s Centre of Excellence, gently pointed out that while there were several similarities between CMS and MAM solutions, there were also significant differences in the way both technologies were designed. “We find that technologies are all fusing together now. But it is not as much about the technology as it is about the knowledge of the workflows, and implementing it and integrating it. If you talk to a CMS vendor, they will know more about digital distribution, web content management, servers, caching etc. That is their calm world. They understand the workflows, the matrix, the APIs and so on. If you talk to us, it is a lot more about where those technologies meet mission critical news workflows, sports workflows and all the partners in

integration that surround that and the training and workflow etc.”

He added that any organisation with a group of skilled business analysts and developers, who understand the nature of the company’s business and the technologies they require, can easily assemble solutions and adapt them to suit their requirements. At the same time, he agreed that MAM solutions still have a long way to go. “We are using more open technology now, which allows for more elastic search across multiple glossaries,” he said, adding to the search function in a MAM solution. “Everything you want is not intelligently done now and not popping out like magic. We need to get there. If we were using more cloud technologies, we could start to do more intelligent background searching, algorithmic searching, pattern matching, big data analysis and so on. Those things are coming. Actually, I think Facebook and Google are putting a lot of their research into open source. You will see that a lot of what we are doing is to get MAM to a fully viable platform technology that can be deployed for libraries repeatedly and ensure integration. There is just a huge amount of complexity when you look at different vendors and the different integration points.”

He said the big challenge was when people tried to layer this technology. “Everyone ends up with a custom configuration and end users are building all these anchor points that don’t give you the flexibility you thought you were going to get.” It was agreed across the board that a proper search feature that is elastic as well as intuitive is the need of the hour.

Taylor seconded that adding that most broadcasters today require a “Google experience, where the system is intelligent and reacting and can think for you and assist you.” He also recommended a different design approach. “At every such deployment, you tend to see the engineers come in, plug in the boxes and then try to figure out how it will work and then we have all this pain about the interface doing this and not doing that. These are core engineering mistakes. If you want to get investment out of your MAM, you need to learn to do it properly to start with.” Billing also pointed out that vendors have been erroneously calling a system that could be easily engineered.

If you build a system from scratch, and move the archive to the cloud, then try to figure out how it will work, and then we have all this pain about the interface doing this and not doing that. These are core engineering mistakes. If you want to get investment out of your MAM, you need to learn to do it properly to start with.” Billing also pointed out that vendors have been erroneously calling a system that could be easily engineered. “Even if you get this system to work with this workflow, we change so rapidly a lot of the time. It’s about each of the pieces in the chain accommodating change. If you do have a piece that is slowing us down, it becomes a headache for us. It depends on how flexible and dynamic the system is.”

Baillie seconded this and added that in many cases, vendors lock end users down with their solutions.

“Engage your users from Day Zero of a project. It is all about the communication to the end user both ensuring we are getting information … from them and that they are being taken on the journey from Day Zero... Take them on the journey”

Robert Taylor, Programme Manager, AJWT

“It’s not just about the technology; there is also a business process and workflow involved”

Omar Alzoubi, Engineering Systems Senior Manager, DMi

“The ability to reconfigure our system on the fly and deliver value to our customers is becoming increasingly important”

Peter Van Dam, Senior Manager, OB planning, Abu Dhabi Media Company
"We buy a system from you, we have to specify that system for you to deliver it properly. When you force me to lock it down, how can I potentially have a flexible system that can understand my content and make it available in a way that I want it available?"

Peter Ennis agreed that this was the way vendors had to move to satisfy broadcasters’ needs.

"The simplicity that you are looking for is you have multiple repositories, perhaps different codecs and you want to transcode them into a common house format, and then it is more universally shareable. We need to get to the stage where the system sorts through the content in a more intelligent fashion."

Challenges at different media houses – technology and costs

"I prefer to work with cloud partners on flexible business models... I realise I have to work with cloud partners on flexible business models, and I realise I have to work with new players to ingest content and process it, but at least, it would make it a more cost-effective model for a department like ours that has only around 50 people."

"I have to work with new players to ingest content and process it but at least, it would make it a more cost-effective model."

Laurent Tescari, Director of Product Development, E-vision, Etisalat

Peter Van Dam of Abu Dhabi Media presented another problem. As a tech facilitating company that provides all the support not just for the state broadcaster but for external parties as well, they are constantly asked if they can change their business model.

"We have content that comes in from different clients and each of them want to operate with a slightly altered workflow. That ability to reconfigure our system on the fly and deliver value to our customers is becoming increasingly important. We want to be able to define use cases and we want the system to deliver the capability to change use cases and adapt quickly to the changing environment in which one operates. In any case, we want to be able to deliver measurable deliverables against which we can justify a return on our investment. Then it becomes easy to justify the revenue."

This compelled the team to once again examine the sort of matrix each of them uses to determine the business viability of investing in MAM.

"How do you look at the return on that versus buying an off-the-shelf system?" Peter Ennis quipped. DMB’s Sally Lootah said an off-the-shelf system would never work.

"It limits my usability of the brand and forces me to adapt to something I don’t want to."

Rob Taylor questioned if there was indeed an off-the-shelf MAM.

"Every MAM I have touched was taken from ground zero every single time," he pointed out.

Peter Ennis commented that Avios does have something “pre-configured with standard workflows.”

"But when customers look at it, they say it is perfect for me but I need some tweaks and some changes. It can provide a starting point but not ground zero.”

While some said it would be difficult to justify a MAM implementation in the light of the inability to monetise assets that can be neither searched nor retrieved, Taylor and Baillie raised the issue of licences.

"Why does one have to pay for every single person who accesses it – if an end user has paid for the system, the care and everything else?"

Rob Taylor seconded that.

"Why does a vendor feel that they have to charge more for the licences once the system has been bought? Why does one have to pay for every single person who accesses it – if an end user has paid for the system, the care and everything else?"

Peter Van Dam of Abu Dhabi Media added that it was hugely crucial that end users have the capability to monitor content to which they had the rights and know when they were expiring to automate the process of sending.

"We spend half of the money we get from the vendor to just retrieve the content. What we need is the ability to search for our content correctly to end it."

Bassem Maher, IT and Technical Manager, Takhayal Entertainment FZ LLC

"Cloud — a possible solution?

Laurent Tescari, who works with E-vision, commented at this point that one of the ways to address the cost issue was to look at cloud options.

"I am unable to justify millions of capex. I prefer to work with cloud partners on flexible business models, and I realise I have to work with new players to ingest content and process it, but at least, it would make it a more cost-effective model for a department like ours that has only around 50 people."

Tescari went on to add that ROI should always be linked to the business and not to the technology, which is essential to get moving. He commented that the technology was like the wheels of the car and questioned what the consequences of the car not moving were.

He further justified his choice of a cloud model stating that with IP and 4K looming on the horizon, he would have to again make significant changes to his workflow if he made an internal investment.

"Having a cloud vendor who can handle that would be a smarter thing than having to take it internally!”

Bassem Maher of Takhayal said that having an efficient search function would have a positive impact on revenue within his organisation.

"We have clients who want our content and we just can’t find it. We spend half of the money we get from the vendor to just retrieve the content. What we need is the ability to search for our content correctly to end it."

Takhayal’s CMS web site is currently doubling up as a makeshift MAM solution. It stores all of the company’s metadata.

"We are looking at using cloud for all of our scheduling system without moving to central storage. We are justifying this by using our CMS and our scheduling system as our indexing system,” he explained.

Peter Ennis agreed that there was only one thing worse than not having the rights to a piece of content.

"It is not being able to access the content to which we have the rights,” he said, quoted an old industry colleague.

He added that it was hugely crucial that end users have the capability to monitor content to which they had the rights and know when they were expiring to automate the process of sending.

Peter Ennis commented that this was the way vendors had to move to satisfy broadcasters’ needs.

"The simplicity that you are looking for is you have multiple repositories, perhaps different codecs and you want to transcode them into a common house format, and then it is more universally shareable. We need to get to the stage where the system sorts through the content in a more intelligent fashion.”

Challenges at different media houses – technology and costs

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the process leg and the people leg. While the first is often the easiest, the last is the toughest. “If you get any of these legs wrong, the stool will fall over,” he cautioned.

THE PEOPLE – Evoking change
Saleh Lootah agreed, adding that it is the people who decide the success of a tech implementation. Citing the issues he has commonly witnessed, he said people are reluctant to move out of their comfort zone.

“It is difficult to get people to adapt to change. With every new introduction, we face so much resistance. With MAM, the resistance would be huge.”

Most of the end users commented that they had tried to devise strategies to incentivise staff to adopt the workflow. In DMI’s case, Lootah says conflicting workflows between two departments served as the catalyst for change.

“When we gave the creative department a luxurious file-based environment, they loved it but it put them off when they realised they still had to take their output onto a tape and give to the library. This created conflict and eventually, the library realised that they needed to transition to a file-based environment.”

Billinge seconded this by adding that people and efficiency are some of the key measures of ROI. Peter Van Dam agreed that this was a significant challenge that he faced too.

“Large technology deployments are like a stool with three legs – the tech leg, the process leg and the people leg. While the first is often the easiest, the last is the toughest. If you get any of these legs wrong, the stool will fall over”

Peter Ennis, Director of Strategic Solutions, Avid Technology
Closer home, Rob Taylor said Al Jazeera experienced success by taking its staff on a journey from the first day instead of leaving training for the end.

“Engage your users from Day Zero of a project. It is all about the communication to the end user, ensuring we are getting information coming in from them and that they are being taken on the journey from Day Zero. Not towards the middle and certainly, it wouldn’t have worked towards the end.

“That's something I have learnt over a lot of years of doing this. You bring them in at the beginning and take them on the journey. It doesn’t solve all the problems but it takes the number of people who are resistant down to a very small number. It takes effort and investment and requires a lot of skills upgrades. You have to take them away from their world of tape and introduce them progressively to a world that is not tape. So while they may not have used the tapeless system yet, they will at least be familiar with the terms and the concepts.”

Peter Ennis, having worked on the programme himself, elaborated on the project.

“In this case, we did a skills audit primarily around the technology bit and also around the operations. We looked at everybody we had within a very large technical organisation and matched the present level skills against the time when the technology would be implemented. We looked at what skills we need at point x in the future to adequately support, implement etc. I felt sick when I saw the results but instantly, you could see the size of the problem but then, it also gave us the opportunity to address it.”

“The end users agreed that in most instances, a technology is fully deployed and commissioning has been completed before users are trained on the system. While some private players argued that they were not obliged to take staff on this journey, those working in government entities said that unlike corporate entities that were driven by profit and loss, they worked in a different environment that had to accommodate cultural sensitivities.

Taylor, however, was quick to point out that the method of taking people on a journey from Day Zero is advantageous.

“Once you take them on that journey, they themselves become excited and want to know when it is all going to come together. Take them on the journey,” he urged.

Baillie added that people don’t need training to use Google or Facebook because they have made the user interface easy and intuitive.

“Make it easy and it’s easy to take people on that journey,” he said, commenting that an intuitive MAM would be a very desirable solution.

The discussion slowly tapered towards whether 4K and the availability of ultra HD content would drive the uptake of MAM in the business.

Baillie immediately pointed out: “If you design your systems properly now with the archive at the centre, it would not matter what format you transitioned to. It impacts it now purely because of the way the systems are designed.”

How can vendors add value?

Peter Ennis concluded the conversation by asking participants how vendors could help add value to end users.

Key requirements were the need for more open systems so that end users were not locked into a specific vendor’s environment; the need to simplify operations and costs; and the need to make MAM more intuitive, so it is intelligent enough to understand the inputs from different islands within a system and adapt.

Baillie was also asked to look at metadata more closely.

“Metadata will become more valuable than content in the next few years. Focus on metadata,” Baillie urged.

Dwyer added that Avid was taking more components and making them horizontal, to ensure they were made available across more platforms.
BroadcastPro ME celebrated five years of success on May 20, 2015 at Habtoor Grand, Dubai Marina. We bring you snapshots.

BroadcastPro Middle East celebrated its fifth anniversary with more than 150 industry professionals including broadcasters, telcos, systems integrators, manufacturers and distributors. The party was hosted at Andrea’s, Habtoor Grand, Dubai on May 20.

BroadcastPro ME has grown from strength to strength in the last five years. While the magazine continues to make its mark in the industry with its exclusive news stories and features, the brand has also gained recognition in the market for its annual conference and awards. BroadcastPro ME and its sister title SatellitePro ME have also actively worked with leading manufacturers to host roundtables and panel discussions with the aim of bringing together industry peers to share their knowledge and experience.

A special thank you to Selevision, our lead sponsor for the party as well as our Golf event. We are also delighted to announce that Selevision will be the title sponsor of our annual Summit and Awards this year. It will be called ASBU presents BroadcastPro Selevision Summit and Awards 2015.

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DIGITAL 9000 – The Wireless Masterpiece.
Moe Najati’s recent documentary, Daghwah, documents a traditional Emirati fishing method and the community revolving around it. Now in decline, the tradition is kept alive by a handful of fishermen living off the coast of Kalba, for whom fishing is the main livelihood. An official selection for at least five film festivals in Europe and North America, the film brings to life a dying tradition.

“I used to drive quite often to Fujairah and would see these colourful trucks parked on the shore. What caught my eye were the bright colours of these lorries, which I thought were abandoned. I stopped by one day and went closer to the beach to see more, and saw at least five to six trucks parked on the shore, very close to the water, and saw fishermen who owned these trucks.

“That’s when I began to dig deeper into it and started researching the subject. I spoke to the fishermen to learn more about this practice, and the stories I heard were quite interesting. So I began to explore the possibility of making a documentary about it,” Najati explains.

While doing the groundwork for the project, Najati forged friendships with the fishermen to get them to talk about their lives in front of the camera. The testing for cameras and equipment began in earnest and Najati zeroed in on the RED Dragon.

“I love to shoot with the RED. It’s a big camera, but we had a nice set-up to pull the project through. My DoP, Asif Limbada, and I decided to work with vintage anamorphic Kowa lenses, which was a rather unusual combination with the RED Dragon. When I saw the output of these lenses, I immediately decided to go with the look the anamorphics would lend to my stories.”

This choice of lenses made the process of grading quite complicated for Azin Samarmand, the colourist at Montage, a post house in Dubai, who worked on Daghwah.

“Anamorphic lenses distort the film in an artistic way and give it a richer texture and vignette, he points out.

The experimentation did not end at filming, even in post there were quite a few challenges, but the experiment was definitely worthwhile, agree Najati and Samarmand. The images appeared vignetted and the shadows were richer, with the contrast brought out vividly.

Since the film was shot in summer, the sky had no contrast and appeared flat, which the colourist was required to fix in post-production.

“It took us longer to grade this film than normal. For an 11-minute documentary, we took almost five days to do the grading,” explains Samarmand.

“The files I would receive were massive in 6K, and we had to bring them down to 2K. I worked directly on the 6K files, which was an advantage, and it allowed me to pull more information and detail for final output in 2K. Regenerating the lights and colours in grading was one of the key requirements of the project.”

The RED Dragon gives 15 stops of dynamic range, which helped to handle the 6K footage shot on it. “The RED Dragon gives 15 stops of dynamic range, which helped to handle the 6K footage shot on it. Had it been any other low-end camera, points out Samarmand, it wouldn’t have worked.

“I loved working on this film. We had a shot of a car in a corner of the beach which had to be colour-graded and corrected. There were so many different elements in this single shot, right from the overexposed sky with the sunlight reflecting on the car chassis. We had to balance these and add colour to water.
“While doing all this, we had to ensure that the images had continuity and had no jumping of colours. These were the main challenges, but I wouldn’t have chosen to do it any other way. At the end of it, what we got is a fantastic documentary.”

Daghwah is a dying tradition, with fewer fishermen engaging in it, explains Najati. The coast is shrinking, and so are the varieties of fish, in the wake of ecological changes. “This type of fishing is done at the coast up to a distance of a few kilometres. The fishermen set out to fish every day around 6am, but it’s not every day that they come back with fish.”

Najati and his team would set out early, by 3 or 4am, and wait for light to come. On shore, the camera was set up on tripods. A DJI stabiliser was also used for some shots, but shots in the sea had to be set up on a boat. “We could only do handheld shots on the boat. There used to be three workers, the main fisherman and the two of us – the DP and myself. There was not much room in the sea to be set up on a boat. “We could only do handheld shots on the boat. There used to be three workers, the main fisherman and the two of us – the DP and myself. There was not much room on the boat, as the net used for Daghwah is huge and takes most of the space,” Najati explains.

The films was edited by Najati himself on Adobe Premiere Pro. “I took some time to decide who I would finally shoot with. Out of the many fishermen interviewed, I shortlisted six, based on who had the best stories to tell and their voice clarity and screen presence. Most of them were very welcoming, and were happy to be a part of the documentary. For the film, we have retained just one main character and his team. He started fishing after World War 2 and has been actively fishing ever since,” says Najati.

Najati’s relationship with film goes back to when he first held the camera in university. As a visual arts student, filmmaking was one of the subjects he studied at the American University of Sharjah. “Films were a part of the course, but I got drawn towards it more than anything else. I started my career as a photographer and then branched into filmmaking,” he says. Najati enjoys making documentaries and has released two independent productions – Daghwah and Fifty 4 – he feels his true calling is drama and action. Comedy, although a popular genre, is a difficult one because as he sees it, making people laugh is not easy. Najati is now developing a full-length feature on human behaviour and political correctness.
Blackmagic’s URSA camera was hotly anticipated when it was announced at NAB last year, primarily because it seemed to offer a lot of features for a very affordable price range of $5,000.

With a 4K (4000 x 2160) 80FPS RAW 3:1, a 4K (3840 x 2160 UHD) 80FPS ProRes HQ (or lower), and a 12-bit RGB ProRes 4444 (up to 60FPS in UHD and 80FPS in 1080 HD), this camera looked great on paper and the best at that price point.

All very impressive! Since the initial release, Blackmagic Design has introduced a number of upgrades to the camera. I was given the EF mount 4K version of the URSA and tested it on a variety of different shoots.

Let’s begin with the form. It does look like a real camera with a built-in handle, a very large 10-inch LCD screen (which I’ll get to later), space for two CFast 2.0 slots, two XLR inputs, SDI IN and OUT, TC IN and OUT, and an interchangeable turret, which means you can upgrade the sensor whenever needed to keep up with the ever-changing technology.

The first striking thing about this camera is its weight, which is around 7.5kg (without lens or accessories). Quite heavy for a handheld camera, but to put this in perspective, the Alexa XT is heavier at almost 8kg. However, there is a key difference in the segments of the market the two cameras address. The URSA is low-cost and thus, more likely to be bought and used by people who have grown up shooting on DSLR cameras — which means the weight might be a deterrent. They are simply not used to filming with bulky, heavy cameras and tend not to have any assistants, let alone the grips and grip support that you would find on a typical Alexa shoot (the ARRI Alexa is currently the camera of choice for higher-end shoots). Have a look at the Oscar winners: the Alexa is used by many Hollywood DoPs.

Once you get over the weight issue, the next striking attribute about the URSA is its large 10-inch, flip-out LCD screen — there’s no denying it’s big! With the previous Blackmagic cameras, one of the biggest critiques was not being able to see clearly the image. However, with this beauty you can, even in bright daylight, it’s decent. Initially, I thought it might be easily damaged or snapped off the hinge, but it’s robust, sturdy and views well off-angle, with decent contrast.

It’s a little tricky to use it on the shoulder, as the screen is so large that you can’t see around it easily. I’m a big fan of viewfinders — that way you can choose to open or close your left eye to survey what’s happening in the scene. Blackmagic has released a viewfinder as an additional accessory with the camera; sadly, I didn’t have it to test.

The camera menu is easy to navigate and you can choose user preferences to display on the LCD, such as waveform, focus peaking, zebras, audio metering — all the tools you would expect from a professional camera — and these can all be displayed on the three screens on the camera.

Yes, another striking feature of this camera is its three screens: the main LCD, an internal LCD and a dumb-side screen. Just like the Alexa, the URSA has a ‘dumb side’ so that assistants and sound recordists can easily access the menu without getting on top of the camera operator.

Even the camera’s image can simply be pulled up by pressing the display button on the internal and external LCDs. This is a very useful feature for a director who doesn’t like to carry a monitor or sound recorder to check the shot’s size. On the dumb side, you can also add a slate with the name of the project, the take number, notes and so on. These are stored in the metadata, which might come in handy for post, especially for VFX shots.

The fact that you can record RAW in 4K at 3:1 makes it an ideal camera for high-end green screen and VFX work. Sound recordists will be happy, as the URSA’s internal audio functions work well, something that many cine-style cameras bypass. It has XLR inputs and bright metering levels that can easily be seen from a distance, and physical audio pots are not buried deep in the menu. The camera is also handy for ‘one-man bands’ recording their own sound, with the option to

Our resident DoP Harvey Glen tests the Blackmagic URSA and gives us his verdict on the camera’s performance.

“Though heavy, the URSA is a very good, well-built camera and if you know what you’re doing and have access to proper lighting, you can get some stunning images.”

Harvey Glen, Filmmaker
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NOMINATION ENQUIRIES

“Another striking feature of this camera is its three screens: the main LCD, an internal LCD and a dumb-side screen”

Harvey Glen, filmmaker

Resolve using noise reduction, I tried to clean it up in DaVinci and it’s not particularly pleasing. Possible, but noise does creep in really does grade up beautifully.

daylight or appropriate lighting must be used. For run-and-gun filming this might not be practical, especially on an observational documentary, but when you do bite the sweet spot, it looks great!

The URSA's native ISO is 400, which in today’s world is quite low, it's not meant to be a low-light camera, which means it has to be used in daylight or appropriate lighting must be used. For run-and-gun filming this might not be practical, especially on an observational documentary, but when you do bite the sweet spot, it looks great!

Blackmagic claims the URSA has a 13-stop dynamic range. From my testing, I think 11 stops is realistic, which is not so bad even when you’re dealing with Arab men and women in traditional white and black clothing in bright conditions. Recording in RAW makes a big difference, and it really does grade up beautifully. Pushing the ISO up to 800 is possible, but noise does creep in and it’s not particularly pleasing. I tried to clean it up in DaVinci Resolve using noise reduction, clearly view the levels on the LCD. The URSA doesn’t come with a standard shoulder pad, and you may need to buy one. It has a global shutter, so you don’t need to worry about any image wobble. Like the ARRI Alexa, you can view in Rec 709, known as ‘Video’, or in LOG, known as ‘Film’.

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The URSA has a USB port, and internal LCD and a "dumb-side screen" but sadly at 800 ISO, it didn’t help much, and the image fell apart. However, once the 4K sensor ships, current owners and new buyers will (I’m told by Blackmagic) have a native 800 ISO with 15 stops of dynamic range. This will be a massive change for the camera and bring it up to the quality professional DoPs expect. The camera doesn’t come with internal ND filters, which is standard with high-end cine cameras, so you will need to use additional ND filters, especially if you want to expose around F4 or wider to reduce the deep depth of field look. The camera’s sensor is very close to the Super 35mm, so achieving a shallow depth of field look is also simple. For my testing, I only had two 128GB CFast 2.0 cards is that they download incredibly fast, especially if you’re using Thunderbolt drives. A wish list request would be to add single clip deletion. If you’re shooting high frame rates at full RAW, it does use up a lot of data, and quickly. A single 128GB CFast 2.0 card only holds a few clips, and if the last shot is no good, simply deleting it rather than filling up more cards would be helpful.

On the LCD screen, there’s a recording button and a right arrow play button which plays back the last clip. The left arrow and right arrow, when using digital DSLR lenses, adjust the iris. The camera functions well with both active and passive lenses, meaning you can use your DSLR lenses and still get great imagery.

A zoom button magnifies the image even during recording, which I really like for double-checking focus, but you have to be careful as there’s nothing to signal you are zoomed in. You need to remember to press the zoom button again and zoom out, otherwise your’re training for a close-up and recording a wider shot. This actually caught me out for a few moments.

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The URSA has a USB port, and its firmware can be updated. Maybe in a future update, they will change this and add a zoom indication. The URSA has come with the full version of DaVinci Resolve which sells for $995, which for me and many other users is the best post-production software on the market, especially for high-end grading. My question is: How
can Blackmagic afford to make such a piece of technology at this price? The URSA is a well-built camera (though heavy), and if you know what you’re doing and have access to proper lighting, you can get some stunning images. It is ideal for commercials, features or corporate interviews with more equipment and time to craft an image, but not so great for making a documentary, where you might find yourself shooting late at night by street light, or in dimly lit locations that you simply don’t have the time or resources to light.

If this camera, in its current state of 4K with native 400 ISO, had been released when the RED One first came out circa 2008, it would have been a huge success and I’m sure Blackmagic, as a camera manufacturer, would have been a major part of the digital revolution, as RED has been. DoPs and camera people have come to expect a lot from cameras. We want them to cleanly cope with low-light situations, record RAW, have the option of high frame rates. So when the new sensor is ready (I look forward to testing it), the URSA will be a true competitor regardless of weight.

At NAB 2015, Blackmagic announced the URSA Mini will be available in either 4K or 4.6K PL or EF mounts. It will cost as little as $2,995 to $5,495, depending on configuration. Body only, it will weigh around 3.17kg, less than half the weight of its big brother. This is bound to appeal to many more buyers, and I can’t wait to test it out. 💪

Key features of the URSA

Since the initial release, Blackmagic has introduced a firmware upgrade to shoot:

• 150fps in 1920 x 1080
• ProRes XQ codec, which is favoured by Blackmagic’s own software, DaVinci Resolve and FCX
• The ability to record RAW on two CFast 2.0 cards simultaneously
• A new sensor upgrade to 4K available in PL or EF mount, which will allow you to record 4K up to 120fps
• 15 stops of dynamic range, and – wait for it – native ISO of 800 (so I’m told). This feature will ship with all new URSA cameras and be available as an upgrade for current URSA owners.

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What is Vuclip all about?
Vuclip is a mobile video on demand service for emerging markets. Our aim is to bring the world of mobile video to markets, where most people access the internet using their mobile phones rather than a PC. In emerging countries, 90% of mobile subscribers use their devices exclusively for making phone calls.

We work with mobile operators and content owners on the ground in Asia, the Middle East and Africa to provide a simple, affordable experience for people who have started exploring the internet using their phones but who have very little money to spare. Vuclip works with more than 200 studios around the world to bring our viewers access to blockbuster Hollywood and regional movies, TV shows and music videos in 25 different languages, including Arabic.

How long have you been operating in the Middle East?
We began operations in the Middle East and Africa in 2013 with the establishment of our office in the UAE. Since then, we have actively grown our partner and subscriber base, and are working towards expanding to other key markets in the region.

What’s the potential for mobile VOD in this market?
The Middle East continues to witness heavy smartphone penetration, with the latest figures from IDC indicating smartphone penetration in the UAE at 75.5% and Saudi Arabia at 73.5%. These markets are home to what we call the Experience Generation — the young, savvy, always-connected individuals on the move. This segment of the population has increasing purchasing power and is hooked onto their mobile devices. For them, mobile is the natural one-stop destination for all entertainment, communication and social networking needs.

In an exclusive interview with Nickhil Jakatdar, founder and CEO of Vuclip, BroadcastPro ME finds out how mobile video on demand is making inroads into emerging markets, and what lies ahead.

We hear you recently partnered with Melody Entertainment?
That’s right. Vuclip aims to offer our subscriber base in the region access to popular premium content across a variety of mobile platforms. Through this partnership, our subscriber base in the region can enjoy the latest Arabic content from Melody Entertainment, including long-form movies in addition to music videos, movie scenes and the famous comedy sketches of Melody Thahadoor Al Malal.

Is a partnership with regional carriers essential to your business?
Yes, of course. The Middle East has migrated to smartphones faster than India. Because of this, we’ve found quick adoption of our apps. Our growth in the emerging markets is, in part, due to the ambitious mobile infrastructure and mobile penetration in the region. We work with mobile operators to provide consumers with an affordable subscription model.

What are the challenges in delivering an unhindered viewing experience on mobile devices?
Our aim is to deliver a video experience to consumers viewing any content on any device and on any network. Critical to this mission is the promise of no buffering when consumers view mobile video.

Even with the introduction of 4G, the problem of buffering has not gone away. Increasingly today, consumers are adopting smartphones with higher resolution screens and they want to view HD-quality videos. Sure, bigger pipes are being built,
but those are already being filled with more data. While networks will get better, so will the quality and resolution of the smartphones, from 720p to 1080p to HD and 4K. Add to this the fact that we have a huge number of consumers still to get on to data, the sheer volume of data is growing several orders of magnitude faster than the pace of investments and growth in infrastructure. This creates a much more acute challenge for operators, consumers and everyone in the mobile ecosystem.

Our Dynamic Adaptive Transcoding technology enables the simultaneous transcoding or optimisation of the content to each specific device and dynamically adapts the video stream to the constantly varying bandwidth of carrier and Wi-Fi networks. Video loading times and frequent buffering often exasperate consumers.

With so much free content online, what could potentially draw viewers to paid content like yours?

“For the carriers don’t make money, they won’t invest in fielding better networks; at the same time, if the consumers feel … they have to pay for every megabyte they use, they will stop using data, which will impact the carrier’s revenues” - Nickhil Jakatdar, founder and CEO of Vuclip

“Even with the introduction of 4G, the problem of buffering has not gone away. Increasingly today, consumers are adopting smartphones with higher resolution screens and they want to view HD-quality videos” - Nickhil Jakatdar, founder and CEO of Vuclip

For content providers, they used to make a lot of money out of voice calls, and as more and more competition picked up and more and more players came into the market, we are seeing a surge in interest in longer-form content these days.

What’s the rate of success for a business model such as this?

“If you look at most mobile operators, they found that offering consumers a combination of free and paid-for content also works well, because they get a taste of the experience without an initial investment. For consumers, we offer a balance between price, selection and quality. For content providers, we help them expand their audience to reach out to the surging numbers of mobile phone users across the world, and for mobile operators, we help them monetize their user base by upselling fresh, personalised content to data subscribers, thereby increasing their average revenue per user (ARPU). We also keep bandwidth usage within acceptable limits by reducing the size of videos while still maintaining quality. This helps consumers make the most of their data plans.

How do you ensure that the content you provide is secure?

“VCAS for video secures OTT services to multiple screens and across multiple network types. The integrated solution will be rolled out to India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

What kind of content works on a mobile? How is it different from, say, a tablet or a smart TV?

For consumers, we offer a balance between price, selection and quality. For content providers, we help them expand their audience to reach out to the surging numbers of mobile phone users across the world, and for mobile operators, we help them monetize their user base by upselling fresh, personalised content to data subscribers, thereby increasing their average revenue per user (ARPU). We also keep bandwidth usage within acceptable limits by reducing the size of videos while still maintaining quality. This helps consumers make the most of their data plans.

How do you ensure that the content you provide is secure?

“One of the biggest challenges is piracy. But as I mentioned before, we have found that when presented with high-quality premium content, an excellent viewing experience and a way to easily pay an affordable, fair price, consumers do the right thing.

How will your partnership with Verimatrix improve your operations?

“Operators have to make the quality of their network better, provide data at a cheaper rate and so on. There has to be a solution that works best for consumers as well as carriers. If the carriers don’t make money, they won’t invest in fielding better networks; at the same time, if the consumers feel they have to pay for every megabyte they use, they will stop using data, which will impact the carrier’s revenues. In order to expand our reach in the mass market, it is crucial to involve carrier billing offering service to viewers across the lowest economic strata to the highest” - Nickhil Jakatdar, founder and CEO of Vuclip
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MOBILE VIEW

A high-performance infrastructure can address many of the challenges of a multi-entity, digital media production and distribution system to deliver competitive advantage, says Yarob Sakhnini

Increasingly, consumers in the Middle East are accessing entertainment and news ‘on-demand’ via mobile devices. Less complex, and with lower cost entry points, this growing demand has put mobility at the heart of Internet subscription service expansion. Consequently, mobile data consumption is growing rapidly.

‘Content’ becomes a valuable resource to leverage, not just for advertising, but also to underpin e-commerce. Connecting content with synergistic products or services, and capturing data, enables behavioural intelligence and more precise targeting.

Big opportunity, Big Challenge, ‘Big Data’

Patterns or trends from mining and analysing ‘Big Data’ are critical for regional operators, agencies, broadcasters and content producers. Inevitably, the insight extraction must be generated at high speed. This is particularly true during campaign pilots or short-term window transactional activity. However, the growing volume of production and ‘Big Data’ content runs counter to the need for shorter ‘time-to-broadcast’, and the desire for higher financial returns on digital assets in an aggressively competitive market.

For some, there is the need to radically reform production and distribution processes, using a different combination of in-house and contracted resources. This transformation involves a new level of ‘Big Data’ collaboration – particularly for video – across the entire value chain. This chain may be spread over several continents as the pace accelerates from digital asset production to distribution, broadcast, archive and playback.

To ensure the data is successfully captured, the infrastructure distributing mobile video and entertainment or news must be sufficiently agile, and scalable, in response to a widely variable...
workload. The capacity of the network to automatically reconfigure according to demand adds substantial value and reduces operating cost.

Content Creation
In terms of content creation, video is the fastest growing premium advertising format. This poses a significant challenge for many traditional publishers. At the broadcast end of the market, Over-The-Top (OTT) pay television is a proposition that many broadcasters have decided is business critical. Most major players are building a range of news or entertainment offerings to compete with the emerging Internet Video Providers (IVP), or established operators, to expand into OTT with aggregated programming. The video production process is becoming highly integrated to accelerate output, reduce cost and improve the quality and timeliness of news and entertainment. The video production ‘Big Data’ files depend upon an infrastructure that is enabled for efficient sharing and handling across a workflow process. For example, this may include remote production staff working on the same production stage, in content developing and editing.

Market Growth, Market Share
OTT video is strategically important for engaging mobile consumers who are using a diverse range of mobile devices to download and view content. If successfully promoted alongside a flexible pricing model, OTT will enlarge the total market size as the entry requirements from a device perspective can be considerably simplified and mobility provides anytime viewing. Estimates vary, but suggest 30% customer growth might be achieved based upon this simplified IPTV model.

The investment required will inevitably rise significantly, putting further pressure on the cost of production and distribution. Social media as a source of content will provide some compensation, including personal video. It will also be a base for channeling consumer response, engagement and ‘word of mouth’ promotion and distribution.

The multiple pricing options that aim to reduce consumers’ entry costs to online entertainment, and expand the market, put pressure on capital budgets. Enabling and supporting this changing environment is dependent on a combination of cloud services and flexible, on-site, high performance technology.

Advertising opportunity
Digital video traffic is estimated to increase by sixtimes more than current rates within the next three years – largely from mobile devices – with a similar increase in advertising spend.

The agency motivation is clear, as the value of digital advertising has increased significantly as part of the total client media expenditure. But more importantly for the agencies, their share of client spending has also risen at a rapid pace.

This profitable, fast-growing segment will continue to drive growth and profit through mobile video. Most major agencies anticipate their digital services will overperform traditional media services within three years. New services that offer a digital marketing technology platform offer opportunities for revenue growth. In addition to content creation, behavioural intelligence from ‘Big Data’ analytics, social media and digital media management, these services may extend into e-commerce, or multi-channel integration.

Strategically, agency technology platform development can lead to new alliances with high performance technology vendors experienced in the digital media market. This enables agencies to extend their capabilities to improve production processes and client collaboration.

Asset and IP Protection
Piracy continues to prevail, but the strategy to deal with it is changing – from asset protection, which is still important – to lowering the cost of consumer access.

This reflects the significant growth in consumer use of the internet. The convenience and fee-based access to multiple productions will, it is hoped, outweigh the cost, quality compromise and complexity of piracy. Solutions that provide native security and encryption capabilities, from the edge to the core, and from a client to the server, must be a vital part of any infrastructure overhaul.

The continuing growth in ‘Big Data’ across the media asset value-chain requires an underlying network infrastructure that will scale quickly. It must also be adaptable at short notice to different workloads, without disrupting production or distribution performance. Legacy networks must give way to the new IP and Ethernet fabric network architecture. This can be efficiently supported by network virtualization, and cloud ‘on-demand’ services, to deliver information in ‘up-to-date’-real time whenever it is required.

The fundamental business value of a high performance network is based upon reducing both media asset risk and cost. This is achieved by increasing the value-chain workflow efficiency across multiple locations, using an integrated architecture, and a scalable combination of on-site and cloud service delivery.
PROPRODUCTS

Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media has introduced a brand-new product from Freefly to the MENA market – the TERO. A high-performance miniature remote vehicle to carry the camera to film chase scenes, the Freefly TERO is a new way to move the camera. Placing a camera in a MōVI cradle on a TERO allows for a dynamic low camera angle, coupled with full three-axis control of the MōVI stabiliser to create shots. The system also can be outfitted with an optional cockpit camera to allow the driver to control the vehicle as if driving it. This allows for out-of-sight operation.

VITEC has launched the MGW Ace, an HEVC hardware encoder that takes the benefits of HEVC encoding out of server rooms and into the field by integrating a low-delay hardware codec into a professional appliance. MGW Ace boasts VITEC’s real-time H.265 hardware-based compression chip; a wide range of inputs; KLV/STANAG metadata processing for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) applications; and a secondary MPEG-4 H.264 chip to support legacy decoders. MDW Ace is suitable for broadcast-quality 4:2:2 and 4:2:0 HD streaming and is designed to support the most demanding and diverse video streaming use cases. Suitable for live news broadcasting from the field, point-to-point contribution of HD video, live streaming from sports venues or disseminating mission-critical military imagery, the MGW Ace is engineered for real-time video – anywhere, anytime.

Sennheiser camera mics go wireless

Sennheiser has unveiled a wireless microphone system for cameras. Wireless sound for video can be recorded in a few steps on the AVX wireless mics. “In many video situations, filmmakers prefer not to work with the camera’s built-in or plug-in microphone but would rather record their own voice directly. In such cases, cabled microphones are not ideal, as they severely restrict creative freedom. The optimum solution is wireless recording,” explained Sven Boetcher, Portfolio Manager Broadcast & Media at Sennheiser. AVX doesn’t need to license the wireless system. It also doesn’t need making the usual settings. AVX is available in three sets: with a wireless microphone (handheld transmitter), with a bodypack transmitter and clip-on microphone and in a special professional version with a bodypack transmitter and an MKE 2 clip-on.

ABOX42 smartens with M-series

ABOX42 has unveiled the M40 smart STB platform for IPTV, OTT and hybrid. This latest-technology model of the M-series product range supports HEVC / H.265 for more efficient streaming of video content. Furthermore, M40 is based on the latest chipset technology from Broadcom, which supports up to 4K / UHD Ultra HD video resolution. With the expanded M-series smart STBs including advanced software features and permanently optimised set-top-box technology, ABOX42 now offers an extensive product line portfolio to meet operator requirements up to third generation DVB-C, T/T2, and 52 hybrid smart STB deployments with different feature and price sets. This supports the product management of the operators offering the flexibility they require.

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Paywizard makes APAC debut

Paywizard will be making its APAC debut at BroadcastAsia 2015. Bringing its subscriber management platform to the show floor (stand 4B1-14), Paywizard will show pay-TV operators and VOD providers across the region how to profit from pay-TV.

The advent of internet connected devices means today, it is becoming a strategic imperative for VOD providers and pay-TV operators to offer content across devices. Paywizard’s subscriber management platform is helping VOD providers and pay-TV operators to grow both their traditional and multiscreen TV businesses. Paywizard Agile is designed specifically for VOD providers delivering over-the-top video and enables companies to manage and acquire subscribers across devices, takes payments anytime, anywhere in multiple currencies, markets effectively through optimised offers and discounts and easily integrates with global online video platforms and international payment providers.

Paywizard AgilXtra is enhanced for pay-TV operators to offer content across devices. Paywizard AgilXtra enables operators to offer content across devices to their subscribers.

Paywizard AgileXtra is designed specifically for VOD providers delivering over-the-top video and enables companies to grow their traditional and multiscreen TV businesses. Paywizard AgileXtra is enhanced for VOD providers delivering over-the-top video and enables companies to manage and acquire subscribers across devices, takes payments anytime, anywhere in multiple currencies, markets effectively through optimised offers and discounts and easily integrates with global online video platforms and international payment providers.

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Cobham decodes with the PRORXD

Cobham will feature its PRORXD receiver platform, which includes 1000GB 4:2:2 10-bit decoding capabilities. The receiver is available in a 1RU or 2RU configuration.

The PRORXD’s decoding algorithm has been especially engineered by Cobham to ensure full compatibility with all leading encoders, and each configuration can decode separate HD signals, including MPEG2 HD if required, which makes it a dual COFDM and IP receiver/decoder.

A core benefit of the PRORXD system is that its bit rate encoding capacity automatically adjusts to compensate for various rates of contention on IP networks, which is particularly valuable when using Ka-band and BGAN satellite systems to ensure optimum quality. If required, the PRORXD receiver can also act as an IP decoder by using the IFB audio input to provide automatic IFB for the presenter.

www.cobham.com

Archiver for Media Intelligence Platform

Addressing broadcasters’ need for convenient, cost-effective long-term storage of aired content, Volicon has introduced a new Archiver option for the company’s Observer Media Intelligence Platform.

Providing multiple simultaneous users with random access to an indexed store of full-resolution, high-bit rate (long-GOP H.264, 9-15 Mbps) content, as well as low-resolution proxies, this option makes programming, promos and advertisements readily available. The Archiver option offers an alternative to the expensive systems typically implemented for long-term archives. Because it features both baseband and transport stream interfaces and is compatible with any application, the module can be deployed in any broadcast environment.

www.volicon.com

Optimising OTT with Enensys

At BroadcastAsia 2015, ENENSYS will focus on new DTT network optimisation and regionalisation features within its overarching OneBeam solution. OneBeam solves the problem of how to use the same satellite capacity to deliver services to both DTH (DVB-S/S2) receivers and DTT (DVB-T or T2) transmitters. OneBeam is now being used in the largest DVB-T2 rollout worldwide, joining multiple deployment successes globally. ENENSYS has released a satellite receiver option for T2Edge and T2EdgeO2 products to enable direct satellite input (DVB-S/S2) at transmission sites. This development allows increased density by removing the need for an external IRD, enabling operators to reduce costs.

www.enensys.com

At BroadcastAsia 2015, Cobham will feature its PRORXD receiver platform, which includes 1000GB 4:2:2 10-bit decoding capabilities. The receiver is available in a 1RU or 2RU configuration.

The PRORXD’s decoding algorithm has been especially engineered by Cobham to ensure full compatibility with all leading encoders, and each configuration can decode separate HD signals, including MPEG2 HD if required, which makes it a dual COFDM and IP receiver/decoder.

www.cobham.com

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Cobham decodes with the PRORXD

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The term ‘branded content’ has been doing the rounds for some time and is used more and more throughout the marketing and advertising industry. Unfortunately, it is also more often misused than used.

Until very recently, the approach to almost all marketing and advertising, has been to saturate the viewer, reader or listener with product placement; but the sledge-hammer effect has lost a lot of its impact.

Branded content through video has put storytelling at the heart of product appeal and is taking brand association to a new level. Thanks to social and digital media, there is a wider audience than ever, and entertainment is far more attractive than conventional selling tools. For production houses across the region, it is a chance to not only diversify into a new stream of revenue but also to rediscover some of their creativity.

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It’s no longer a case of a client saying, ‘Here’s the plot, go and shoot it.’

‘Producers, who are increasingly working as artistic directors, constantly explore new angles and new storylines, incorporating the brand’s values, considering where and how the audience will view the content and how the audience can engage with that content.

Production companies have now moved away from an advertising and marketing approach, which has

outstayed its effectiveness. We are now giving a little more credit to our audiences, who have largely switched off to the culture of advertising we have relied on for decades. They want to be entertained, and with branded content; one can provide that entertainment and create purchase appeal at the same time.

The vast majority of branded video content is aimed at online viewers, who can be targeted far more accurately than previous traditional media allowed. Digital platforms are undoubtedly one of the main catalysts for the move towards branded content, but many clients believe that online production should somehow be less expensive purely because it is not for conventional broadcast.

There is no reason quality should be compromised just because the end product is online rather than on TV – to produce good content wherever it lives still requires the same preparation, time and effort. The savings for the client don’t come at the expense of quality. Production itself can be more cost-effective.

A large proportion of branded content commissioned in this region is produced by experienced TV programme makers. Broadcast production in the West has long been outsourced to independent production companies and television production traditionally brings with it experienced multi-skilled personnel, such as producers, directors, editors, assistant producers, researchers and lighting cameramen, leading to lower production costs. The emotional association and subtlety of branded content has led to a much more individual production approach to each storyline. Many corporate videos have become formulaic to the extent that they can be both anonymous and meaningless.

The classic John Lewis Christmas ads are a perfect example of branded content; but if you pitched those concepts to companies in this region, many of them would not see the potential of brand association. They would expect the name of the store to feature throughout the ad rather than as an ident towards the end. We have found now that it is far more effective to shoot a short teaser to illustrate your concept, and also to show that you have understood the brief. It may sometimes be difficult in terms of time and budget, but if you have confidence in your pitch, you should have the confidence to go the extra mile. It can pay dividends in the long run.

While it is not exactly in its infancy, branded content still has a long way to go in the Middle East. There is still some resistance to the concept, but the clients who have commissioned branded content have recognised – literally – that it is not the same old story.

Ian Carless is Executive Director at Talkabout Media and is the winner of 13 awards for branded content.

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