AL JAZEERA LEADERS' SUMMIT
Broadcast industry heads convene in Doha to discuss the future of media

RED REVOLUTION SAUDI FILMMAKER REVIEWS THE NEW RED EPIC-W

Zee Entertainment woos Arab audiences with new VOD offering

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

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

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**THE NEW SENNHEISER EK 6042**

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Last month, BroadcastPro ME was delighted to join several industry leaders for the inaugural edition of the Al Jazeera Leaders’ Summit.

Al Jazeera Media Network has been known for thinking out of the box especially in recent years and taking on a rather ambitious work transformation project. As a news network that has collaborated extensively with some of the most prominent vendors and solution providers both within the IT and digital space to create some innovative and futuristic solutions for the work transformation project alongside other projects, AJMN had the knowledge, the ability and the clout to bring together an interesting mix of industry specialists from both regional and international shores for the event.

At the Leaders’ Summit, AJMN took attendees on a tour of its facility and showcased some of those technologies, and shared some of its expertise with regional peers. Both vendors and end users joined in the panel discussions.

Technologies that are becoming increasingly critical to the broadcast industry although still fairly nascent, such as the opportunities that cloud can provide, security issues within broadcast, universal delivery network for video and so on, were discussed in great detail. It also became evident in the course of the discussions that cloud architects were the new breed of professionals leading the digital era.

BroadcastAsia was yet another highlight of May. The exhibition was moved to Suntec in Singapore instead of the usual Marina Bay Sands where CommunicAsia was hosted this year. It’s always a pleasure to attend the conferences and exhibition at this event owing to the insight it provides us into the APAC broadcast market. The event was very well attended this year too and hosted new and traditional players.

Next year, the event is being rebranded to include more companies and will be called ConnecTechAsia 2018. I look forward to an even bigger and better event next year.

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
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1 gala awards dinner

1 day / 4 panels
25 speakers / 16 awards

Al Jazeera Media Network concluded a deal at NAB with Imagine Communications confirming its investment in the Versio playout system for disaster recovery playout at the network’s Doha headquarters. The solution will enable Al Jazeera to move into a software-based environment while also enabling it to streamline its operations.

“We have been searching for cloud DR playout since the last one year,” commented Miljenko Logozar, Chief Broadcast Architect, Technology and Network Operations Division, Al Jazeera Media Network.

“Our objective in the future is to move away from hardware-based solutions to cloud-based software solutions. We want to get away from the CATVX model and restrict ourselves to operational costs so we are looking beyond virtualisation and want to truly benefit from being in a cloud ecosystem. We have had very good experience with Imagine in Al Jazeera English as well as Arabic.”

Logozar explained that Imagine has had major breakthroughs in terms of its technology: “This solution gave us exactly what we were looking for. It matched our vision to move to a software-based environment. Because of the issues with big latency between cloud and on-premise, installation will remain on the premises. The cloud concept, however, allows the complete DR installation to be moved elsewhere in the world with one click.”

Al Jazeera has been mulling its DR playout project for the last decade but has kept putting it off when it thought of the technical and operational scale, and complexity involved in achieving the desired results.

We had to find a cloud-native solution that would form the core of the system. We were on the search for microservices, which means it doesn’t have to be one big fat app but lots of small applications that are talking to each other through web services. Imagine had built something like this; we are most interested in the technology rather than the playout solution because we have old fashioned playout. What we then discovered is their Zenium platform, which is an open platform and allows us to customise it to suit our DR requirements and additionally use in other cloud projects,” he added.

Anas Hantash, Director Middle East & Africa at Imagine Communications, who concluded the deal added: “Al Jazeera started with Imagine Communications’ Versio as an IP playout solution. This is a cloud-native product powered by Zenium, our pure microservices technology. Al Jazeera was intrigued by the capabilities of this core enabling technology, especially after we announced the opening of the Zenium microservices library at NAB. Our technological vision is now tightly aligned with Al Jazeera’s and we are both keen to further explore our partnership to better serve this influential media company’s growing and vibrant audience.”

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The collaboration will bring award-winning festival films in their original formats to cinema lovers in Dubai. This move of endorsing Emirati entrepreneurs is the first of its kind from Meraas.

The exclusive partnership also aims to play an instrumental role in promoting the development of local talent through a monthly “Made in the UAE” film talk series targeted at showcasing good-quality content created in this part of the world.

Commenting on the partnership, Al Khaja said: “The UAE market definitely has a gap for alternative cinema, which this initiative hopes to fill.”

The Scene has garnered an impressive number of loyal members since its inception in 2007, she added.

Al Jazeera ties with Imagine for DR

The Scene partners with Roxy Cinemas

Emirati filmmaker Nayla Al Khaja and Dubai-based holding company Meraas have announced a cultural collaboration between The Scene and Roxy Cinemas. The Scene (formerly known as the Scene Club) was founded by Al Khaja to showcase the best of independent cinema from around the world in the UAE. The collaboration will bring award-winning festival films in their original formats to cinema lovers in Dubai. This move of endorsing Emirati entrepreneurs is the first of its kind from Meraas.

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VoddlerNet powers Intigral’s Dawri Plus

Voddler Group has provided MENA OTT and IP video product provider, Intigral, with its VoddlerNet hybrid over-assisted cloud streaming solution to optimise the subscriber viewing experience on Saudi Telecom Company’s (STC) Dawri Plus digital sports platform. The Dawri Plus OTT service delivers sports video and fan engagement across the region, offering live match streaming and enabling the creation of unique fan engagements across the country and with STC subscribers around the world. It allows fans to experience Saudi football anywhere, at any time, on any device, by enjoying an immersive second screen experience with in-built fantasy gaming and social media interactivity.

Dawri Plus is powered by a turnkey Intigral cloud-based solution supported by VoddlerNet video streaming, which enables not only high-performance streaming and features, but also the ability to scale deployment while offering customised features. “The Intigral team has extensive knowledge and deep expertise in the sports industry, and we advise our clients across all aspects of the sports value chain, all the way from developing impactful digital products to integrating and executing online and offline marketing activations,” said Hamoud Al-Rumayan, CEO of Intigral.

“VoddlerNet enables us to dramatically reduce our dependency on a CDN and deliver quality of service and experience to Dawri Plus customers.”

**Vision247’s XtremePlatform powers Al Majd’s OTT service**

Broadcast specialist Vision247’s XtremePlatform has been deployed to power Saudi Arabian broadcaster Al Majd’s new over-the-top (OTT) television service Hadif for global Arabic communities.

Vision247 partnered with UAE-based solutions providers, CMT Technologies, to deploy the new service. XtremePlatform provides a fully customisable, end-to-end OTT TV delivery solution, content delivery network (CDN) streaming and front and player implementation. Hadif can be accessed via an operator administered content management system (CMS) with restricted capabilities for multiple user groups. Both providers claim that XtremePlatform has enabled Hadif to become the first internet streaming solution to be synchronised by worldwide clock for global delivery of live TV with extremely low latency, thereby ensuring broadcast quality delivery over the internet.

Al Majd presently has more than 100,000 direct-to-home (DTH) subscribers. The service will support live TV, video-on-demand (VOD) and catch-up TV in English and Arabic languages. Hadif’s electronic programme guide (EPG) and VOD metadata enables community generated ratings and recommendations, making it an advanced OTT platform, Vision247 claims. The service offers apps for iOS, Android and the web and is set to expand into smart TVs and set-top boxes in the next few months. The Hadif service offers multiple features including cloud TV channel playlist module with world clock reference and client side playlist execution; a pay system compatible with PayPay, PayU, World Pay, PayWizard, HyperPay and CashU; enhanced EPG with instant catch-up, social media sign up, sign in and sharing, advanced reporting tools, emotion star ratings, recommendations as well as advanced user management.

Speaking about the project, Tanya Vidmar, Head of International Sales at Vision247 said: “The Middle East and North Africa region is one of the fastest growing regions for pay TV, in both subscriber numbers and revenues. Our collaboration with CMT Technologies to launch Hadif will significantly enhance the TV services available to Arabic communities by providing a flexible, multiscreen service that can be viewed on traditional TVs as well as mobile devices.”

“Al-Hafedh is a wonderful opportunity to implement our solution in a fast-growing market. We are excited to be part of this project and to support the growth of Hadif as it expands its offering. Vision247 is thrilled to be working with such a reputable partner in the region,” added Ahmad Aloweid, VP of business at Al Majd added. 

The feedback from our customers suggested a desire for flexible multiscreen services, and Hadif is equipped to deliver that.”

**OSN brings live action from ICC Champions Trophy**

OSN is hosting a line-up of legendary cricketers in Dubai, who will provide expert analyses during the ICC Champions Trophy, live from the OSN studios. This complements the live and exclusive coverage of all 15 matches from the much-anticipated tournament on OSN Sport Cricket HD beginning June 1.

Cricket fans also have the option of watching the action on-the-go on the online TV platform OSN Play.

Hosted by veteran sports presenter Jim Rosenthal, OSN’s studio panel will see the OSN Sport Cricket HD presenters, including OSN’s chief cricket analyst Nadeem Sadiq, provide expert analyses during the tournament. The Hadif service offers multiple features including cloud TV channel playlist module with world clock reference and client side playlist execution; a pay system compatible with Sago Pay, PayPay, World Pay, PayWizard, HyperPay and CashU; enhanced EPG with instant catch-up, social media sign up, sign in and sharing, advanced reporting tools, emotion star ratings, recommendations as well as advanced user management.

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**Lawo and Abu Dhabi Media partner for technical upgrade**

Abu Dhabi Media (AID) has awarded a contract to deploy a new central audio router and control/monitoring system to German technology specialist Lawo. Comprising a Nova73HD Hybrid MADI & RAVENNA/ARIS router plus VSM Control and Monitoring System, the AID master control room installation is accompanied by satellite compact radio broadcast consoles in the broadcaster’s studios, replacing equipment that had become outdated.

The choice of Lawo’s Nova73 HD routing system was based on its hybrid to integrate with existing equipment via MADI and AES, and with the new IP-based Lawo mixing consoles in the studios via RAVENNA. The audio router provides 8,192 inputs/outputs, available via RAVENNA, ARIS, MADI and SDESTM-limiters, all in a compact IUT package.

In terms of configuration and user friendliness, the Nova73 HD features a hot-plug capability and online configuration that even allows the system to be expanded and changed during live broadcast. In terms of security, Lawo’s STAR technology provides redundancy and fall-safe operation.

**Discovery Communications chooses Equinix cloud services**

Discovery Communications has engaged with Equinix to implement interconnection oriented architecture (IOA) that will enable the company to transform its digital business into a fully cloud-based, distributed model.

By co-locating the company’s IT infrastructure in Equinix International Business Exchange (IBX) data centres in Ashburn, London and Paris, Discovery will consolidate 80% of its IT infrastructure, optimise delivery of worldwide content and accelerate real-time product delivery via fast low-latency connections. The deployment process includes consolidation of Discovery’s critical back-office support systems, applications and network connectivity.

**Image Nation signs deal with Hollywood producers**

Image Nation Abu Dhabi has signed a three-year production pact with veteran producers Roy Lee and Steven Schneider to produce a slate of high-concept, modestly budgeted English-language dark genre films.

The film projects are said to have international appeal and franchise potential. The plan is to make at least one film a year over the next three years, which Image Nation Abu Dhabi will fully finance.

The deal reunites Steven Schneider with Image Nation Abu Dhabi after their recent collaboration on Émirati director Ali F. Mostafa’s dystopian thriller The Worthy, which was released worldwide via Netflix last month.
Al Jazeera chooses Jünger for audio control platform

Al Jazeera has chosen Jünger Audio loudspeaker management technology to control and regulate audio across four of its main television channels. The broadcaster has installed 10 DPAPN slim line digital audio processors in a new central TX area that has been constructed as part of the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project (AJWT). The area incorporates five transmission booths – one for each channel and one spare. The DPAPN processors are housed in a central apparatus room and managed from the TX area by a Jünger Audio VAP-EM1 remote panel.

Ali Elleuch, Head of Network Operations Standards at Al Jazeera, said: “The Jünger Audio units have been setup as main and back-up for redundancy. Presently only Al Jazeera Arabic is broadcasting from the new TX area but more channels will follow soon.”

Ooredoo tv reaches 100,000 subscribers

Launched in February 2016, Ooredoo tv reached a milestone last month with 100,000 subscriptions. Ooredoo tv launched its 4K set-top-box and the region’s first 4K linear channel. It also signed up with MBC Group to offer MBC HD channels exclusively in Qatar, introducing the region’s first MBC+ Ooredoo co-branded live channel. Ooredoo tv also offers a dedicated kids’ user interface with premium packages from beIN, OSN, Abu Dhabi Sports Media, TFC, My GMA and Starz Media, Ooredoo tv combines apps, such as MBC, TFC, My GMA and Starz Play, Ooredoo tv also offers MBC+ Ooredoo co-branded live HD channels exclusively in Qatar, in a new central TX area that has been constructed as part of the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project (AJWT). The area incorporates five transmission booths – one for each channel and one spare. The DPAPN processors are housed in a central apparatus room and managed from the TX area by a Jünger Audio VAP-EM1 remote panel.

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Sennheiser Middle East posts 20% growth in Q1

Sennheiser has announced a 20% year-on-year growth of its business-to-business (B2B) and prosumer (B2C) business in the Middle East. A strategic focus for Sennheiser has been to grow its business in the most engaged digital moment. Advertising is delivered based on users’ interests and location, to ensure maximum relevancy for users. Users can then simply dismiss the ad or click through for more information.

The technology behind the service was developed by enterprise mobile platform Unlockd, which has also debuted the Unlockd Connect product over the last 12 months in three major markets: the US with Sprint subsidiary Boost Mobile, the UK with Tesco Mobile, and the Caribbean with the region’s largest carrier, Digicel.

Turner EMEA Selects TiVo to provide enhanced EPG

Turner has selected TiVo as its EMEA metadata distribution partner. Turner will use services from TiVo’s new studio, broadcast and network metadata packages to manage the network’s electronic programme guide (EPG) metadata distribution and service, which covers 44 EMEA channels.

“Today’s consumers demand a fully connected entertainment experience to be able to discover and access content they want quickly and easily,” said James Crossland, Regional Vice President, Technology and Operations EMEA and APAC, Turner.

“When we were selecting a partner to enable our metadata distribution, TiVo’s global reach and long-standing experience working with the industry ecosystem made them the natural choice to power our services across Europe. We want to give our viewers a superior EPG experience when browsing our channels, and we see it as an integral part of our programme offering to them.”

Rod Ho, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Metadata at TiVo, commented: “TiVo is providing metadata distribution services that distribute multiple formats where needed. “Joining forces with Turner is a testament to TiVo’s technological capabilities in delivering solutions to help make TV and video viewing more enjoyable for their customers.”

Ethiopia’s INSA selects Eutelsat for new Ethiosat TV platform

Ethiopia’s Information Network Security Agency (INSA) has announced the launch of Ethiosat, its new TV platform. INSA has inked a multi-year contract with Eutelsat Communications for capacity at its 7/8°W north-western, pole position for MENA satellite TV. Launching with nine national channels, Ethiosat will progressively ramp up with additional content. The new platform offers licensed channels the opportunity to broadcast on a simple platform, ensuring easy reception for TV homes across the country and accelerating digital take-up.

UK’s VisionTV hosts Alaraby television channel

Vision247 has announced the launch of Alaraby Television’s (Alaraby TV) service on VisionTV in the UK. The channel is available with immediate effect on VisionTV channel 244 in the international genre, as part of the VisionTV UK app.

Alaraby Television Channel Director, Abbas Nasser, said: “We are very pleased to join the VisionTV platform in the UK including the Freesview network, and we look forward to providing the best in Arabic content for our target audiences throughout the UK.”

Alaraby Television will provide news, political, social, and cultural and entertainment programmes in Arabic language to the 1.1m UK Freesview users as well as those with EELTV and the recently launched VisionTV UK app for smart phones and tablets.

VisionTV consists of more than 30 free-to-air channels, delivering a wide variety of both UK and international programming. VisionTV is claimed to be the only portal on Freesview that aggregates multiple channels on one.
Wildmoka heads to the Middle East

Wildmoka, a digital content creation platform provider, headed by co-founders Cristian Livirdotti and Thomas Mongey, has now set its sights on the Middle East. The company intends to have representation this year in the GCC, and hopes to announce customers in the region within the next few months.

More recently, Francoise Semin, an expert in the content creation platform, has joined the team as Head of Business Development.

Wildmoka’s solution includes a cloud-based video platform as well as web-based tools designed for instant video clipping, editing and publishing from any content – live stream or file – to any digital platform.

“Our platform allows content owners and holders to extract key moments from their video footage and publish it immediately to any digital platform, whether it is social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, or other platforms such as websites or mobile apps,” commented Livirdotti, who hails from Lebanon and views the Middle East as a promising market, especially with the volume and scale of social media use in the region.

“Digital marketing is becoming increasingly important in the region and social media plays a big role here,” added Semin.

“We have a solution that instantly resolves a lot of the challenges that customers face with going digital.”

Wildmoka’s main focus is on streamlining the workflow as much as possible, allowing its customers to produce massively and publish extremely quickly at lower cost, as well as providing them with maximum opportunity to monetise their content, whether within social media or via new in-app purchase models.

Wildmoka, although a fairly new entrant, already boasts a portfolio of customers in France, including France TV, beIN, Canal+ and Orange, while in the US, it has Newsmax and ICC, among its customers.

ALTV launches user-generated show in Morocco

ALTV has launched a user-generated current events show in Morocco.

The Moroccan launch of the daily show, Li Sharak3 Wijhat Nadar [Street’s Point of View], was launched in Egypt earlier this year.

Conceived as part of ALTV’s mission to bring more content from across the MENA region into digital content creators, Street’s Point of View shares the perspectives of people on local and global trending topics.

As Street’s Point of View is adapted for new countries across the MENA region, ALTV’s local influencers will bring the opportunity of training, insight and commercial success to aspiring content creators.

BBC Earth launches Orbi in Dubai

BBC Earth launched Orbi in Dubai last month. An indoor nature experience, Orbi in Dubai is the only one outside of Japan and was unveiled at City Centre Mirdif.

Collaboratively developed by SEGA Holdings and BBC Worldwide, Orbi fuses BBC Earth’s nature content with SEGA’s technology to create an entertainment experience that will submerge visitors in the natural world through a visceral, multi-sensory education experience.

Natasha Hussain, GM and Vice President, Middle East and Mediterranean, BBC Worldwide, commented: “Orbi in Dubai boasts one of the largest screens in the world, and BBC produces content specifically for screening there. Some exhibits give you the chance to be at the heart of the action with 4D and VR techniques. It gives visitors an immersive experience of snow-capped mountains, the ocean and tropical climes, in the middle of the desert."

“The UAE has been a strategic partner for us in the business in the Middle East for many years. We want to bring BBC Earth to where there is an appetite and demand for such content.”

BBC Worldwide has concluded several deals with broadcasters across the Mediterranean and the Middle East covering natural history and factual content. In Turkey, BluTV audiences will be able to enjoy landmark series such as Planet Earth II, whilst NTV will broadcast, amongst others, Spy in the Wild and Earth’s Great Seasons both within the home of Planet Earth II, which in the UK was the most watched natural history programme in 15 years. TRT, the Turkish national broadcaster, also concluded a deal which includes Penguins Spy in the Huddle.

Planet Earth II was recently acquired by Iranian channel Manoto, which picked up the Wild strand that includes Alaska, Japan, Patagonia and Thailand. Other examples of content sales in the region include a deal with Al Jazeera, which will air the likes of Life in the Air.

“The series was filmed for over four years underwater and now new scientific papers have been written on the back of the filming that we have done with the new discoveries and animal behaviours. We have a history of having more than 60 years of natural history unit set the bar in filmmaking. “The BBC Player was launched in Singapore and Malaysia with Starhub and TNS to cater to the growing demand of BBC content in those regions,” says Hussain.

The project is funded through BBC Worldwide. “We are keen to bring BBC Player to where there is audience demand. It offers and additional way of enjoying our world-class content.”

BBC Worldwide has a commercial team based in Dubai, and a team in London, which is responsible for curation and scheduling of channels for the MENA region. BBC Worldwide has also partnered with Google Earth and Oculus.
Anghami triples its audio ad business

**Music streaming company Anghami has revealed that it recorded a three-fold growth in audio ad revenue last year. Anghami’s music marketing services are supported by DMS, the digital arm of Choueiri Group.**

The streaming company claims to be the first platform to bring music marketing into the region through audio ads and sponsored playlists. The solution is not only disrupting the regional music industry but also giving top brands the opportunity to exclusively customise a user’s experience, driven by innovation and creativity through data and technology, the company claims. The rise of streaming has extended artists’ reach, expanded users’ content accessibility and improved brands’ targeting. Through Anghami, marketers are tapping into “deep music intelligence” to communicate the right audio ad to their target audience using technology, data and emotions. This is one of the mega trends within music marketing in the region.

**Audio AG appoints new distributors for Saudi Arabia and France**

Audio AG has appointed Rodyan as the distributor for RME, ALVA, Ferrofish and myMix products in Saudi Arabia. Rodyan, headquartered in Riyadh, will leverage its sales and marketing experience and distribution capabilities in Saudi Arabia to offer customer support. In addition to the ALVA, Ferrofish and myMix product lines, the agreement includes distribution of the RME Pro and RME Premium line, updates, accessories and spare parts.

The company has also appointed Audio-Tecnika as distributor for RME, ALVA, Ferrofish and myMix products in France.

**OSN premiers WWE Wal3ooha**

OSN debuted an all-new localised WWE Arabic show to OSN Sports. WWE Wal3ooha premiered on OSN Sports Action 1 HD last month. The weekly show’s name means “light it up”, and it sees presenters Jassim Al Basaiti and Nathalie Mamo deliver exclusive interviews, stories and highlights from the week’s key contests to WWE fans in the region.

The partnership between OSN and WWE provides exclusive access to WWE superstars, while featuring all the big stories from Raw, SmackDown and pay-per-view events including WrestleMania and SummerSlam, having been specifically curated with localised Arabic WWE content created for the region, from the region.

Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN, said: “Branding our position as the region’s premier entertainment network, OSN is proud to be part of creating and delivering another unique and exclusive show for the region. WWE Wal3ooha will deliver the best action from the week gone by for fans only on OSN.”

**NewTek appoints 3D Storm as authorised distributor for 26 countries in Africa**

NewTek has appointed 3D Storm as an authorised distributor in 26 countries in Africa. 3D Storm is now the authorised distributor of NewTek products in Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho.

The company has been distributing NewTek products in South Africa since 1999, and has developed a strong relationship with local distributor Timbex. In addition, 3D Storm continues to serve the Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius and key markets in Europe.
Arabsat launches Euronews’ new frequency

Arabsat has announced the launch of Euronews’ new frequency on its BADR-4 satellite, to join other tier-1 regional and international news channels run on Arabsat BADR-4 News frequency 11996 MHz. Euronews’ original frequency was active till the end of May 2017, while Arabsat viewers were informed about the change via Arabsat linear and non-linear media distribution network.

“Our viewers are delighted with our long partnership with Euronews, one of the most viewed news channels in Europe and look forward to continue to offer their uniquely rich and varied news streams through Arabsat BADR-4 News frequency 11996 MHz,” said Khalid Balkhiyouri, Arabsat President & CEO.

“This move supports our content strategy to deliver specialised video frequencies reflecting market demand to Arabsat audience across the MENA and Europe and ensuring the best free-to-air viewing experience at home. “Arabsat is a long-standing partner for Euronews and we warmly thank all the team that supported the launch of the Euronews English frequency to cover this key region,” said Michael Peters, CEO of Euronews.

“With Arabsat, we are guaranteed to reach a wide audience which is, in common with our consumers across EMEA, composed of curious and open-minded leaders, interested by our unique positioning. In addition to providing an expert coverage on European news, our multicultural team of 30 nationalities, is also our strength. Indeed, Euronews’ journalists are the best qualified to share and analyse the diverse opinions on global events, rather than imposing a unilateral perspective as so often happens in the current media landscape. In a world of infobesity and polarised opinion, this is the uniqueness of Euronews that I’m sure will meet the interests of the Arabsat audience.”

UAE qualifies to submit feature films to the Oscars

The Dubai International Film Festival has announced that the United Arab Emirates will now have the opportunity to submit an entry to The Academy’s foreign language film competition for the 90th Academy Awards following the selection committee being approved this month.

The UAE is now eligible to submit a feature-length film for consideration in this category, the ceremony presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), will honour the best films of 2017 and will take place on March 4, 2018, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California.

DIFF opens submissions for Dubai Film Connection

Submissions are now open for the Dubai Film Connection, the co-production market for the Arab filmmakers part of the Dubai Film Market (DFM), the business community of DIFF. Celebrating its tenth anniversary, DFC has enjoyed a decade of success discovering and presenting projects from emerging and established non-fiction film projects in development to regional and international industry decision-makers.

American School of Dubai opts for NewTek IP series

American School of Dubai (ASD) hosted its first TEDxYouth event last month. The event took place in the Blackmagic Studio 4K switcher, which then fed directly to the Matrox Monarch HDX recording and archiving, live streaming encoders, the Matrox Monarch HDX redundant purposes.

Michael Peters, CEO of Euronews.

“When Arabsat, we are guaranteed to reach a wide audience which is, in common with our consumers across EMEA, composed of curious and open-minded leaders, interested by our unique positioning. In addition to providing an expert coverage on European news, our multicultural team of 30 nationalities, is also our strength. Indeed, Euronews’ journalists are the best qualified to share and analyse the diverse opinions on global events, rather than imposing a unilateral perspective as so often happens in the current media landscape. In a world of infobesity and polarised opinion, this is the uniqueness of Euronews that I’m sure will meet the interests of the Arabsat audience.”

UAE qualifies to submit feature films to the Oscars

The Dubai International Film Festival has announced that the United Arab Emirates will now have the opportunity to submit an entry to The Academy’s foreign language film competition for the 90th Academy Awards following the selection committee being approved this month.

The UAE is now eligible to submit a feature-length film for consideration in this category, the ceremony presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), will honour the best films of 2017 and will take place on March 4, 2018, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California.
Al Jazeera Media Network’s inaugural Leaders’ Summit brought together CTOs and CIOs from leading media organisations in the region and beyond. BroadcastPro ME brings you a report

Last month, Al Jazeera Media Network hosted its inaugural Future of Media – Leaders’ Summit at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Doha, with the aim of getting regional and international broadcast industry leaders, CIOs, ICT professionals and media experts together to discuss new and innovative technologies, and how they can potentially help media houses streamline workflows and improve operational efficiencies.

Held under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al-Thani, Chairman of AJMN, the summit included a number of individual presentations and panel discussions that touched upon digital transformation, the challenges of adopting cloud within broadcast, the impact of social media on media, content and audience, digital disruption and cyber security in media and broadcast.

Al-Thani said in his opening speech that the summit was part of AJMN’s continuous efforts to keep abreast of the important developments taking place in media and technology, content publishing platforms and ways to reach the audience. He pointed out that the conference was an opportunity to learn about the latest technologies used in various fields of the media, and to discuss fruitful challenges facing media professionals and technicians coping with rapid technological development.

He expressed the hope that the event would be an opportunity to come up with important recommendations and guidance that would enable attendees to anticipate the future of media and prepare for the expected changes in the nature of this field.

Mohamed Abuaqla, CIO/CTO of Al Jazeera Media Network then took attendees through the network’s own transformation and technical journey over the last 20 years, through five scenes, starting with the launch of Al Jazeera Arabic. The journey is not just impressive but gives a good understanding of why AJMN took an ambitious and futuristic path that most industry players thought was doomed to failure five years ago. Back then the task looked Herculean, and while it is not complete, what has been achieved with Abuaqla spearheading the transformation is not just impressive and enviable but has gained AJMN the respect of its peers both regionally and internationally.

Abuaqla went through various milestones with the launch of AJ’s numerous channels over the years and, more recently, its digital initiative. However, it is the technical and workforce transformation that had attendees in awe.

He explained that the compelling need for transformation began when social media became an integral part of news, collaboration through Dropbox and other such services increased, and consumption habits changed with devices. The need to transform was evident; deciding how to go about it was the challenge. Although it took several years, the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation (AJWT) project is the result.

“We now have solid infrastructure,” explained Abuaqla. “Initially, each of our bureaus were set up differently and everything was decentralised. But collaboration was inefficient. AJWT helped us unify our presence. We delivered a new location in Washington, DC, and in 2016 in Doha. Now we have similar technologies, and better collaboration and better flexibility. People can work from any of our offices, and it will be no different for them because they will be using the same technology. It also makes it easier for vendors to support us all over the world in the same manner.”

To complete the transformation, Al Jazeera realised it needed to make a shift into services – today, it offers 350 services or so.

“Transformation has to be holistic, involving people, processes and technology. To become more transformative, you need to become a service provider.”

Mohamed Abuaqla, CIO/CTO, Al Jazeera Media Network

The Leader’s Summit

Al Jazeera Media Network’s inaugural Leaders’ Summit brought together CTOs and CIOs from leading media organisations in the region and beyond.
There is never going to be an ideal cloud environment, the closest we can have is a hybrid environment. The best option for media companies is to have a blend of public and private clouds. The business model and the economies of scale and variety will determine which type of cloud environment you want to use. For example, if it is mass storage, then the ideal solution will be a public cloud because of the scale and elasticity it provides. As a multi-country, multi-region broadcaster having your own cloud turns out to be prohibitively expensive but, at the same time, having rigid content, which is very sensitive to data security may call for a private cloud. In a cloud-based industry the most sought after skillset is that of digital architects. A digital architect needs to know the model of cloud, not just the size. Cloud architect is a relatively new profession with a specific skillset. We are running programmes for our solution architects to get on to that journey and become cloud architects. One size doesn’t fit all. Depending on the value chain of media content your consumption of cloud varies. Dreamworks, for instance, used to make one movie in three years then one movie in two years, and now it’s four movies in a year. They are doing a cross collaboration using a cloud based environment, where the content creator is leveraging the cloud for a work space. Content distributing, on the other hand, will need to provision more services to viewers in a VOD environment.

connectivity with all the facilities we had across the world.”

Today, AJMN has partnered with Avid and Microsoft among others on its cloud journey, with a cloud newsroom being another ambitious project at the network.

“Why a newsroom on the cloud? We are the first to do it, with Avid. We wanted an on-demand model that could help our journalists deliver news quickly. It’s all about new frontiers, and we are now utilising artificial intelligence for this. We have half a million assets of state stories that are being digitised and being moved into the cloud so we can scale it and we can distribute them across different platforms. It helps us to set up the Vision for the Future.”

Abasgla identified several developing technologies that will continue to shape Al Jazeera’s approach, including artificial intelligence (AI), big data and blockchain. He concluded his speech by saying that the summit was aimed at bringing media exports together to see how AJMN could ease the technical journey and conquer all challenges through the right collaborations and partnerships.

Keynote speaker Paul Lee, Partner and Global Head of Research for the Technology, Media and Telecommunications (TMT) industry at Deloitte, presented research on the ways digital and traditional media complement each other. While mobile device usage has climbed over the last three years, live television consumption has remained steady – and significantly higher than digital usage, he pointed out.

“Digital transformation will never end, but it doesn’t need to be zero-sum disruption,” he said.

“It doesn’t have to be them versus us, it can be them and us.”

He added that although people are spending more time on their phones, certain forms of media, such as feature films and television series, do not lend themselves to mobile consumption because of the limitations in screen size.

“People glance at social networks, but they gaze at long-form video.”

He noted that while live media consumption has declined and digital consumption has increased, free television remains overwhelmingly the best way for advertisers to reach a broad audience. Furthermore, older audiences tend to prefer live content – and that demographic,
“Digital transformation will never end, but it doesn’t need to be zero-sum disruption. It doesn’t have to be them versus us; it can be them and us”

Paul Lee, Partner and Global Head of Research for the Technology, Media and Telecommunications (TMT) Industry, Deloitte

“Data journalism is about understanding the story from traditional mass media to personal media with visualisation. Together, we are working with news organisations to leverage tech for the benefit of its audience and employees.”

A panel discussion followed, in which participants shared their thoughts on the challenges the broadcast industry faces as it moves to the cloud. Wolfgang Wagner, Director of Production and Engineering at German broadcaster WDR, said media organisations will have to merge functions that in the past had been separate.

“In the future, media professionals will need to have a broad education of broadcast technology and a sound understanding of IT,” he said.

“They will need to be able to merge these seamlessly.”

The afternoon continued with more optimism about the marriage between technology and media. Jeff Bassica, President of Avid Technologies, outlined the potential benefits of embracing so-called digital disruption.

“Digital is disrupting every aspect of our lives, but it’s not a bad thing. People are consuming more content and that has created huge opportunity for our industry,” he said.

However, he also identified several common challenges that come with increasingly embracing digital, including increased rate of content creation, exponential growth of distribution platforms, increased rate of content consumption, and lagging media budgets.

The afternoon concluded with two presentations about the ways in which increased social media use has affected media organisations’ relationship with their content and audiences. Keynote speaker Mohammed Nanabbai, Deputy CEO at Media Development Investment Fund, outlined how quickly the way news organisations and their audiences interact have changed. He reminded attendees that as recently as 20 years ago, information moved in one direction, from media providers to consumers.

Since then, however, the flow has become increasingly back and forth. “People on social media have the first ones to cover events such as protests, and that in turn drives coverage. That coverage then drives people to take part in these events, which creates even more coverage on social media. It becomes a cycle,” Nanabbai said. He noted several contradictions that social media has created for the media industry. For example, organisations have lost their direct link to their audiences, but are paradoxically more able to engage with them. While new narratives and once overlooked voices are emerging, censorship by state actors is also on the rise.

Al Jazeera Executive Director Dr Yaser Bishr addressed the changing relationship between media and audience. He outlined the major challenges Al Jazeera faces in a social media-driven world, including shortened attention spans, audience fragmentation and the sheer volume of content being created.

Bishr urged attendees to focus on user experience, using the iPhone as an example. “The iPhone experience doesn’t begin with the iPhone,” he said. “It’s the experience that people have while engaging with the iPhone as an example. The iPhone is an example of how user experience is changing.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

Paul Lee

Media companies need to work together with companies such as Ericsson to solve the problem of complexity and to collaborate. We are looking at more integrated ways to work with operators to see how content is better consumed. For OTT delivery, content is distributed over the top from local CDNs across the network to reach the consumer. That’s causing a lot of difficulties because it is very expensive so media companies have to weigh the advantages of a high investment in such a service. CDN is not just expensive but also doesn’t lend optimal experience in many cases.

We are building UNDN (universal delivery network) for video and other content, including gaming and web content. Our technology is located deep into the network of operators and we also work with content owners. The idea is to lower the cost for publishers and improve the user experience. We are deploying few nodes ourselves into those operators’ networks and then we work with operators in a fertilised computer node level, where they can deploy nodes into the network as close as they would like deliver at peak capacity.

Only a third of the world has access to the internet that is capable of digital transformation. This should be a priority. The penetration of Facebook is 100% among the 2bn people that have access to it, the other services should work towards that goal to enable digital transformation; Ericsson is committed to that.
One of the most important panel discussions at the summit, in light of the recent cyber attack that affected more than 150 countries across the world, was on security. This is a topic close to Abuagla’s heart, as he has often reiterated its importance at a number of roundtables hosted by BroadcastPro ME.

As media organisations become more connected to their audience, the opportunities for hostile players to take advantage of that connectivity increases as well, said Haroon Meer, founder of South African firm Thinkst Applied Research. His presentation on cyber security and the broadcast industry served as a wake-up call for a field he said has until recently been isolated from such threats. Increased connectivity and complexity, a shortage of IT security experts and a rise in motivated attackers all combine to threaten broadcast media in ways the industry may not be prepared for, he said, and addressing those threats requires a fundamental change in mindset.

“The threat is real. Broadcast has been protected almost by accident because you have been hidden on an island, but you’re not anymore,” Meer said.

As media distribution is absolutely going through a renaissance,” he said.

“The summit was concluded by Dr Mostefa Souag, Acting Director General of Al Jazeera Media Network, who commented: “This conference represents a unique opportunity for TV and digital media professionals in our region to discuss ideas related to the latest technologies relevant to their work, and to learn about the latest technological innovations in television broadcasting, digital media platforms, cloud storage, data security and content dissemination. We hope that it has contributed to a clearer picture of the future of the media and the expected changes in the nature of our work, so that we can prepare to keep pace with this development and make maximum use of it.”

Seeing the success of the invitation-only summit, which had representation from both regional and international broadcasters, AJMN has announced that it intends to make the summit an annual event.
Zee’s new VOD portal Z5 Weyyak offers Hindi and Arabic drama series and Bollywood content to cater to Arab audiences worldwide. In an exclusive interview with Nadine Samra, VP Digital Business Middle East and Africa, Zee Entertainment, Vijaya Cherian finds out about the new service and the network’s digital strategy.

Nadine Samra, VP Digital Business Middle East and Africa, Zee Entertainment, has had a daunting task these last few months. Amid several VOD and OTT launches in the UAE, she was hired and tasked with assembling a digital team for Zee, with the aim of launching a VOD platform that would initially serve an Arab audience with an appetite for Arabic and Bollywood entertainment, and then other communities. Last month saw the result of that effort with the soft launch of Z5 Weyyak, a VOD portal that boasts more than 6,000 hours of content, primarily from Zee’s extensive library of Indian content dubbed or subtitled into Arabic, as well as newly acquired Arabic content.

“Weyyak is an Arabic word, which means ‘with you’. It is pronounced differently in the GCC, Egypt and the Levant, but it means the same thing. It’s our way of saying that wherever you go, whatever you do, whether you are in Europe, India, the Middle East or Africa, if you are interested in Arabic content, we are with you. Zee has recently built a global digital platform called Z5, and Weyyak is the Arabic version of it. This is in keeping with the vision of ZEE5 CEO of international business Amit Goenka and Chamli Tennakoon, who is the CEO of Z5X Global and Chief Digital Officer at Essel Group,” says Samra.

Samra comes with a lot of digital expertise, having launched several websites and apps many years ago as part of a personal passion and then moving on to build Shahid.net and MBC.net at MBC Group and growing the platform for almost six years, before eventually transitioning to Zee last year to set up its digital business in Dubai.

“Zee’s digital offerings, however, are not exclusive to the MENA region but part of a larger global transformation strategy. The team, which reports directly to the digital global head, Tennakoon, is being groomed with the aim of creating a platform that can reach out to a wider demographic that is not restricted to the MENA or APAC markets.”

“Zee’s team has been created as part of the digital transformation of the whole company on a global scale. Essentially, we have started from scratch with one vision. Our digital strategy is to think about transformation in wider terms and put processes in place to execute that. At first I was responsible for the Middle East, and now Africa is also part of my remit.”

As part of its launch treat to viewers, Weyyak.com, which is also available as an app on iOS and Android devices, has announced four series dubbed from Hindi to Arabic that will be available exclusively on its platform. Season 2 of Fidya, Aadhe Adhure, Khelti Hai Zindagi Aankh Micholi and Dilli Wali Thakur Girls will be available exclusively on Weyyak. Weyyak will release one episode daily of Fidya during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The platform has both Hindi and Arabic content and leans more heavily towards drama series than films.

“Fidya season one was so popular that people were very keen to see season two. We brought it exclusively for Weyyak because of popular demand and have dubbed it in time for Ramadan viewing. With Zee Entertainment...”
being a content producer, we have a lot of premium content that includes big names and big brands that Arabic audiences love. So we have had something great to start with in terms of the huge library of Indian content that is either dubbed or subtitled into Arabic. At the same time, we also have a library of Arabic content that we are slowly acquiring and building. At present, we have a good collection of Syrian and pan-Arab content. This platform is an entertainment hub for Arab audiences, so we will try to provide content that appeals to this audience. This is our first objective. Of course, it is on our roadmap to eventually make Indian series for our South Asian audience available, because at the moment they don’t have a legal and free platform in this region for binge watching Indian drama series. We hope to change that,” Samra says. Weyyak is an ad-supported platform that offers different advertising models suitable for clients. The primary advertising model is through video pre-rolls and mid-rolls, in addition to the sponsorship of a title, where the brand is integrated with the content’s creative material. It travels with the content in all of its relevant pages and marketing material. “We will be tailoring advertising packages to provide the highest return on investment for our clients and reach their entire target audience. I believe in branded content, and with integrating the brand and our premium content, the impact can be huge.”

“"This platform is an entertainment hub for Arab audiences. It is on our roadmap to eventually make Indian series for our South Asian audience available, because at the moment they don’t have a legal and free platform in this region for binge watching Indian drama series. We hope to change that," Samra says.

Nadine Samra, VP Digital Business Middle East and Africa, Zee Entertainment
Samra was primarily appointed to beef up Zee’s Arabic digital offering. With the success of Zee Aflam and Zee Alwan in the linear world, Zee was keen to explore how its OTT offering could add to the media network’s success. “From a Zee perspective, I came on board specifically for Arabic, but as we evolve our platform, we intend to add other flavours that also cater to the South Asian audience,” she says, adding that one of the big concerns with content is rights acquisition for longer periods of time.

“While our Indian content is available to us for a lifetime, we are looking to acquire Arabic content for at least two to three years. If they are very attractive titles, of course, we will probably have the rights for a shorter period of time.”

Samra’s young digital team presently comprises 15 members, and the firm hopes to double that by the end of the year. This team is supported and backed up by global digital teams in India and the US. “When we hired people, we looked for champions in the field who brought passion and experience to the job. The brands they worked for wasn’t important. We have a very young team and many fresh graduates who are actual users of the platforms they have created,” explains Samra.

The digital team includes content acquisition and multimedia experts who look after acquired content, its metadata and the curation of that content before it is made available online. In addition, the team includes people in product management, branding, marketing, sales and social media. The team also works with several partners, including TVAPP, Oxagile, Akamai and Amazon, to deliver the platform.

“We have worked with many great partners during the prelaunch phase to be able to achieve our objective of launching Z5 Weyyak. The vision is to launch Z5 Weyyak in the highest quality possible and the best user experience within a short timeframe. We worked closely with TVAPP as our front-end vendor to develop the website and the different applications, including iOS and Android. As for the OTT back end, it is a custom CMS developed by Oxagile. For the video caching, we are partnering with Akamai for CDN delivery. In addition to that, we are using Amazon AWS for the hosting of the infrastructure,” says Samra.

Building a platform from scratch can be challenging, but Samra says: “This platform is the fruit of all our learnings. Our past experience has taught us better methods and what works and what doesn’t. That’s the beauty of a green field, because it gives you the opportunity to start over and create a new product that helps you avoid past mistakes and build something more superior.”

Samra says there is a company-wide effort to create a digital culture, “because in this lies the future of entertainment”. “We have tried to make the experience as pleasant as possible for our audience, by building a free platform where our audience can watch our content without the need to register. We have created a short timeframe. We worked closely with TVAPP as our front-end vendor to develop the website and the different applications, including iOS and Android. As for the OTT back end, it is a custom CMS developed by Oxagile. For the video caching, we are partnering with Akamai for CDN delivery. In addition to that, we are using Amazon AWS for the hosting of the infrastructure,” says Samra.

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a very neat, clean and modern interface with recommendations based on what they have watched, to enrich the viewing experience for our viewers. We are also trying to be a bit creative when creating categories for people, so they can find what they are looking for easily. One unique feature of our website is that Arab viewers may want to navigate through an English interface instead of Arabic, so we have given them the transliterated version of the titles and other elements to enable better viewing capabilities for our viewers. This is not done by any other AVOD platforms here.”

Zee has also ventured into a different sort of production, taking a whole series of 40- to 60-minute episodes and redirecting them into ten-minute episodes. “These episodes are redirected from scratch with a new direction and re-editing. We are not cutting scenes here; we’re literally redirecting one-hour episodes as ten-minute episodes,” she reiterates, adding that this is purely because it is a new way of looking at content and creates opportunities to integrate brands subtly into a production.

“The image itself has been tailored, where some colours from the image or brand that are popular may recur through the story, and this creates more impact.” At the moment, the VOD platform has both Hindi and Arabic drama series, and Bollywood movies only. The videos are all in HD format, with others transcoded into 1080p.

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**BROADCASTPRO GOLF DAYS**
BroadcastPro ME celebrated its seventh anniversary at Copper Dog, Hilton DoubleTree, Jumeirah Beach Residence on May 15, 2017.

Some snapshots from the party

BroadcastPro ME’s seventh anniversary party brought together more than 140 MENA industry specialists, including TV, radio and OTT operators, systems integrators, manufacturers and IT specialists, to celebrate the MENA broadcast community and the affinity between the community and the BroadcastPro brand.

Vijaya Cherian, Editor of BroadcastPro ME, thanked the community for its continuous support and its contribution to the success of the magazine and its related events.

“We launched in the summer of 2010 and since then, it’s been a fantastic ride. We have enjoyed the support of the region’s broadcast fraternity, and this has helped us create a number of platforms to bring this community together, not just for networking but also for sharing information, knowledge and experience while also celebrating and acknowledging excellence amongst our peers. We are proud to serve this industry and look forward to continuing our close association with all members of the broadcast community.”

BroadcastPro ME also extends its gratitude to lead sponsor Selevision, as well as Sennheiser, U-TO Solutions, MediaCast, Broadcast Systems Arabia and Deluxe for sponsoring a host of lovely prizes for the traditional raffle draw during the event.

Thanks to our sponsors.
Bringing the latest news from the MENA broadcast and film industry
Filmmaker Rabih Al Haber enjoys being behind the camera and has a soft corner for RED cameras.

Rabih Al Haber appeared to be in a very enviable position at the start of his career. With a degree in architecture and a fantastic job on the one side, and the family construction business to look after on the other, should he prefer that, Al Haber was spoilt for choice. But like most aspiring filmmakers who desire to pursue a creative journey, Al Haber found his choices both limiting and uninspiring. So he ditched them in the pursuit of personal happiness and found it in a world of imagination, colour and vivid imagery, which took him on a journey revolving around producing films, documentaries and TVCs. And a big part of that story for the last half a decade has been with the RED.

“I studied architecture and had a career path chalked out for me,” says Al Haber.

But as part of his college degree, he interned as an assistant sound technician at the studio of a new TV station in Lebanon. It was a life-changing moment. “I knew then that that was my calling. I loved to be in the studio and enjoyed my time there, but had to return to Jeddah soon after for the sake of my family business. I joined my father’s construction company, but left it six months later. I could not see myself doing that for the rest of my life. I didn’t want to work on something I didn’t enjoy, even if it meant starting all over again,” he says.

He seriously sought work in TV and video, and began working at Arab Radio and Television. “ART was covering the Saudi League football, and a job offer with them was a big deal for me. It was an assistant’s job for a salary of $500. That job gave me an insight into the world of TV and broadcast, and I learnt the ropes slowly. I was moving cables initially. Then I moved into other areas, but it was learning on the job for me. Then I studied sound engineering and secured a diploma in that, and went to Egypt to work in Cinema City.”

He primarily trained in camera work and films

Rabih Al Haber, a filmmaker based in Saudi Arabia, speaks about the business of TVCs and what drew him to invest in a RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor through a number of workshops. His first TV show as a full-fledged director was with Rotana.

14 years later, Al Haber runs a successful production house in Saudi Arabia with several big consumer brands among his clientele. While TVCs and corporate films are his bread and butter, he pursues documentary filmmaking on the side, for what he calls his passion projects. “I love making films but also run it as a business. For me, quality is primary, and exploring new styles and techniques have helped me grow as a filmmaker. With the right tools, you can realise your vision.”

One tool that has helped him execute some of his ideas successfully is the RED camera. More importantly, the RED EPIC-W with the HELIUM 8K sensor has helped him push the envelope in terms of executing his creative vision.

“RED cameras have played a key role in recreating the images that I have envisioned in my head. I think this is what draws me to filmmaking – the power to create bright and beautiful snapshots.”

When he started his own production house, Ad Dimension, it was his dream to own a RED camera because it served as the perfect tool for what he had in mind, he says. Al Haber began his filmmaking career with the Canon EOS, a gift from his wife Amal. When he and his partner Hassanain Zaki built a studio, however, they started to secure each piece of inventory, item by item, as the company began to grow. Today, they own 14 cameras including RED, Sony, Canon and Blackmagic Cinema 4K models.

Five years ago, Al Haber made his first investment in the RED SCARLET – which he considers a milestone. Owning a RED camera was not just aspirational for him, but also for the rest of his peers in the Kingdom. He first experienced the power of the SCARLET when he borrowed it for an assignment from Lebanon and then liked it so much that he bought one for himself. More recently, he invested in the RED EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K S35 sensor – he is
importantly, the sensor affords when shooting Full HD or 4K. More directors more framing options resolution of 1080p video, giving Saudi Arabian government. campaigns as well as films for the has shot six TVCs for big HELIUM 8K sensor, Al Haber "HELIUM, I do not require an Al Haber says the HELIUM 8K has a number of impressive qualities including enviable sensor size, weight, dynamic range and its R3D format. It's a great camera. There is a certain aesthetic quality about the RED that fascinates me. The black box look holds immense power, and it's capable of delivering such fantastic results." When the HELIUM 8K sensor was first announced, Al Haber was in the race for one and emailed the company directly, but was told it hadn't been launched yet. "Advanced Media in Dubai was the only company in the region that had the camera, so I approached them. I convinced them to sell me the camera. When I posted the news that I had the latest RED camera on social media, no one believed me. Only the production house in Saudi Arabia that owns this camera," Al Haber proudly declares. With the R3D EPIC-W with HELIUM 8K sensor, Al Haber has shot six TVCs for big campaigns as well as films for the Saudi Arabian government. The 8K sensor has 17 times the resolution of 1080p video, giving directors more framing options when shooting Full HD or 4K. More importantly, the sensor affords greater colour handling. The EPIC-W captures 8K full-frame motion at up to 30fps. It is also capable of producing 35-megapixel stills and offers super 35 lens coverage. Al Haber says he always shoots in 8K, even though the display is not 8K – “but there is a huge difference in detail”. 8K resolution delivers more possibilities for cinematographers for reframing, visual effects, motion stabilisation and supersampling footage. It gives the ability to do more with your footage in production, without having to reshoot. This also makes it compatible with standard cinema lenses. The lens matters as much as the sensor, he says, adding that his own choice of lens is the Zeiss Prime. On the 8K, there is negligible crop factor with the HELIUM. However, shooting in lower resolution like 4K or 6K retains a bigger crop factor. Comparing the HELIUM and the SCARLET, Al Haber says: “If people don’t know, they won’t see the difference. A colour grader will know the difference.” The EPIC-W is capable of up to 30fps. It is also capable of 8K full-frame motion at 60fps full format (for WEAPON 8K S35). I was using the Phantom Flex when shooting with my other camera, including the SCARLET, but with the HELIUM, I do not require an additional lens. ” Al Haber says the HELIUM 8K has a number of impressive qualities including enviable sensor size, weight, dynamic range and high-speed frame rates. “It is a very rugged and user-friendly camera,” he says, adding that the clips are graded in REDCODE RAW and post workflow. The MAC has a 64GB RAM and a more sophisticated graphics card and processor. The number of hard discs used to store the footage is much more, but editing our films in-house means we have more flexibility and ease of operation.” While editing doesn’t interest him – “because it involves sitting inside a room for hours on end” – Al Haber does get involved when the colour grading is done, to ensure he gets the tonal quality he wants out of his projects. He explains that while the journey of a TVC begins with the storyboard, every stage is important and it’s crucial to get it right at the editing and grading desk. “I have to be convinced by the storyboard. The pre-preparation meeting is the most important for me to have an idea of what the client wants. Then we build the storyboard and decide on the frames. I shoot in 8K now and scale it down to HD. “Someone once told me that a TVC should give the message in three seconds, and I have made that a ground rule for all of my projects. I often ask for feedback from lay people, because the message is being directed at them.” Al Haber’s films have a distinctive style and quality. He says people associate his films with colours and camera moves. “I don’t make ads for social media and YouTube. My ads are made for the big screen and they are to be enjoyed on the big screen. I won’t buy an expensive camera to produce content for a small mobile screen. While I don’t have formal training, I believe that experience is the greatest teacher.” Al Haber regularly attends RED workshops in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and makes a point of being present at most of the Advanced Media camera workshops in Dubai to ensure that he is abreast of the latest information and new tips on how to stay ahead of the game. He is an avid diver and licensed underwater filmmaker, and is presently working on a film about the ocean. “People often ask me why I prefer the RED over, say, the Alexa. Well, it’s a bit like asking someone if they love the Lamborghini or a Ferrari; it’s a very personal choice. I am a RED user and will always be one. RED complements my style of filmmaking. I like to have crisp and sharp images with vivid colour, and RED delivers that for me beautifully.” Rabih Al Haber, Filmmaker
Qligent unveils Vision OTT

Qligent unveiled its first OTT-specific solution of its Vision cloud-based monitoring platform at NAB. Called Vision-OTT, it is the company’s first 100% virtualized cloud solution, eliminating all system configuration and management for the end user. Vision-OTT leverages Qligent technologies, including the company’s scalable Virtual Probes, and introduces new efficiencies, notably Amazon Web Services (AWS) to deploy, host and manage Qligent Virtual Probes from anywhere in the world. The Vision-OTT architecture will include a special aggregated server that communicates with and collects all field data from each probe or edge device. Merged with AWS, the Vision-OTT platform claims to provide unparalleled reach and penetration into the high-density universe of OTT signal distribution and delivery. Qligent is also offering its popular Monitoring as a Service (MaaS) as a managed service layer for Vision-OTT. This service, called Oversight-OTT, will provide continuous off-site monitoring, event-based troubleshooting, incident-based and/or periodic analysis, comprehensive reporting and recommendations to improve and scale services as warranted. It removes the burden from OTT service providers tasked with monitoring, analysing, troubleshooting and optimising very widely dispersed distribution and delivery systems that cross borders, continents and oceans.

“The Qligent approach is designed to be a purely 100% software-defined, hardware-agnostic solution from the ground up,” commented Ted Korte, CDO of Qligent. “It is fully virtualised and quickly deployable to almost any location, from almost any location. And the workflow ensures that our customers really penetrate the enormous signal density of the OTT architecture and even work backwards from the last mile – which, especially in OTT, is where most of the problems exist.”

www.qligent.com

GatesAir announces UHF transmitter range

GatesAir has launched a new high-efficiency UHF transmitter range to help broadcasters leverage the new business opportunities promised through Spectrum Repack and the ATSC 3.0 DTV standard. The new Maxiva ULXTE and UAXTE liquid transmitter joins the recently-announced UA73 family of transmitters to give broadcasters two design options with RF performance and the industry’s lowest total cost of ownership.

The ULXTE and UA73 liquid transmitter joins are optimised for channel changes driven by the Spectrum Repack, thanks to next-generation power amplifiers that increase peak power capacity for all ATSC and OFDM waveforms. This design strategy accelerates manufacturing and delivery by simplifying channel tuning, and increases power density for all modulations. The slimmed-down architecture, reducing footprint and weight, makes single-engine maintenance a reality – and an ongoing OPEX benefit – for networks and broadcasters with limited RF engineering resources. “The ULXTE brings the same flexibility and operational efficiencies of its air-cooled sibling to higher power broadcasters who want the added performance savings that liquid cooling offers inside the RF plant,” said Rich Redmond, Chief Product Officer, GatesAir.

“This means that broadcasters are not only reaping the benefits of a futureproof transmitter optimised for repack and ATSC 3.0, including equal power levels, they are also getting a solid-state system that will significantly reduce the heavy air-conditioning needs and electrical loads of high-power UHF through a liquid-cooled approach. And like the UA73, it delivers next-gen signal correction.”

www.gatesair.com

Imagine touts Unified Distribution architecture

Imagine Communications is touting its Unified Distribution architecture, the result of the company’s early embrace of a transition to standards-based IP technology and the cloud as a potential deployment destination.

Unified Distribution provides an end-to-end platform that broadcasters and service providers can leverage to stream fragment-based content (MPD/ DASH and HLS) to IP-based devices through third-party or private content distribution networks (CDNs). It uses advanced technologies, including adaptive libraries (ARL) and just-in-time packaging (JITP), to enable media companies to collapse both traditional and OTT operations into a single infrastructure. “We have been working towards making it possible for the user to go as digital as they can, from content origination all the way to however far they can go in the distribution process before they have to distribute the content on numerous digital platforms,” commented Dr. Glodina Connan-Lostanlen, Chief Marketing Officer at Imagine Communications. “Unified Distribution makes that possible.”

www.imaginetcommunications.com

Audinate introduces new networking chip

Audinate has announced the immediate availability of its new Dante Broadway networking chip designed for mid-channel count audio products. Available in 8x8 and 16x16 channel options, Dante Broadway is used for adding Dante audio networking to products such as mixers, power amplifiers, DSPs, hardware interfaces and conferencing solutions. Dante Broadway blends the small form factor of Audinate’s Ultima products with the most popular features of the Brooklyn II module, including latency as low as 0.25ms and support for Gigabit Ethernet. Redundancy is also supported in specific configurations for high-availability applications. With a rich set of control interfaces (including SPI, UART and GPIO), plus support for Dante Data Protocol, packet bridging and AES67, Dante Broadway can seamlessly connect an audio product into the growing ecosystem of Dante-enabled products.

www.audinate.com

Bexel brings more clarity to live production

Bexel Global Broadcast Solutions has unveiled the Bexel Clarity 800 camera, claimed to be the world’s first miniature high-frame-rate (HFR) point-of-view camera for live production. Building on its experience in live broadcast, Bexel developed the standard-setting Clarity 800 camera system to meet sports and event producers’ increasing demand for high-quality real-time HFR video. “Small cameras don’t usually have the low latency capability,” commented Craig Schiller, VP of Global Sales. “There has been a growing demand for HFR, and a complete gap in the market for a POV camera with real-time processing optimised for live sports. The Clarity 800 allows HFR to be easily used in any application.” The Clarity 800-HD offers HFR in HD up to 8x (UHD) and the Clarity 800-4K with 4K (UHD) up to 2x (1080p) is soon to follow, delivering complete camera functionality at only 4.7 inches high, 2.56 inches wide and 1 inch thick.

www.bexel.com
Riedel launches Bolero

MultiDyne fortifies 12Gb/s support

MultiDyne’s new SilverBack-120 models include 120Gb/s support for the SilverBack family of camera-mounted transceivers, while FiberServer-120 optical remapper/multiplexers enable up to 36 signals of up to 120Gb/s each to be transmitted over just two fibres.

12Gb/s equipment has most commonly featured quad-link connectivity, comprising four separate 30Gb/s signals for each 4K feed. Increasing adoption of 120-SDI interfaces enables 4K video to be transported over a single connection, simplifying infrastructures, reducing cabling requirements and speeding equipment set-up and strike. The addition of 120 support to MultiDyne’s fibre solutions delivers these benefits, while giving users denser signal capacity, greater connection flexibility and stronger compatibility with the growing array of 120-enabled cameras and production gear.

“120 is a big buzzword,” said Frank Jachetta, President of MultiDyne.

“Many people have embraced it, but it’s not yet ubiquitous. Our new 120 capabilities augment our existing capabilities, enabling our customers to take advantage of the new benefits with 120Gb/s equipment, but ensuring compatibility with any existing quad-link 4K or HD gear they’re using today.”

SilverBack-120 provides a full-bandwidth fibre optic link between any camera and a production truck or control room and puts all the signals needed for multi-camera production – 120Gb/s, 30Gb/s or 1.5Gb/s video, audio, intercom, camera control, tally data and more – onto a single tactical or SMPTE hybrid fibre cable for robust connectivity even across long distances.

By combining SilverBack’s existing capabilities with 120Gb/s support, SilverBack-120 provides exceptional versatility, particularly in dynamic environments where users may work with a wide range of equipment,” said Jachetta.

“If you’re using a 120 camera one day and a quad-link camera the next, or even dual 6G, no problem – just plug them in.”

www.multidyne.com
BroadcastAsia to rebrand as ConnecTechAsia

“Both BroadcastAsia and CommunicAsia have expanded; we had no choice but to have them under two different names, as it was impossible to accommodate both in a single place. We also see more convergence and overlapping of technologies in the broadcast and IT industries, which is why we have launched ConnecTechAsia 2018,” said Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director at BroadcastAsia, UBM - SES.

“Under its new name, the show is expected to grow bigger. This will also allow us to pitch to new companies that are becoming increasingly important globally and the core of their business is supported by connectivity. “The idea is to provide our exhibitors one participation at three shows every year. We will allow the exhibitors to do cross-marketing and cross-business partnerships.”

“For broadcast, we continue to position ourselves as the leading international media show focusing on traditional as well as new media. At BroadcastAsia this year, there were 645 exhibiting companies from six countries and regions. We had 13 national pavilions and two new ones, including Russia and China.

There were 50 new companies at the show with the likes of Oracle, IBM, HP, Amazon, exhibiting for the first time. Then we had the traditional players such as Canon, JVC, Sony, Hitachi, Red, Panasonic and others.

“There were several workshops, including a post-production workshop and an innovation hub. We had a live IP lab for the first time in Asia, where manufacturers had a chance to talk about their IP solutions. TV Everywhere saw a 50% increment at the show; there were more new ones, including Russia and China.

“There were also more content management companies.”

Harmonic drives monetisation for video service providers

At BroadcastAsia 2017, Harmonic demonstrated its software-based solutions for powering next-generation video services, including UHD, OTT and IP. Claiming to deliver pristine video quality on every screen at the lowest possible bitrates, Harmonic is helping to shape a more monetisable future for broadcasters and pay TV operators.

“EyeQ video compression optimisation solution delivers quality video and reduces bandwidth by up to 50% for OTT services. Using new analytics technology, Harmonic demonstrated how the EyeQ solution improves quality of experience for OTT services, ensuring a more consistent viewing experience with less buffering and lower latency. Harmonic demonstrated its end-to-end UHD-HEVC OTT workflow, which enables operators to deliver UHD HDR video for both subscription and demand applications.”

The company’s recent innovations include contribution with the new ViBE CP9000 UHD-HDVC contribution encoder, and UHD editing via the Harmonic MediaGrid shared storage system.

SAM introduces 12G-SDI products

At BroadcastAsia 2017, Snell Advanced Media (SAM) demonstrated its 12G-SDI support across a range of products, including its Kula and Kahuna production switcher range.

Kahuna and Kula multi-format production switchers were on show at BroadcastAsia. Kula (available as 1, 2 and 3 M/E versions) handles multiple formats, making it both future-proof and adaptable for today’s production environment. A wide choice of control panels (up to 24 crosspoints) and access to up to 42 inputs makes operations easy, giving users more time to work on other elements within the live production environment. Supporting higher resolutions, a 12G-SDI mainframe is now available for the Kula switcher. Kahuna supports any combination of SD, HD, 1080p (with A & B), 12G-SDI and Quad SDI for UHD signals, eliminating the need for external conversion.

Edystone to launch new transmitter

UK manufacturer Edystone Broadcast is planning to launch a new transmitter, which will be called the B900i, into the market. The transmitter will be smaller and lighter than the current 7600 series and provide an efficiency of more than 90% compared to its predecessors.

“It’s a modular build and all of the parts are hot swappable,” commented Russell Jay Darrell, Sales Manager, Edystone. “The company provides turnkey FM systems.”

The integrated workflow of its products saves time and minimises duplication and errors. It is also a more software-driven, modular and more scalable.”
**TiVo’s metadata offering**

“A high-quality metadata catalogue provides the foundation for intuitive search and navigation, enabling users to easily find their favourite TV shows, movies, music, celebration, books and games, as well as discover new ones. Our international sports metadata catalogue covers more than 400,000 of the world’s most popular sporting events, designed to help drive viewers to the most exciting sports content available and offering rich, real-time information.”

Built for service providers, content providers and consumer electronics manufacturers, TiVo powers personalised discovery experiences compatible with set-top boxes and iOS and Android mobile devices, and enables search across linear, VOD and OTT platforms.

“We deliver relevant search results, personalised recommendations and more, so that subscribers can more easily enjoy their content from any source, on every screen.”

“Supporting both single- and multi-screen content discovery, TiVo’s solutions integrate a breadth of content sources including live linear, time-shifted and recorded content such as catch-up TV, along with popular subscription video on demand (SVOD) and other OTT applications,” he added.

**Digigram launches AoIP**

Digigram is now able to transport MPX directly from the studio to the transmitter, thanks to the integration of an additional software option to its IQOYA *LINK and IQOYA *LINK/LE codecs. These codecs enable transport of composite MPX signals over IP, building a smart solution for broadcasters and tower companies. They support both analogue MPX and digital MPX over AES/EBU at 192kHz. This cost-effective solution eliminates the need to maintain several pieces of equipment – not only RDS and stereo encoders, but also a costly sound-processing unit – at each transmitter site, by creating the MPX signal from the back-end audio only once on the studio side. With this IQOYA software option, Digigram supplies users with a simpler and more cost-effective yet sufficient solution that can transport MPX over IP directly from the studio to different transmitters.

Cedexis offers crowd-sourced view of real-time CDN, cloud and ISP performance to optimise end-user experience. Using multiple CDNs, Cedexis maximises availability of content, automatically distributes traffic surges and ensures the audience is always getting the lowest latency and highest throughput from providers. Single server distribution is not a sustainable solution for the rich web content we consume today, with high resolution images, music and videos. Adding more servers and load balancing could partly solve the problem, but this wouldn’t be a sustainable solution in terms of scalability. By utilising distributed proxy/caching servers placed in data centres all over the world, it is possible to deliver content efficiently without straining the infrastructure. Cedexis has been working with Starz Play in the region and among its recommendations are projects for Al Jazeera and Sky News Arabia. The company also has a partnership with Microsoft to optimise their solutions.

Cedexis offers a free real user monitoring solutions to know how providers are serving their end users. It enables this through data from websites, mobile apps and custom clients.

**ChyronHego spotlights live production**

ChyronHego showcased a full CAMIO Universe end-to-end production workflow running in VXP, the company’s all-new virtual server platform. Also on display was ChyronHego’s PRIME graphics ecosystem, Neon trackless virtual studio system, and world-class sports graphics solutions including Paint and Virtual Placement. In addition, business partner GRM Alliance presented a demonstration of the ChyronHego Visual Radio solution.

ChyronHego introduced its all-new Virtual Production Server (VPS), a ground-based virtual server platform that can host end-to-end live production workflows. With VXP, running live production workflows in a virtualised server environment is no longer a vision for the future, but available to broadcasters here and now. The VXP platform enables broadcasters to create highly efficient, cost-effective and easy-to-manage production workflows for news, sports and other programmes, all from virtual instances running on a single server. ChyronHego also showcased PRIME 2.5, an all-new, high-performance update of the company’s PRIME Graphics to system. PRIME 2.5 is a resolution-agnostic solution that leverages 64-bit GPU- and CPU-based technologies.

**TMD showcases storage and archiving**

TransMedia Dynamics (TMD) focused on high-performance storage and archiving applications at BroadcastAsia2017. TMD’s range of media service applications runs on the Medalion-LMS Unified Media Services platform, a solution for all aspects of software-defined workflow management. It is scalable and cloud native, and can run on-premise or in the cloud. TMD showcased Paragon, a storage management solution that enables broadcasters, content owners and production companies to protect their video assets for the long term, using any combination of LTO, tape, cloud or MAM-III storage. Its features include the native ability to explore Avid file systems, transfer projects and complete clips or partial clips into and out of Avid storage. Paragon automatically extracts and stores Avid metadata, and users can also create their own descriptive metadata templates. These functions allow users to locate, transfer and start using content faster.

“Security is one aspect of an end-to-end solution. Then there is monetisation and what the user sees on screen – the user experience has to be extremely good. To retain the customer’s business and to avoid churn, providers must provide flawless delivery on any device. We provide an integrated end-to-end experience to implement security solutions on managed devices like set-top boxes and unmanaged ones like Android phones and iPhones. ‘We all know the market is moving to a connected device approach instead of a broadcast-centric model, and users consume content on the go,’ he added.

**Cedexis launches IQONEX**

Cedexis launched its new IQONEX pricing platform, which makes it easier for broadcasters to ensure that they’re getting the lowest cost for their content. Cedexis IQONEX is designed to help broadcasters improve the quality of their content delivery, with the goal of optimising their cloud costs.”
The war against piracy

The value chain for movie, TV and sports production and distribution is longer and more complex – you simply can’t take Game of Thrones or the next Pixar movie on tour!

“The music industry has somewhat recovered by changing its business model to concentrate on making money from concert tours, but this is not a solution available to the visual content creative industries. The value chain for movie, TV and sports production and distribution is longer and more complex – you simply can’t take Game of Thrones or the next Pixar movie on tour!”

One of the first things I did when I took the lead role in fighting piracy at OSN was to change the language. We talk about ‘content protection’ rather than ‘anti-piracy’. There are two strong reasons for this. First: piracy tends to conjure up an image of good-hearted rogues like Jack Sparrow in Pirates of the Caribbean. Second: entertainment content is in real need of protection. Let me quickly dispel the first notion. Those who steal content to illegally distribute it are actually involved in sophisticated criminal enterprises that have a global reach, which are suspected to have links to other dangerous criminal activities. They ride roughshod over local laws, as well as regulatory rules, without any concern for the damage they cause.

Regarding the second point, our industry faces an existential threat with the rise of internet-delivered illegal content distribution. That’s not to say we are complacent about other forms of content theft – far from it. We fight free-to-air satellite infringement, hybrid set-top box sales, illegal cable networks and a number of other forms of distribution. In 2016, OSN carried out more than 250 raids on shops, hotels and labour camps across the main territories in which we operate. But online content theft is different. It could be said that for the audio-visual entertainment industries, this is a Napster moment. The launch of the illegal music file-sharing site in 1999 set in motion a devastating decline in the sale of albums and singles. In the US, between 1999 and 2013, for which we have figures, album sales dropped by over 50% and revenues plummeted from $14bn to $7bn.

Second: piracy tends to conjure up an image of good-hearted rogues like Jack Sparrow in Pirates of the Caribbean. Second: entertainment content is in real need of protection. Let’s reinforce the notion. Those who steal content to illegally distribute it are actually involved in sophisticated criminal enterprises that have a global reach, which are suspected to have links to other dangerous criminal activities. They ride roughshod over local laws, as well as regulatory rules, without any concern for the damage they cause.

The war against piracy

The Middle East Satellite Broadcasters Anti-Piracy Coalition recently agreed to expand its membership to reflect the present and future threat from online infringement. Smartphone saturation, ever faster network data and broadband speeds, and a relentless demographic have contributed to people moving away from watching entertainment on traditional linear television services.

These factors, of course, represent great business opportunities for our industry but the infringers are already in the market, using technology to cut across our long-standing international and regional rights structures. OSN has developed a strong three-pillar strategy to fight the infringers. Firstly, we are investing in security, working alongside enforcement agencies to bring these criminal enterprises to court. Thirdly, we have started a wider conversation with entertainment consumers – particularly younger people – asking them to think about the consequences of their behaviour and giving them clear information.

I am heartened by the increasing collaboration within our industry; we can fight this scourge and stand up for the creative people who underpin our businesses. And let’s get away from talking about pirates. Let’s talk about content worth protecting. Let’s reinforce the great value of entertainment.”
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