BEHIND THE CAMERA
Abdullah Aljunaibi discusses debut feature

TOP GEAR
Content creators talk about their choice of kit

AUSTRALIAN OPEN USING REMOTE PRODUCTION SUCCESSFULLY

THE GOOD FIGHT
MBC Group battles the odds with new shows and trailblazing initiatives
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It is strange to speak of meeting a living legend in the same breath as witnessing live tennis action captured via remote production hub somewhere in Melbourne. Yet in the past month, I had the opportunity to see history of vastly different kinds unfold on either side of the Equator.

Down under, local broadcaster Seven Network took the remote approach to broadcast Federer's age-defying feat of winning the Australian Open and the rest of the matches. An incredible 80 odd feeds were transported between three sites in Melbourne on a self-managed dark fibre for this.

Remote production is increasingly gaining traction for live sport. If it can be done in Australia, it can also be done here in the UAE, which is the centre of several major sporting events that are broadcast live. We are talking about huge savings of the telcos and broadcasters can come to an understanding. All details revealed in this issue.

Twenty days later, it was time for the annual BBC Worldwide Showcase. In "the largest international TV market to be hosted by a single-distributor", I found myself sitting next to David Attenborough. The nonagenarian has lent his famous voice to Dynasty, a five-part series that presents animals battling the odds the modern-day Carringtons and Colbys. Only there are no clever edits, makeup and directorial flourishes.

Executive Producer Mike Gunton spoke about how the team followed the animals for four years. Four painstaking months of letting the drama play out in nature as the animals must prove their leadership and maintain their dynasty. You could feel the tense silence in the air as we watched some pivotal moments from the footage.

All of us wanted to know what came next. We were spoilt to several conversations afterwards, and I promise to share this in great detail with you in the next issue. For now, suffice to say I have returned home with a newfound respect for what the BBC does.

In the meantime, just as we were going to press, we heard of the collaboration between Netflix and OWN. They say keep your friends close and your enemies closer. But in this bit too close even for frenemies? Time to ponder! Until next time...

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
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Dubai firm conducts first ever remote grading on Resolve

Dubai-based production house KKDD Film Production has concluded its first ever successful attempt at remote colour grading on DaVinci Resolve with colourists in Mumbai-based post-production company Nube Studio. It’s also a first for Dubai.

Commenting on the success of the remote operation, Abigail Young-Taguilid, DaVinci Resolve Technical Specialist at Mediacast, a Dubai-based Middle East distributor for Blackmagic Design, said: “We believe this is the first ever remote grading operation from Dubai. As a distributor, we are in touch with the end user and most end users keep us informed about upgrades and so on.”

Speaking to BroadcastPro ME, Kinjal Tanna, Producer at KKDD Film Production, said: “Some months ago, as we were upgrading the software, Mediacast told us about the possibility of remote grading. We were excited about the possibilities and set about making it happen.”

From IP address-related issues to incompatible versions of Resolve, the first two attempts were unsuccessful, Tanna recalled. “When the IP addresses were exchanged, we had access to their monitors and vice versa.”

“We worked on a TV commercial. They uploaded the files with no conversion or generation loss. We had to upload the XML files along with the rushes of the film. Other than having the same XML files and offline edit footage, the timelines also had to coincide perfectly.”

Whereas previously Tanna’s team would send reference files to the colourist in Mumbai with the inevitable back and forth before final approvals, the real-time grading allowed them to achieve their outcome with no loss of control. “The DoP was present on our side to ensure the final look was what we wanted. Going forward, the only issue we have to resolve now is the current state of internet in India. Whereas downloading 2-3GB files is not an issue here in Dubai, it takes a long time in India.”

With the prospect of employing a full-time colourist not feasible cost-wise for most production houses, Tanna believes there is huge potential for remote grading. “Remote grading increases our reach and gives us the benefit of working with different colourists around the world. We are not restricted anymore, having ironed out the technical issues.”

The KKDD experiment has generated interest among local production houses, Abigail of MediaCast affirmed. “We have interest from other companies that are exploring remote grading with colourists in Lebanon and elsewhere. Owing to the increased interest, we hope in the near future to conduct demonstrations from our office here in Dubai with our office in Turkey,” Abigail added.

Wesam Kattan joins Vuclip as VP of MENA

Vuclip, a PCCW Media company, has appointed Wesam Kattan as VP, Content & Brand Marketing, for the MENA region for Viu. This appointment comes ahead of the unveiling of the Arabic Originals on Viu, its direct to consumer video-on-demand (VOD) service. In his new role, Kattan will oversee the overall operations and strategic direction of Viu in the region with a focus on driving a strong content-led value proposition for consumers, as well as strategic partnerships.

Prior to this, he has more than fourteen years of experience working with MTV Arabia, Rotana, MBC and Creative Edge Internationals.
Media Mania invests in Fujinon high-end box lenses

Abu Dhabi-based OB company and production house Media Mania, owned by industry veteran Roland Daou, has invested in two high-end Fujinon UA107 4K box lenses to cover sport better, as part of its ongoing 4K investment.

“We started investing in 4K solutions last year, because this is the future of the market,” commented Daou. “The UA107 is the longest lens available in the market and provides much better close-ups. We use this primarily to cover football, horse jumping and judo, among other sports.”

Media Mania serves as a one-stop shop in the market, providing equipment for rent while also undertaking live productions and providing crew for all events.

“We do live coverage, we provide ENG crew and cinematographers, and also have an inventory that boasts all the latest equipment in the market. We cover many sports including live events, broadcast and so on. This lens will add great value to our live sports production,” Daou added.

Chris Damsley, GM MEA for Fujifilm Optics, said the lens also has great appeal for international games.

“Both our 80x and 107x lenses have proven very popular in the live events markets. We have seen a lot of interest with the Winter Olympics happening now and with the upcoming World Cup. The interest in 4K is growing in the Middle East market, and we are really excited to be able to support Media Mania for the future. The demand for these lens is primarily for live events, and as a result, service support is critical. We have one of each model available locally for immediate swap-out, and a full service centre in Dubai,” he said.

icflix deploys KeyOS platform for better content consumption

Dubai-based icflix has deployed the KeyOS MultiKey DRM Service for its streaming and VOD platform. The move is in response to a growing trend among OTT users who consume content on a variety of new consumption platforms that are not based on desktop computing. This fragmentation of the consumer playback experience requires greater flexibility in delivering a studio-approved multi-DRM service, the release stated.

Using a variety of common programming languages, the KeyOS Platform enables studios, content licensees and OTT operators to deploy studio-approved DRM within their existing content workflows. KeyOS supports the three consumer DRM platforms, Microsoft PlayReady, Google Widevine and Apple FairPlay DRM.

‘Onshore’ licence for twofour54 companies operating outside free zone

Abu Dhabi’s Media Zone Authority (MAZA) and the Department of Economic Development (DED) will now allow firms within the free zone to apply for a DED branch licence in addition to their existing free zone licence, without an additional onshore office.

“Twofour54 is encouraging partners through the process to take advantage of this new commercial opportunity,” the licence helps firms freely carry out their commercial activities and take part in more tenders for government and semi-government entities, helping connect private and public sectors in the emirate.

Introducing URSA Broadcast.

The professional Ultra HD broadcast camera for less than the price of a DSLR!

URSA Broadcast is a flexible new Ultra HD broadcast camera that’s like two cameras in one. It’s an incredible field camera, as well as a professional studio camera. URSA Broadcast works with your existing B4 lenses, shoots HD and Ultra HD, features traditional broadcast controls, built in ND filters, dual SD and CFast recorders, and records in common file formats such as DNxHD 145, DNxHD 220X and ProRes.

The new extended video mode shoots incredible looking images with accurate skin tones, vibrant colors and incredible detail that can go straight to air without extra color correction. Now you can afford to upgrade to a professional Ultra HD broadcast camera for less than the price of a DSLR!

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae
Saudi Arabia to build entertainment industry with $64bn investment

Saudi Arabia has announced that it will invest $64bn over the next ten years to build its entertainment industry, as part of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030. Ahmed bin Aqeel Al Bathai, Chairman of the Board of the Saudi General Entertainment Authority (GEA), announced that the Kingdom will host 5,000 entertainment events this year, with musicals, stand-up comedy, live performances from some of the biggest names in music, and Cirque du Soleil among others. He said 500 companies have already registered to organise entertainment events.

Eng Faisal Badaraf, CEO of GEA, added that the scale of the 2018 entertainment programme will create a “total of 224,000 new jobs, including 114,000 direct and 110,000 indirect jobs expected to be created in the sector by 2020”.

Cinescape to open three multiplexes in KSA

Cinescape, the exhibition arm of Front Row Film Entertainment and Kuwait National Cinema Company (KNCC), will aim to launch 197 cinema screens by Q4 2018 in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam in Saudi Arabia, as part of a first phase in which it has secured three multiplexes. KNCC is in talks with high-profile real estate entities to secure additional multiplexes, as well as stand-alone cinemas across the country, in accordance with the Kingdom’s 2030 Vision.

KNCC’s Hisham Al Ghanim said: “There is a high influx of Saudi audiences that flock to Kuwait to experience cinema here because of the film, we are able to show and the high standards of the sites themselves. We have a keen understanding and appreciation of their tastes. We expect to open a total of 12 multiplexes in the next 36-month period.”

Gianluca Chakra, Managing Partner of Front Row Film Entertainment, added: “Along with these distribution lines, there is a potential to grow once the lay of the land has settled. Front Row’s outside-the-box exhibition and distribution model can only help enhance the Saudi expansion. Added to that is the strong Egyptian catalogue and the burgeoning market of original content development we are working all together. With this, there is substantial potential for growth in the region.”

iflix brings LEGO content to MENA with two-year deal

iflix has entered into a two-year distribution agreement with LEGO Systems. The deal gives the streaming platform’s MENA subscribers unlimited access to both stream and download a vast selection of LEGO Kids content, including Ninjago: Masters of Spinjitzu, Friends of Heartlake City, Jurassic World Indominus Escape, Marvel Superheroes Maximum Overload and DC Superheroes Batman: Belfuggered among others. The agreement will see 122 episodes across

iflix has signed an exclusive MoU with Abdulmohsin Al Hokair Holding Group to launch multiplex cinemas in the Kingdom. The partnership will see the creation of up to 30 multiplex cinemas in existing and new developments in the country over the next three years, featuring best-in-class seats, screen and sound experiences. The proposed joint venture is expected to deliver cinemas with the standards of Vue’s international flagship sites in London, such as Vue West End

and Westfield.

Speaking about the deal, Tim Richards, founder and Chief Executive, Vue International, said: “This is a huge moment in the history of global cinema development for the exhibition industry and we are honoured to be partnering with such a well-regarded and prestigious operator.” The MoU follows the recent announcement by Saudi Arabia that it would lift a ban on cinema, and parameters of the joint venture. It stands to be the only operator invited to attend the Future Investment Initiative (FII) and subsequent discussions held in Riyadh. Since October 2017, Vue has participated in a number of high-level meetings on building and operating standards for the joint multiplex cinemas in the region. Discussions are ongoing between the parties on the detailed structure and parameters of the joint venture. It is expected that the first cinema could welcome its first guests in 2018.

iflix is Head of Content, iflix MEA, said: “LEG0 is one of the world’s most recognised and beloved brands, and we are excited to bring LEGO’s premium titles to our members both young and young-at-heart on a dedicated LEGO-branded channel for all to enjoy.”

Gina Contellos, Senior Content Distribution Manager, LEGO Group, added: “Through the extensive library of content available on the new channels feature, fans of all ages will have direct access to their favourite stories and characters any time they want.”

Riedel acquires Archwave

Riedel’s acquisition of Swiss audio networking and streaming specialist Archwave will create an R&D hub in Zurich and increase Riedel’s global engineering team to more than 100, while expanding its R&D capabilities for IP and standards such as AES67.

“By collaborating with Archwave, we are taking an important step towards providing complete networking solutions to broadcasters. With our new engineering team in Switzerland, we now have all the tools we need to create the plug-and-play workflows that our clients need for their transition to IP,” commented Thomas Riedel, founder and CEO of Riedel Communications.

As part of this, Riedel will also acquire Cymatic Audio, an audio specialist within the music industry.
Netflix announces first original Arabic series from Middle East

Netflix has announced Jinn, its first Arabic original series. The series will feature Arab talent, and will be filmed in Jordan later this year. Executive produced by Elon and Rajeev Dassani (SEAM), this young adult fantasy adventure comes from on-the-rise Lebanese director Min-Ieun Brun Chauay (Very Big Shot) and Jordanian screenwriter, Bassel Ghandour (Theb). partners with the twin producers. The six-episode series is expected to launch to all Netflix members around the world in 2019.

Jinn will be a contemporary supernatural teenage drama focused on young Arab characters. "This is a great opportunity to portray Arab youth in a very unique way. The level of authenticity Netflix is trying to achieve with this show is what attracted me the most to be part of this project," commented Min-Ieun Brun Chauay.

Jinn is Netflix's second project in the region. Netflix's first project, the Arabic stand-up comedy, Adel Karam: Live from Beirut, launched on March 1st.

OSN marks milestone in regional content licensing and distribution with Asli launch

Pay-TV network OSN has launched a digital platform called Asli, on its Wavo platform. Asli, which means 'original', serves as a licensing ecosystem for content creators to produce and broadcast original work. The platform is free for everyone to view, and season one will feature nearly 40 hours of curated content, with fresh and exclusive material to be added regularly. Featuring a range of Arabic and English content, Asli content will be subtitled in both languages.

The first release of Asli content includes regional content producers such as Punny Poe Times, Peeta Planet, Peace Cake, Krenming Cultures, Salizons, Najla Al Khaja Films, What Doesn’t Suck! and Waza.

As part of the Asli initiative, OSN has also built a large multi-purpose studio at its HQ in Dubai Media City. The 247 facility gives Asli's community members the space to film, edit and collaborate on content production. Designated by local content creators, it features a working space, a shoot and test corner, brainstorming booths, a ready-to-shoot living room, equipment trolleys, a majlis, a live music room and live streaming facilities, alongside production and editing booths. The studio is exclusive to members and will be free to access until the end of 2018. Membership rates have not yet been announced.

The team is in negotiations with various brands and vendors to make available a host of equipment ranging from consumer cameras to high-end systems for content creators. A booking process will be in place for members to rent studio space as well as equipment. Asli’s commercial ecosystem and studio is aimed at fostering a community of the region’s best content creators by providing them with a sustainable model to license their work and a physical space to express their creativity, without compromising on storytelling.

"Since first announcing Asli, we've experienced incredible interest from content creators throughout the region wanting a community, a sustainable revenue model and industry support," commented Ismat Abidi, Founder of Asli.

Top Swedish talent hard at work in the Asli studio facility in Dubai Media City

UBMS highlights SkyPanel from ARRI at workshop

UAE distributor United Broadcast & Media Solutions (UBMS) conducted a half-day workshop on February 15, showcasing the new S-360 from the ARRI SkyPanel range. The workshop was conducted by Product Manager Richard Lackey at the UBMS Training Academy in Dubai. Representatives from production houses and rental companies, as well as filmmakers, videographers and lighting professionals, attended.

Lackey said: "The main reason for conducting this workshop is the arrival of the new S-360 SkyPanel. We have the first and only one in the region and wanted to introduce the new product to industry. We had showcased the product in CABSAT as well. The ARRI SkyPanel is a flexible and portable LED light which is an excellent alternative to traditional lighting setups. It is a game-changer for the lighting industry."

Speaking about the deal, OSN’s CEO Martin Stewart said: "Through this partnership with Netflix, we are demonstrating our customer-centric focus on delivering convenience and flexibility for all.”

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Although rates are still being discussed, Abidi mentioned that a fee is being offered to content creators for already published content, while brand new content fetches more. In some cases, the team in also following a retailer model where they play a flat rate to regular contributors. Abidi believes revenue will be generated through distribution and leasing.

The educational backbones of Asli are workshops called the Creative Couch (also an area in the Asli studio) where creators benefit from advice on licensing models, IP, content protection, colour grading, lighting equipment, editing software and commercial skills relevant to the media industry. Asli producers and filmmakers will be travelling around the region over the next few months to creative hubs including Riyadh, Amman, Beirut, Karachi and Kuwait, to host Creative Couch workshops and grow the Asli community. Team Asli recently hosted a Creative Couch session in Cairo.
 Nielsen announces UAE's first Radio Audience Measurement results

Global measurement and data analytics company Nielsen revealed the first known comprehensive data on UAE Radio Audience Measurement (UAE RAM) in Dubai last month, also unveiling which channels have the biggest reach in the country. The research pointed out that radio is one of the most powerful entertainment platforms in the UAE today, with a staggering 93% of the total population aged 10 and above spending nine hours a week listening to radio. The results for the quarter ending 31 December 2017 also showed that not only is there a radio peak in the evening, lasting up to 9pm, but there is also very high engagement continuing much later into the night.

Among the radio networks, ASN came out on top with 30% of the audience, while Abu Dhabi Media Radio was close behind at 26.8% and the Channel 4 Group at 15.2%. Among English radio stations, Virgin Radio emerged the winner, while Radio Mashaal stood out among Arabic radio stations and Al Arabiya stood out among expat Arab radio stations.

With average commuting time in the UAE at 96 minutes, much of the nation’s radio consumption happens while people are travelling. Listeners tuned into radio during the morning and afternoon drive times, with peak times between 7am and 9am, 2pm and 4pm, and 6pm and 9pm during weekdays. Although weekend consumption drops by half compared to weekdays, radio reach remains significant, with engagement peaking between 9am and 9am, 2pm and 3pm, and 7pm and 8pm.

Contrary to popular belief, radio listening activity in the country remains high even late at night, from 8pm until midnight. 27% of all radio consumption in an average week occurs between 8pm and 12am, with 61% of listeners tuning into radio from 8pm onwards. Additionally, the study shows that radio engagement at home starts increasing from 6pm and peaks at 11pm, whereas listening activity while travelling lessens after 9pm, though it is still significant.

“The extensive study has reaffirmed radio’s resilience and vitality as a popular medium of information and entertainment for the UAE population,” commented Sarah Messer, Director Media – MENA & Pakistan, Nielsen.

Long drive times in the country have been identified as the foremost driver of the medium’s growth, as listening to the radio while on the move tops the list of places radio is consumed. Specialised content like real-time traffic updates have made radio even more attractive to people who commute daily to work and back.

“In addition, radio’s acceptance as a leading source of music discovery and entertainment, driven by creative and engaging presenters, contributes further to its reach across audiences from different backgrounds, and cultural preferences for later lifestyles are driving listenership during evening and night-time. Our UAE RAM solution measures the country’s 40+ radio stations, each catering to our diverse population in a multitude of languages. From our results, we can clearly see that the UAE presents an exceptionally strong market for radio and a great way for advertisers to reach their target audiences.”

Some important figures were highlighted. The UAE has a remarkably high number of what are classed as ‘heavy’ radio listeners, with 1.9 million people – recorded an average consumption of 8 hours per week. 98% of listeners aged 10-14 and younger millennials aged 15 to 24 appear to be heavy listeners with 95% reach and 10 hours of average radio consumption weekly. The medium has a reach of 81% among Filipinos and other East Asians, who registered 8.5 hours of listening a week.

Class A/B, the highest socio-economic status, has an almost universal reach of 99% and eight hours of radio engagement per week, while 95% of class C1 consumes nine hours of radio every week. Radio has greater reach among classification C2 than class D, with 95% and 88% listenership respectively. Radio reach and time spent listening vary by location, with 95% people in Sharjah and 92% of listeners in Dubai spending the most time with radio, at 10 hours each week. In Abu Dhabi, 95% of the population tunes into various radio stations for 6.5 hours a week, whereas in the Northern Emirates region, which includes Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah, average per week listening activity goes up to 9 hours with a reach of 89%.

The UAE RAM project started with an establishment survey of 17,000 face-to-face interviews across all seven emirates in the UAE, to enable Nielsen to determine population dynamics and ensure its collection of radio data would be balanced and representative. A ‘hybrid diary’ methodology was used for the research, introducing both a traditional paper diary and an innovative electronic diary to respondents, to measure robust information on radio listening. Every quarter, 2,100 people aged 10 and above, representing all nationalities and languages across the emirates, are asked to record their radio listening activities for seven consecutive days. They record their listening in 15-minute time-slots for the entire week in their chosen diary format.

**News in Pictures**

**Sharjah Art Foundation launches platform for filmmaking**

Sharjah Art Foundation has announced the launch of the new Sharjah Film Platform (SFP), an annual programme that will provide a platform for filmmaking in the UAE and the surrounding region. The multi-structured programme will offer film production grants, workshops and discussions as well as curated film screenings and filmmaking awards. SFP launched with an open call for the foundation’s first annual Short Film Production Grant, and online applications from emerging filmmakers were accepted through 28 February 2018. Up to three winners will receive a total of $30,000, and their original films will be screened as part of SFP’s film programme in January 2019. The winners, who will be assessed on the creativity and technical skill demonstrated in their submissions, will be announced in March 2018.

**Advanced Media Trading and Dji recently unveiled the new Mavic Air drone at the Sanad Academy in Dubai’s SkyHub campus.**

This foldable, pocket-portable drone, designed with travellers and outdoor enthusiasts in mind, features a three-axis gimbal-stabilised camera with a 1/2.3” CMOS sensor that shoots 12MP stills and is capable of capturing 4K video at 30 fps that can transfer at speeds up to 100 Mb/s or keep on its 8GB of internal storage.
MBC Group CEO Sam Barnett gives BroadcastPro ME a candid glimpse into the challenges of the past three months and the strategy ahead.

When MBC Group Chairman Sheikh Waleed bin Ibrahim Al Ibrahim was detained along with several other royal members and high-profile businessmen from the Kingdom at the Ritz-Carlton as part of an anti-corruption drive in November, there was only one thing on CEO Sam Barnett’s mind – the show must go on. Waleed was released in January this year, although the terms and conditions of his release remain the subject of speculation.

MBC Group is one of the finer examples of a commercially successful broadcast operation in the MENA region, and it has continued launching a steady stream of new programmes and formats in the new year. Even as we went to press, production was in progress at MBC’s Dubai Studio City facility for The Wall, an Endemol Shine format that the broadcaster has franchised and brought to the region for the first time. The fabulously lit, five-storey pegboard, built to the exact standards of its international counterpart, was assembled in Italy and brought to Dubai.

The Wall launched on MBC 1 on Valentine’s Day, hot on the heels of the Beirut grand finale of The Voice Kids, which crowned 10-year-old Moroccan Hamza Labeid as the winner and drew in an estimated audience of 100m viewers across the region. Anecdotal media stories describe cities across MENA coming to a standstill to watch their young compatriots perform.

Alongside these shows, the broadcaster has several other new initiatives in parallel from Wizzo, its games portal to Goboz, touted as the region’s largest and safest kids’ VOD. MBC also has several original productions lined up for Ramadan on its Shahid Plus platform and is in the process of setting up a disaster recovery facility in Cyprus. Political upheaval has clearly not slowed down the broadcaster.

“It all comes down to content,” says Sam Barnett around 15 minutes into our interview at the broadcaster’s HQ in Dubai Media City.

“There is a lot of talk about structural changes and viewership and platforms, but ultimately, the strength of what we do comes down to our content.”

“There’s no arguing with that approach, as the industry has watched with admiration over the years as the Saudi broadcaster has engaged a growing audience across the region and beyond, with a compelling mix of international and locally produced shows, drama series and more. Recent programme and platform launches, however, come in the face of some unprecedented challenges, the foremost being Sheikh Waleed’s detention at the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton.

This was followed by the more recent announcement that MBC no longer holds the rights to Saudi Professional League football matches, which it had secured as part of a ten-year $1.09 billion deal in 2014. The contract was handed over last month to state-owned Saudi Telecom Group (STC) for a reported $1.8bn by KSA’s General Sports Authority.

In a conference room overlooking a clear winter’s morning over the Palm, Barnett talks about this turn of events.

“The strategy for sports has changed in the Kingdom. When we took the rights in 2014, the idea was to go with the model that worked elsewhere in the world, which was to try and create premium league football, encrypt it and generate pay revenues, which would then feed back to the clubs. They were looking to develop the football sector in Saudi. I think, since then, the environment has changed and the authorities and the Federation want to maintain free-to-air football. Clearly, we had bought the rights on a different model so we were expecting something to change, so we will adapt to that, but this has not necessarily come as a shock to us. We have been in discussion with the authorities now for 18 months on how we navigate this change in strategy. We are still talking, but as is evident from the announcement, there was a clear shift.”

And what happened to the billion-plus dollars offered to purchase the rights?
"That’s still part of the discussion," says Barnett, without elaborating.

A week following Sheikh Waleed’s release, Barnett does not make light of MBC’s ordeal following the detention but stresses the innate resilience of the 26-year-old organisation.

“I challenge you to look at MBC programming prior to November 4 and onwards. You will not spot any difference in our editorial or programming policies. There has been absolute consistency. And when most organisations would have wobbled with their chairman not being accessible, the employees here were robust. The institution is strong; we are cash flow positive and the programming has continued. We have been affected by this, morally and emotionally, and we have been through difficult times, but the work has continued.

“There was a lot of media interest locally and internationally as to whether MBC is in trouble. A few advertisers may have had concerns, but matters have since calmed down when they saw that it was business as usual at MBC. The whole issue cleared up at the right time as advertising budgets are being finalised, and the finale of The Voice Kids and the launch of The Voice are a testimony that all is good and Sheikh Waleed is back.”

While there has also been a lot of speculation in the media about the terms and conditions of Sheikh Waleed’s release, Barnett confidently says: “Sheikh Waleed is out; he has been exonerated of any wrongdoing. He has kept all of his shares and will retain management control of MBC.” He also stresses that “the things that MBC and Sheikh Waleed have been pushing for are aligned with policies in many countries … if this is a Saudi-owned institution, it is one they can be very proud of”. In the meantime, MBC Group has focused on remaining profitable. In 2014, while the rest of the Middle East and South Asia was overwhelmed by glamorous television dramas from Turkey, MBC established O3 Medya in Istanbul to undertake Turkish productions. “When the demand for Turkish drama began to soar, we thought we would hedge our bets by having a production house in Turkey. That has worked very well. Today, we have Antah Watani (The Traitor), which is the number one show in Turkey running on our screens at the moment. We are producing what will be the largest Turkish production ever, which is Sultan Al Fateh.

“Over the years, Arabic drama has also increased in popularity. The production values for drama have improved with the growth in the advertising market and more

“It all comes down to content. There is a lot of talk about structural changes and viewership and platforms, but ultimately, the strength of what we do comes down to our content”

Sam Barnett, CEO, MBC Group
revenue per episode. For Ramadan this year, we have Al Assouf, a Saudi historical drama set in the 1970s, featuring famous Saudi comedian Nasser Al Qassaby. We shot it in Abu Dhabi within the twofoot54 premises, and we are so confident about it being successful that we have already shot Season Two. But production costs money. A Turkish drama episode costs “hundreds of thousands of dollars per episode”, he says. To add to a Middle East broadcaster’s woes, along with the advertising downturn, are the lack of a robust ratings system and tougher laws to counter piracy. “Advertising revenues dropped last year. We will generate the same and tougher laws to counter piracy. “Advertising revenues dropped last year. We will generate the same, and we deserve the advertising budgets. We have been profitable for many years despite the decline in advertising and the shock we received last year.” The measure MBC took, besides actively working with the anti-piracy coalition to bring pirates to book, “For Ramadan this year, we have Al Assouf, a Saudi historical drama set in the 1970s, featuring the famous Saudi comedian Nasser Al Qassaby. We are so confident about it being successful that we have already shot Season Two.”

Sam Barnett, CEO, MBC Group

was to expand into more markets like Africa with more targeted content, thereby attracting more targeted advertising. To do that cost-effectively, it moved to spot beams. “For many years now, we have been reaching out to 40 million people each day, but we only sold advertising for a small percentage of those eyeballs. We sold in the Saudi market and more recently in the Egyptian market, but in North Africa, where we have four of the top ten channels now, there is huge potential. Algeria has the potential to grow significantly, with 37 million people, four million barrels of oil per day and an economy that has a huge amount of pent-up latent demand. Brands will rush in there, but the fact that we were stronger but were not able to generate advertising revenues for that market was a weakness.”

“We had two options. We could go and launch MBC Algeria and MBC Morocco, and try and use the content to attract people away from the main channels. That is quite an expensive strategy. Ultimately, you are competing against your main channels. Like with MBC Max in Egypt, it had to pull people away from MBC 4 and MBC 1. The move was successful, but the point was that it was an expensive way of doing it.” MBC decided to move to spot beams onto 26 degrees East (Arabsat Badr 7), and 7 and 8 degrees West (Eutelsat). This meant it could now have targeted programming and advertising. “If you could use the satellite and essentially divide the feeds into two, then we can use our existing channels to target those in North Africa at the flick of a switch. That is what is happening,” says Barnett. “We are now able to sell North Africa advertisements on those spot feeds. Last year, it was a small number and this year, it will be a bigger number, and in 2019, it will be an even bigger number.” “And over time, and particularly as these markets develop advertising wise, this would have been a good thing to have done. Advertisers want to get data on markets. The point in Saudi is being measured. There is a people meter in Morocco, and in Algeria, it will come as the market develops.”

“The move to Arabsat’s spot beams had its nervous moments, Barnett confesses. The town of Benghazi surprisingly informed Barnett that his gamble had paid off. “We were slightly nervous when we moved to spot beams. We cut our channels off the wide beams and asked everyone to move to the spot beams. It was potentially traumatic: The fact that I am sitting here talking to you confirms that it has worked and that 57 million TV households actually retuned.”

“Claritying how MBC know, Barnett explains: “At the time, we looked at online search trends for MBC frequencies, and we found this massive spike from Benghazi. When we saw that, we knew it had worked. Both the spot beams drop off, and unfortunately, people in Benghazi are outside the coverage. They can still watch MBC, but they need a bigger dish. The sudden massive spike from Benghazi on the search trends, by logical deduction, meant that had Riyadh or Marrakesh faced a problem, there would have been an even bigger spike because of sheer population.”
they do not have rights. Now, they are also taking MBC’s encrypted channels and OSN’s as well. You pay $108 for the box and you get everything free for the first year. I believe it is available in Saudi Arabia and possibly elsewhere. If we cannot tackle piracy, then investing anymore in pay TV will be difficult, because you cannot make a return. We would urge regulators to take a stand to defend intellectual property rights – otherwise we can all pack up and go home. Fortunately, we don’t have a huge exposure within pay and we are not in sports much longer either. Pay is a strategy we may have pursued if there was a clear defence of intellectual property rights.”

Apart from piracy and the threat of FAANG, Barnett’s team is looking at data, the one big lacuna across the regional industry.

“We have undertaken a big data initiative to make up for the lack of quality research in the region. We already have the structures ready for this incoming data that will generate all sorts of growth possibilities.”

Possibly the biggest challenge facing Barnett is demographic, with more than 28% of the Middle East population aged 15-25. The region is also second in the world in terms of daily YouTube video views, with more than 310 million. Broadcasters have to make sure content – and the right sort of content – is reaching younger users and transitioning boomers and Gen X.

Barnett responds by highlighting the flip side of good content – the innate strength of the staff in the organisation, drawn from 65 nationalities.

“Our production teams are drawn from the region and target audiences. If you walk around the building, you will see the diversity. Without that, we could become outdated very quickly. Diversity keeps us young and relevant, but it is also a strategic decision. The last three months have been challenging, but what I saw was a real bond among the people here. We have emerged stronger.”

The political situation around MBC Group and other Saudi organisations remains volatile, with conflicting media reports, but there is no doubting the inherent strength of MBC as we walk past the broadcaster’s bustling offices and studios.

“We will be using technology including data from telcos and people meters. We already have the structures ready for this incoming data that will generate all sorts of growth possibilities.”

The political situation around MBC Group and other Saudi organisations remains volatile, with conflicting media reports, but there is no doubting the inherent strength of MBC as we walk past the broadcaster’s bustling offices and studios. - Supriya Srinivas & Vijaya Cherian

“We have undertaken a big data initiative to make up for the lack of quality research in the region. We already have the structures ready for this incoming data that will generate all sorts of growth possibilities.”

We have emerged stronger.”
You have championed a number of reality-based shows in the region. Why is that?

As a channel working for the South Asian diaspora primarily, we realized that the diaspora here—against their counterparts in Canada, the US and elsewhere—have a closer and stronger attachment to their roots. Our typical pay-TV family audience in the GCC is middle-to-upper-middle class. The parents still see themselves as emigrants even as their children have been exposed to a cosmopolitan environment. While Colors is a popular channel, especially across the ME, were the reality-based dramas, the shows that resonated with our audience, the shows with their glamorous production values.

How did Checkmate come about?

We identified a couple of trends among South Asian families. The emphasis on education as a gateway to a good job remains strong. The parents still see their children as emigrants even as their children have been exposed to a cosmopolitan environment. While Colors is a popular channel, especially across the ME, were the reality-based dramas, the shows that resonated with our audience, the shows with their glamorous production values.

How was this season of Checkmate different from the inaugural edition?

We cast a wider net for this year’s auditions, and based on last year’s success, we got a pool of participants who were a lot more serious and focused on the end game of the show—i.e., the internship—and not just looking at the experience as a chance for being on TV. In terms of rounds, we did away with some challenges that did not work well. For instance, we did away with the creative challenge wherein each participant received a blank canvas with art materials. We introduced a crisis management round this year, with participants responding to questions from our judges in real time. In addition, we have candidates visiting retail stores planning a holiday for a family of four to a tropical country. The challenge calls for optimising budgets, resources within the store, time constraints and taking into account factors such as weather, holiday experiences and so on.

What is the grand prize?

We are offering six-month paid internships with three organisations: RAK Bank, bayut.com and Colors. Six months is long enough for both the winner and the company to decide on a future course of action.

How are you gauging audience engagement for Checkmate, and what is your revenue model?

Regarding the revenue model, we are looking at various innovations. For instance, in Singapore we launched ‘Salaam Namaste’ Singapore with the telco StarHub Ltd as our sponsor.

Do you believe content produced here will travel back to India and elsewhere?

For the present, we will not be telecasting Checkmate in India. We have global rights to all content we commission, so there is always that option.

In India, the channel genres are more sharply defined than here. A show such as Checkmate would not typically air on Colors. It would be part of a different channel. Also, given the kind of money mining on shows produced in India, everything you do has to be on a large scale and cater to a large audience. We do not face similar pressures and that allows us to be more experimental here than in India.

Have overall market conditions provided you with opportunities, or are there challenges?

It has been challenging to hold on to the kind of revenues we generated earlier. Traditional advertisers have cut down their spending both in terms of corporate and retail advertising. We quickly realised that the existing content and channels will only give us diminishing returns, so we essentially shifted gears and started investments in live events and local content.
PROINTERVIEW

“We are looking at a global launch [for Voot] in the next six months. We have identified eight to nine markets where the South Asian diaspora is large enough.”

Sachin Gokhale, Senior VP MEA, APAC for Viacom 18

We needed to come up with newer reasons for advertisers to invest with us, so we took it beyond the 30-second slot and created platforms that allowed the integration of local advertisers with the content produced. While it allows branded to rise above the clutter, it also helped us draw in clients who would not have normally spent money on traditional linear television. As a channel, we are not just offering 100 spots for advertising, we are addressing their marketing needs. In the last 12 months, as much as 30-35% of advertising sales has come from new business initiatives. We are not just competing with traditional big broadcasters, we are up against digital platforms as well. So much of the budget is now being diverted to digital and result-oriented campaigns. As a channel, we need to keep ourselves relevant. Otherwise, our base will erode.

What are your plans for 2018? We hope to take our India-based AVOD service, Voot, internationally over the next six months as a subscription model. Subscribers here will then have 15–40,000 hours of content available that will be refreshed daily. “That is where we want to be, but we will get there step by step. We do not want to cannibalise existing businesses, but we do want to reach consumers that are not watching our linear channels. We are looking at the right mix. There are questions we are addressing at the moment. While Voot in India does not carry channels, should it do so internationally? What should the subscription mode be?” Should it be available as an app or on Google Store, or should it be made available through local telcos? It will differ from market to market. We are looking at a global launch in the next six months. We have identified eight to nine markets where the South Asian diaspora is large enough, with purchasing power. Is the introduction of Voot part of the B2C strategy you referred to at the BroadcastPro Summit? Voot is one of them. Content owners now have access to consumers directly, in terms of knowing what they are consuming. We do not have to rely on just TV ratings. By posting on social media, we can mine far richer insights into our viewers. In India, we post up a post about a show and we get 2,000 comments immediately that can give us working insights into what the audience is expecting.

As a content owner or broadcaster, I can have my big stars do a session on Facebook Live. Earlier, people would wait for that one press conference with the star; today, you can have city-specific engagements via the digital route. The initial exponential growth that we enjoyed in the first few years has settled. Our challenge going forward is to stay ahead and above all remain relevant to our audience.

Checkmate – Hunt for the Smartest Young Executive in the Middle East

The 14-episode South Asian local TV show Checkmate – Hunt for the Smartest Young Executive in the Middle East, new in its second season, premiered last month on Colors TV. Through an eight-week course, 16 young men and women selected during auditions in December 2017 are put through seven real-life business challenges and tasks to evaluate them as a team and as individuals in their ability to deal with stress, decision-making, marketing, creative thinking, team spirit, time management and providing solutions to the challenges thrown at them. Each episode is judged by a senior professional from that field of business.
With his debut feature film Camera garnering positive reviews and awards, Emirati filmmaker Abdullah Aljunaibi speaks to Supriya Srinivas about his ambitions to make Arab films with universal appeal.

The film Camera remained a synopsis for 10 years as Emirati filmmaker Abdullah Aljunaibi knocked on the doors of government and private entities for financing. In early 2017, a chance meeting with a Dubai real estate developer, Dr Faisal Al Mousa of FAM Holdings, turned things around. “After 10 long years, it took just 10 minutes for me to explain the idea of Camera to him and for him to agree to offer $1 million. I left my full-time job as director for Dubai TV and started work on my first feature film.”

Tapping into the mainstream genre of psychological thrillers, Camera revolves around a road trip among friends that turns into a bloody tale of survival. Asked why he financed the movie, Dr Al Mousa says: “The movie industry in the UAE is still very young, with no sustainable model for production. The country offers all the infrastructure from technology and studios to local talent, so why not make movies? Movie-making is big business around the world and we want to be leaders in this industry.”

For Camera to be part of the Muhr Awards at the 2017 Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), Aljunaibi had to complete the movie at a punishing pace. “I took a month to prepare my actors. I finished the shoot in 21 days in April and took three months for post-production,” he recounts. The harsh shooting conditions in the desert and the rigours of 24/7 post-production paid off as he walked up to applause to receive the Muhr award for Best Emirati Director at DIFF 2017. When a fatigued but happy Aljunaibi spoke to BroadcastPro ME on the sidelines of the festival, he said he spent most of the $1 million on equipment, makeup and post-production. His no-compromise approach to quality has paid further dividends, with Camera poised for commercial release Gulf-wide. “I got top-of-the-class equipment from one of Dubai’s largest cinema equipment rental houses, Gamma Engineering. I respect the audience that takes the trouble to travel to the cinema halls and pay for a cinema ticket. I am happy to say this is one of the few Arabic films with cinematic quality of international standards.”

Aljunaibi’s Director of Photography, Hani Alsaadawi,
“With daytime temperatures often touching 50 degrees … the call time for crew and equipment was 4am”

Director of Photography
Hani Alsaadawi

describes that particular shot in detail and the rigorous production shoot that spanned 21 days (see box: Shooting in the Mleiha desert).

Aljunaibi’s exacting standards extended to sound as well: “Every single sound you hear in the film was dubbed. While sound on the set was recorded for reference, every sound from the cut of a knife to a step in the desert was created in the studio. This was a practical decision as well, considering I could not control natural elements or an overhead plane during a shoot in the mountains and the desert. It helped speed up shooting as well, because 70% of retakes are generally because of faulty sound recording.”

Music composer Marcel Lteif and sound designer Gerrit Genis from Dubai production house I Am We Productions describe the challenges of creating every sound and scoring the music for Camera (see box: How we created sound and music for Camera).

The demanding approach to production was matched by an extraordinary urge to tell a story that began when a teenage Aljunaibi watched Bollywood films in an open-air theatre in Abu Dhabi. “I was driving a taxi to support my family and would watch Bollywood films while I waited to ferry audience members home. From Amjad Khan to Amitabh Bachchan, I have watched every film of the 1970s and I soon began to feel the urge to weave my own stories into films.”

A chance opportunity to be part of a production team for a Jordanian art director allowed the “boy who loved movies to become the man who creates movies”. “While I have directed more than 3,000 hours of events for Dubai TV, including the opening and closing ceremonies of previous editions of DIFF, Camera is my first feature film. I had made six shorts prior to this film.”

Described as a psychological thriller, Camera is about a group of friends who discover an abandoned mobile phone in the desert, let their curiosity get the best of them and play what the camera recorded. It shows another group going on a road trip that quickly turns into a bloody tale of survival.

A Screen International review gives Aljunaibi the thumbs-up for his debut feature: “Violent Emirati genre films tend to be thin on the ground. Abdullah Aljunaibi’s debut feature film Camera is punctuated by some nicely stylised moments of tension and violence and makes impressive use of its desert locations. Luckily
Produced, the film is a bold attempt to tap into a mainstream genre.”

Filmmaking is not just about the art for Aljunaibi, it is a mission, he asserts.

“Camera is about youth finding a sense of direction and purpose.”

The three official hats of director, actor and mentor of fresh new actors at Lighty on Aljunaibi. He won the Best Director Award at DIFF for his 2012 short film The Path, and as an actor, he appeared in Toby Hooper's 2013 UAE-shot horror film 314.

He believes mentoring new actors is intrinsic to his mission to help build a stable film industry in the UAE, and that Emirates filmmakers are held back by the three red lines of sex, religion and politics.

“I will respect you if you cross that line, but you need to prove to me that it is justified and that it makes your movie stronger.”

As director, he believes in teamwork.

“I don’t know everything. I have the vision and the idea, and then I learn everything to the right person. My DP Hani is incredibly talented. He was like my eyes, translating my vision to reality. A lot of credit of bringing Camera to life goes to him. My audio directors Marcel and Gerrit showed me that when you work hard, you get a great product—and lastly, I have to thank Dr Faisal. Building towers is simple, helping build a society is tough.”

The film went 50% over budget, with Aljunaibi having to put in an additional $850,000 to complete it, and the process did bring a bit of tension to the Aljunaibi household. But it was worth it, he said.

“When my wife watched the screening at DIFF and experienced the overwhelming response from the audience, her smile of appreciation was my biggest reward.”

Other than a Gulf-wide release, Aljunaibi will be getting the film dubbed into Tamil, Urdu, German and Dutch and release it in India, Germany and the Netherlands.

With an ambition to make 10 features in the next five years, Aljunaibi is keen to make Arab films with an international appeal.

“I am not interested in making a film about an Emirati camel rider and his problems. Just as the theme of Camera is universal, I am keen on making Arab films that will find universal appeal. I saw that clearly at the DIFF screening where I had an international audience relate to the film.”

“While the dubbing was not done in our studio, it was polished in terms of syncing, mixing and so on. I did the music composition using Cubase 9.5, while Gerrit did the sound design. For this movie, there were two specific timelines. One related to the past when the killing took place that the protagonists watch on the phone, and the second timeline was the present. While we kept the present ambient-driven, playing on silence, the past was tension-driven. Given the genre of the movie, our music was based on creative tension—for instance, for the villain we created an ominous aura through the use of Shepard tones with an endless loop of a screaming sound.

“Given the tight schedule, I would sketch the music as soon as I would get an edit. Both Gerrit and I kept sketching and revising the music, which helped build a society is tough.”

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THE STORYTELLER AND THE CAMERA

Award-winning filmmakers and a celebrity YouTuber join the Canon panel to discuss factors that determine their choice of camera.

An estimated 28% of the Middle East population is aged between 15 and 29, which represents over 108 million young people. Four in ten MENA residents watch videos online daily, and the region is ranked second in the world by the number of daily YouTube video views. In addition to this, mobile watch time in the MENA region is one of the fastest growing in the world, rising by 90% year on year.

Vijaya Cherian, Editor of BroadcastPro Middle East and moderator of the panel, Nayla Al Khaja, film director and producer, Reshelt Shah, independent documentary film director and senior film lecturer at SAE Dubai; Paul Atkinson, Product Specialist at Canon Europe for professional video and cinema EOS cameras; Jovan John, winner of the Dubai 48 Hour Film Project Project, and Lowi Sahi, celebrity YouTuber.

From left: Vijaya Cherian, Editor of BroadcastPro Middle East and moderator of the panel, Nayla Al Khaja, film director and producer, Reshelt Shah, independent documentary film director and senior film lecturer at SAE Dubai; Paul Atkinson, Product Specialist at Canon Europe for professional video and cinema EOS cameras; Jovan John, winner of the Dubai 48 Hour Film Project Project, and Lowi Sahi, celebrity YouTuber.

“Big cameras can intimidate people, especially when filming documentaries in villages in India, observed Reshelt Shah. “What factors determine your choice of camera and how have your choices evolved with time?” Vijaya asked the panelists.

Responding to the moderator with a nostalgic look at the simpler era of 35mm film, when there were fewer choices, Nayla Al Khaja outlined her approach to selecting a camera. “When the DSLRs came into the market, it was such a sensation, it revolutionised filmmaking. People began making home videos that didn’t look like home videos any more. There was a slickness, a depth of colour and features that allowed for freedom of expression and creativity. "If I am filming content for YouTube or social media where I have limited resources and limited access to gear, I would use entry-level equipment that is lightweight, and one that has a flip screen. But if I’m doing a high-end TV commercial or a narrative film that needs to look like it had more production value attached to it, I would go for high-end cameras that offer superior image quality both in terms of dynamic range and colour reproduction, among other aspects. Content and the platform determine the kind of gear I would use and, of course, the budget. Sometimes the variety available today can confuse budding filmmakers.”

Documentary filmmaker and senior film lecturer Reshelt Shah highlighted the empowering aspect of technology, given the sheer affordability of cameras. “The DSLR revolution made filmmaking more affordable for us, especially with low-budget productions. If I want to make a film for social media or a small budget film, I’m going to go with a good camera that offers full frame, high-resolution image capture, while being easy to handle. For my documentary features, I tend to film in India, generally in the villages. I cannot afford to take a big camera – it would intimidate people.” Al Khaja interjected here to recall a film shoot with Reshelt in Oman. “We were carrying this big camera in Oman. People thought we were holding a machine gun and started running away.”

When wielding a big camera, people also think that you have more money, Shah observed. “Cameras need to be easy to handle, while also giving us the depth and the colour we require. For documentaries especially, the ISO must be high because lighting conditions are often low.”

Is there one camera that caters to all sorts of production needs, Paul Atkinson from Canon was asked. “Ideally, you have to record for high-end productions. If you are shooting on a smartphone and project it onto the big screen. You have an entire range of cameras, and it really depends on how you end up using that footage. What has surprised people the most is when they discovered that really high-end footage is sometimes being shot on DSLRs. That was the genesis of the whole C300 camera in 2011, which was designed to meet the demanding needs of modern moviemaking,” Atkinson explained. Among the most demanding of film productions is the annual 48 Hour Film Project, sponsored by Canon Middle East this year. In the recently concluded Dubai edition of the competition, Jovan John’s team and 28 other teams were supported during the 48-hour shooting period by Canon with equipment and services including camera loans, checking, cleaning and cinematography workshops. Flexibility with price and technology is key, explained advertiser-turned-filmmaker Jovan, founder of Dubai media company Likewater Media. “As content creators and filmmakers, we are always on the lookout for flexibility in terms of price and technology. We use equipment that is appropriate for the medium, and it is great to know that if you have a vision in your mind, there is appropriate equipment to help you execute that vision.”

For the 48 Hour Film Project, the organisers gave us a basic outline and we went on to develop it. It was comforting to know that there was a technical crew on standby to make sure everything was in order. If anything went wrong, we could always go to them.”

Iraqi vlogger Lowi Sahi revealed that his online journey began when he responded in 2015 to a dying fan’s request to ‘bring’ Dubai to her. His weekly vlogging currently stands at more than 500 videos, with Sahi garnering a whopping 1.2 million YouTube subscribers.

“Documentary filmmaker Reshelt Shah speaking at the Dubai Film Festival panel. (Photo: Courtesy)”

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His skilled video productions are a far cry from the out-of-the-bedroom videos normally associated with vloggers, indicating he is technically savvy. According to Sahi, it is the 7D that changed the game on social media. “It was one of the first cameras you could flip the screen, and suddenly, I had the power to talk and film. This camera was my route to vlogging, and not just for me but for a global community of vloggers. The Powershot G7 X also has an incredible quality to it, and I felt I could shoot from the mountains to the water and nothing ever happened to the camera. Now it is on my wall. I have framed it because I made 500 videos with it, and somebody else who has spent three years on one film has not had more than 100 people watch their film in the theatre. Then the question is, what is the right trend or direction to follow?"

Sponsored equipment is an asset and needs to be included in the budget, said Nayla Al Khaja. “Content and the platform determine the kind of gear I would use” Nayla Al Khaja, Emirati film director and producer platform for which it is being shot.” Creating a video for online subscribers is significantly different from shooting for the big screen, Nayla Al Khaja observed, citing the example of her experience shooting Malal, a story about arranged marriages in India. As Canon’s ambassador, she has also had the opportunity to try a range of the vendor’s cameras. “I have had the privilege of curating different cameras for different needs, whether it’s a high-end or a point-and-shoot kind of camera. Maybe Sahi has one million people watching one of his vlogs, and somebody else who has cost and how much my time should also be considered.”

People are most surprised when they discover that really high-end footage is sometimes being shot on DSLRs, observed Paul Atkinson. “In my specific field, I think working with a DoP works best. We look at the story and what the scene demands. Is it a scene in a little room, or on a mountain top? Whatever the scene may be, the DoP will then come to me and say this is the gear we need, and these are the accessories we need to create that scene you envision as a director. “It becomes a dialogue between the DoP and me. In the film business, you can’t have a one-man show as you would if you were shooting for social media. With Malal, we had a crew of 82 people. It was a huge undertaking. Of course, with the flexibility of social media and YouTube, you have great examples such as Casey Neistat, who have developed their own identity by creating content that is riveting. These are very interesting times.” The discussion then turned to how equipment has evolved over the years, and Atkinson used this opportunity to point out that compact cameras and a few features like auto focus were gaining more traction with content creators. Commenting on autofocus, an innovation described as a paradigm shift in terms of efficiency and accuracy, Atkinson observed: “You’ll find that technology is making tools smaller. A feature such as autofocus for my generation, was unheard of. It started with DSLRs, but it is now used in cinema cameras and is a feature that you can actually trust and use. It’s called CMOS dual-pixel auto focus, which is very fast, very efficient, very effective and it can be trusted. “It’s changing perceptions by giving filmmakers another tool. The downside, of course, is if you have a really usable autofocus, do you need a focus point? When you come to things like news gathering, people want something as small as possible. All cameras are now being developed with minimal build and a single shooter in mind. In newsgathering, it’s a feature that you can actually position yourselves, compose yourselves and start recording the news.”

“A few months ago, my DoP and I and the on-location sound recordist went to Ajman and took a DSLR and a tripod with us. We filmed a seven-minute short film and our budget was approximately $112. With the markets changing and budgets getting tighter, smaller teams for documentaries really help, and the gear has kept pace with our needs.”

Al Khaja at this point gave us a reality check and cautioned that people who were receiving equipment free of charge were often forgetting to budget in the price of gear. “When someone gives you something that’s sponsored, that’s an asset. But you have to remember to plug that number in, because it’s not a reality. When you go out there with the bigger players for distribution, such as Netflix, everything is going to translate to a proper number. It’s very important for us to train ourselves and understand the cost of the assets we have, whether it’s sponsored equipment or not. Time is just as valuable. When I’m doing the budget, I actually include how much the equipment would have cost and how much my time is worth, so when someone says they did a shoot with $12 or $136, time should also be considered.”

On the challenging transition from a non-commercial social media enthusiast to the owner of a production house, Sahi gave us an insight into the adjustments he made along the way. “When I switched from vlogging to be the director of my own

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production house, I started to ask myself what I should pay myself. What do I put on the quotation? My brother helped me and brought a list of what production companies charge for. I saw ten jobs that I personally do, including being the DoP, director, the storyboard artist, colourist and the administrator sending emails.

"While the industry is changing and budgets are lower, and brands are focusing on social media, we don’t want to expand too much, to allow us to stay at a price range that can benefit the companies. We produce more and we produce quickly, and it’s all about networking in our field. If I had to hire someone, it would be an extra DoP for sure.

"As a YouTuber, the quality is usually not that important either. At the end of the day, it is the message you want to put forward."

Drawing on her experience as a lecturer at SAE in Dubai, Reshel Shah seconded the need to stay focused on the content.

"We tell our students that it is all about content – what you’re trying to show and what the message is. While the need to be a one-man crew is what the current economy demands, personally I will never be a DoP! It is not who I am. I am a film director and film producer of documentaries. I need my DoP with me, I need his advice. That’s why he is always there with me and explains to me why those cameras are not as small as my palm, with the size would be a huge deciding factor.

Also, as a YouTuber I used to film everyday for two years, which we did not have earlier. Now we have in-flight WiFi, which we did not have earlier. Also, as a YouTuber I used to film every day for two years, which meant battery life was crucial and robust cameras are essential."  

Turning to his fellow panellists, who have taken the more traditional route towards creating content through feature films and documentaries, Sahi suggested more collaboration. “As content creators for social media, I don’t believe our intention is to take over the cinema and the documentary side of content creation. I believe there is huge potential if we collaborate and create content for online platforms such as Netflix and others.”

"As content creators and filmmakers, we are looking for flexibility in terms of price and technology"  
Jovan John, founder of Dubai media company Likewater Media

helps increase viewership by 25%, because a lot of people don’t listen, they read the content."  

The hour-long discussion, which touched upon several topics including the first cameras of the panelists and how they slowly started to pick and choose their equipment over the years, finally concluded with the moderator asking the participants what their dream camera would look like.

Ali Khaja pointed out that for her, "A camera that is not obtrusive and doesn’t look like a machine gun. Service and support are very important, and that is the only way any brand can move forward. Just putting a product in front of you is not going to do much, especially if you are looking for long-term users. I think that as part of the 48 Hour Film Project, we definitely got that."

"I would go completely off the ball," commented Atkinson, "and have a camera with very fine film as well as a digital sensor. That would be my dream camera, but it will not be the size of your hand. Realistically, my dream camera already exists."

"I am very happy with the cameras I have," Sahi observed, adding that on social media, the ease with which you can reach your audience is more critical. He recalled a recent segment he filmed aboard an Emirates A380. “Now we have in-flight WiFi, which we did not have earlier. Also, as a YouTuber I used to film every day for two years, which meant battery life was crucial and robust cameras are essential."

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Every year, the stakes keep getting higher with live sport. Viewers want better quality and more choices, more perspectives on several different devices, and all the fanfare and social engagement that comes with a live event. While the demands for viewing live sport have gradually increased, shrinking budgets have compelled broadcasters to look at technological alternatives that offer more for less.

This is where remote production is being touted as the single biggest disruption that has changed the dynamics of producing live sport, promising to cut costs while offering a lot more flexibility to make available several different perspectives of a game for multiple platforms.

BroadcastPro Middle East had the exclusive opportunity to witness how remote production changed the game at the Australian Open tennis tournament last month for local broadcaster, Seven Network, the unilateral rights holder for the event, and its main technology partner, Gearhouse Broadcast.

Gearhouse had been Seven's primary technology partner in covering the Australian Open in previous years. Seven wanted to keep up with technology while maintaining the same quality, if not higher, of broadcast as it had in past years, and Gearhouse catered to this by bringing remote production to the table – a solution that proved to be a win-win for both entities.

Seven Network's decision to go remote meant it needed only limited crew on-site. The rest were stationed off-site at a remote broadcast centre (RBC) that Gearhouse assembled at another location in Melbourne, where security, catering and other logistics were much simpler.

“The cost of footprint at major events is very expensive,” explains Ian Stokes, Broadcast Engineer at Gearhouse Broadcast Australia and one of the key people that oversaw the RBC deployment in Melbourne. “Our mandate was to create the infrastructure that would enable the domestic broadcaster to match what they traditionally did on-site, while keeping costs down.”

To put things in perspective, Seven Network, in addition to being the unilateral rights holder for the Australian Open, also holds the broadcast rights in Australia for the Winter Olympics, for which Gearhouse has provided a remote production facility. In previous years, a flyaway kit was stationed at Melbourne Olympic Park – the main site of the action – and all operational staff worked from there.

The RBC, by comparison, opened the doors for experimentation with more feeds and additional streams for OTT platforms. Remote production promised to remove the bottlenecks that are typical in a live production workflow and let the client deliver more live content with better quality for less.

“We were operating between three sites – Melbourne Olympic Park, the site of the action; Seven Network’s Broadcast Centre Melbourne (BCM), and the remote broadcast centre,” explains Stokes.

“The Melbourne Olympic Park remote site is what we built the overarching architecture for. There were multiple feeds going back and forth between the different sites. We had

GRAND SLAM TENNIS GOES REMOTE

When 35-year-old Roger Federer won the Australian Open, his first in five years, BroadcastPro ME had a ringside view of the remote production that moved an incredible 86 signals around Melbourne on a self-managed dark fibre. Vijaya Cherian travelled to Melbourne to speak to the teams at Gearhouse Broadcast and Net Insight on how they facilitated remote production for rights holder, Seven Network.
more than 50 HD-SDI feeds leaving Melbourne Olympic Park, all with 16 channels of embedded audio, over 200 audio channels over eight MAUI feeds, and eight data networks as well as a monitored 10G network. All these signals landed at the RBC, with the majority also landing at Seven’s BCM.

“Additionally, there were 14 SDI paths out of the RBC landing at both Melbourne Olympic Park and BCM, and 12 SDI paths out of BCM landing at both of the other sites. All of the network signals were available at all three sites. Overall, there were around 90 SDI feeds between the three sites on the diverse fibre.”

The sheer volume of feeds going between the three different centres across Melbourne needed to be managed efficiently, and this could not have been done without a third partner, someone who understood remote production well. This is where Net Insight entered the picture, with its Nimbra solution. “With Net Insight as a partner, we created the first operational remote broadcast centre in Australia for an event that exceeds all other events by feed count done annually,” explains Gavin Romanis, Business Development Director at Gearhouse Broadcast Australia, who pitched remote production to Seven. “We had done a proof of concept with Net Insight and Techtel, their local distributor, previously. When this partnership came about, we specified our needs to them, and they worked out how to get those amount of feeds down a very small amount of fibre using JPEGL2000 (J2K), Ethernet tunnels, uncompressed, MAUI and so on. “Gearhouse can provide a solution for outside broadcast, but we are not a telco and do not traditionally do telco interconnects. But with the Net Insight and Techtel partnership, we knew they had the backbone. Essentially we do the OBs and they do the fibre infrastructure. We are also the first non-telco in the broadcast domain to self-manage a dark fibre that was leased as a per-event use. The achievement was the process of moving 96 signals around Melbourne on a self-managed dark fibre.”

As a result, Net Insight’s Nimbra 688 modular platform was deployed across the various sites. This multi-service networking platform enables real-time media transport over standard telecoms infrastructure. Its multi-service capabilities enable the bi-directional transport of JPEGL2000, IMX-4 and 4K Ultra HD video formats, as well as IP data and native audio in a one-box solution. IP connectivity is used for equipment control, while audio production can be facilitated regardless of whether the audio production workflow requires discrete or embedded audio. Bi-directional video is required in remote production to backhaul the produced feed to the venue for monitoring. Data links can be set up between the broadcast facility and the remote venue to support remote equipment control, including camera control, audio control and tally. Nimbra addresses the three most significant challenges, crucial in any remote production environment: latency, bandwidth efficiency and synchronicity. The solution uses J2K compression to provide high-quality compression with low latency. An HD-SDI feed can typically be compressed down to between 120 and 150Mbps without any visual impairment, while maintaining end-to-end latency within the requirements set for remote production. “Showing the benefit of the solution, Olle Waktel, VP Sales – Net Insight, says the J2K compression “reduces bandwidth by 90%.”

“The critical thing about J2K is that it gives you that perfect level of compression with only a two-frame latency. In essence, it touches that sweet spot between two-frames latency and 90% compression. With uncompressed files, you may get even lower latency but you consume ten times the bandwidth and it’s economically not justifiable. “The built-in J2K codec means broadcasters don’t just save on bandwidth costs but can bring in more camera feeds from the venue. Because it sustains video quality, even after multiple encoding/decoding iterations, J2K distinguishes itself from other compression technologies such as MPEG-4. This makes the technology well-suited for production.”

“I know of challenges Gearhouse faced was synchronisation, explains Stokes. “We used a mix of J2K and uncompressed encoding. We needed to factor in that the host broadcaster was running plain cameras, virtual cameras, clean feeds, dirty feeds and virtual feeds, and all of them had a different timing associated with them. We worked to use delay within our system to bring the audio in at the front end of the system, to ensure it filtered in correctly.”

Here, Waktel steps in to add that Nimbra “provides a reliable synchronous transport, so all signals go through the system just like they are all in their own private fibre. So there is no conflict between the signals, no overloading and no packet loss. You get exactly the same low latency for all signals. It is a super reliable low-latency solution.”

He adds that the 20-year-old company has been built on the Nimbra platform. “The solution has evolved over the years. Two of the biggest challenges were customers have had are bandwidth and latency, and this solution has addressed both successfully.”

Nimbra transports all media services completely synchronised, even over packet-based infrastructures, meaning all audio and video feeds were in perfect sync, even as feeds traversed different paths over the network. Nimbra does this by putting a timestamp on each video frame that leaves the venue. At the destination, this enables Nimbra to play out each video feed in perfect frame alignment and facilitates clean switching in the studio facility of both video and embedded audio.

To avoid frame slips or repeats, as well as maintain the lowest possible end-to-end delay, the solution can also be used to extend the studio clock domain to the equipment at the remote venue. Any video interface on the remote Nimbra equipment can be used to output a genlock signal that operates off the central studio clock.

Net Insight says data transport over Nimbra has the same quality of service properties as live video transport. This enables broadcasters to use the solution to extend office telecoms, VoIP and other office applications to the remote venue. “I think this event provided us with
PROSPORT

Unlike the GCC, where most teleport services are owned by large government entities or telcos, private teleport facilities seem to be the norm in other countries. BroadcastPro ME had the opportunity to visit Sydney Teleport Services, a privately owned small-to-medium business operation in Sydney, which has provided broadcast services for several sports events in recent months including beach volleyball, water sports, yachting and surfing.

Owned and managed by Scott Jenkins and Marrianne Skinner, Sydney Teleport uses Nimbra extensively for data, audio and video signal transport. The Nimbra MSR network deployed at the facility creates a reliable long-distance network, via intercontinental diverse layer three IP links. The current Nimbra network enables on-demand transport of video and layer two Ethernet services between the US, the UK, New Zealand and Sydney.

"We serve as a courier company for signals; we pick up the signals for venues of POPs overseas or take them from here and send them overseas," explains Jenkins. "When we first kicked off, we were more of a satellite teleport. But now, we tend to have more fibre available because it has become more cost-effective. Satellite is also becoming more cost-effective, so we have supports of Net Insight and Teltranz. Nimbra served as the product that was effectively the bridge between remote production working and not working. We had the dark fibre and we had all the facility here, but we had no way of putting the signals onto the fibre without Nimbra. This essentially made the project a viable option."

Romaniis is clear that the main reason people want to go remote is "because they are enticed by the savings they could potentially realise."

However, he cautions that "those savings are only viable if you have a transmission path – whether it is fibre, dark fibre or PMP, that makes it cost-effective".

"As soon as your transmission path increases in pricing, it negates any savings you would have made by not flying in staff, and that is a big challenge."

With this project, we have not only proved that we can handle remote production, but we are identifying to the market that there are alternative ways of producing live sport successfully if existing production equipment and technology are supported."

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A visit to Sydney Teleport Services

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We recently had the opportunity to play around with Blackmagic Design’s DaVinci Resolve 14, and are thrilled that users can get the best of both worlds when it comes to audio and video. It makes a mark in the market as an all-in-one solution, and editors, colour graders and audio engineers now have all the necessary tools right at their fingertips. With the addition of Fairlight Audio and the new collaboration features, a project can be worked on by editors, colour graders and audio engineers simultaneously, speeding up workflows and providing great efficiency.

Additionally, with this release, Blackmagic Design has revamped the playback engine of DaVinci Resolve, making it 10 times faster and giving users better support for CPU threading, GPU pipelining, lower latency and much faster UI refresh rates. We tested out the new version of Resolve on two different workstations to see exactly how well the new playback engine performs on different specifications.

The first workstation was a HP ZBook 15. This workstation has a 4GB NVIDIA graphics card and 56GB RAM. With the previous version 12.5 of DaVinci Resolve, from time to time there would be a slight playback lag on heavy RAW video formats such as those from RED cameras. With the new playback engine, however, we noticed significant improvement in playback, especially with heavier video formats. We noticed a change in speed during playback, and when scrubbing through the timeline. Users can be assured that whether they are working on a desktop or a portable workstation, there will be no interruptions in their workflow.

New UI features

Upon starting the program, users will instantly notice a change within the project manager, which has a new sleek design with the databases to the left detailing the users. On the right-hand side are all the available projects for the chosen user. This design provides a user-friendly and straightforward layout, making it less intimidating for first-time users.

Once the program opens, the addition of the Fairlight Audio page is hard to miss on the bottom pages panel, located between the Colour page and the Deliver page. Blackmagic Design keeps a traditional workflow in mind, as users usually edit, grade and then move on to audio before outputting the media. Project Settings also has new additions which offer more flexibility and room to experiment. Users now have the ability to set timeline frame rates up to 120fps, and can even set custom resolutions all the way up to 16,000x16,000, for maximum flexibility on projects. Another useful feature is the ability to save custom layouts – you can organise your workspace as needed and save the layout as a preset. This is ideal, especially since you can then export the preset and use it on other systems with DaVinci Resolve 14.

The timeline comes with new additions that allow for a cleaner, more concise workflow. The Media page has some important new features that make working in DaVinci Resolve easier. Users now have the ability to unmount drives directly in the Media page, where previously they had to open Media Storage in the Preferences menu.

Another new addition is the Undo History window. This function is a lifesaver, as users don’t have to spend time clicking the undo button and hoping they find what they lost; now they can simply open Undo History and select the point they need to go back to. Working on a complicated project, one often wastes a lot of time going back on project saves to find the version needed. This feature totally eliminates that pain.

Users can set custom resolutions all the way up to 16,000x16,000… for maximum flexibility on projects

Teneille Saayman and Nina Sargsyan, Fat Brothers Films

“Users can set custom resolutions all the way up to 16,000x16,000… for maximum flexibility on projects”
With Fairlight you can record on multi-channels, edit, mix and master audio as needed, and there is no longer a need to leave Resolve”

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to track colour. What made this process faster is that whatever clip you drag onto the Timeline takes on the colour of that track, making it easier to navigate the Timeline and place clips. This feature is a handy tool speeding up workflow and communication between editors, as well as Timeline organisation.

Another much needed feature is the Position Lock tool. This allows the user to lock clips and prevent them from being moved or tampered with by accident. Different from the typical lock button available on each track, the Track Lock tool button locks the entire track. The Position Lock, however, locks the clips into their specified positions. This way a clip can’t be moved, or even positioned onto another track.

New Marker upgrade

One of the most important upgrades is the New Marker feature. In DaVinci Resolve 14, users now have marker information overlaid in the Source Viewer for that clip. This way, whatever important notes you have are available to you directly.

The addition of the Duration Marker gives users the ability to mark sections of a clip they deem important or simply want to keep as a backup. All they have to do is set In and Out points in the desired section of the clip in the Source Viewer, right-click the section and choose ‘Create In and Out to Duration Marker’. Resolve automatically registers these markers as cues; users then have access to them in the Media Pool. This new feature works wonders, as one is never satisfied with just one cut from a take. Instead of spending time noting down cut points, you can just make a Duration Marker and have Resolve do all the work for you.

Trim, Effects and Source Viewer upgrades

Users now have a highly efficient and much needed powerful upgrade, and have the ability to edit multiple clips at once in the Timeline. We’ve all had an edit that required a few clips to be trimmed together at once, either by a few frames or by a few seconds. The Effects tab on the Edit page now features Resolve FX, previously only available on the Colour page. Users now have the ability to add effects such as Lens Flares, Camera Stabilisers and even colour-related effects such as Contrast Pop.

This gives them the freedom to manipulate certain parameters of a clip without leaving the Edit page. Lastly, Blackmagic has added the ability to drag either audio or video from the Source Viewer onto the Timeline. For Premiere Pro users, this was always a very handy feature, and now having it available in Resolve is ideal.

Revised Colour page and Resolve FX

The Colour page in DaVinci Resolve has received great updates to previous features. For starters, the Tracker palette has an upgraded Stabiliser with three different methods of stabilising, each with its own unique advantage. However, users can always switch back to the old Stabiliser.

Resolve FX

With DaVinci Resolve 14, users are given over 20 new CPU and GPU effects. The Effects tab has now been restructured into categories, making it easier to look for effects. While all the new plug-ins are amazing, a few stand out for their versatility and efficiency. Face Refinement is a GPU-accelerated plug-in giving users the ability to track a subject’s face and smoothen skin, re-touch lips and eyes, and even add colour to cheeks. Resolve creates a mask around the face which you can then adjust as needed. This plug-in came in handy recently on a project that required the subject’s face to be completely isolated and needed additional lighting. Usually, we would go through the process of making a window in Resolve, then track the window. However, with this tool we were able to track the features and add the extra lighting and grading required, completely separate from the background, thus completing isolating, tracking and grading in record-breaking time.

While users of the Studio version have access to all the new effects, users with the free version have a limited number of them.

Mini panel upgrades

The Mini panel has a few new upgrades which make it more practical to use. LCDs and button backlights now have a dimming option available in the settings. Holding down the Reset button resets the entire node. Users can use the PREV/NEXT frame buttons to go to the In and Out points of a clip simply by pressing and holding the button down.

Fairlight Audio

This release of DaVinci Resolve 14 comes with a phenomenal new update, the addition of Fairlight Audio. Fairlight Audio was once only available in high-end facilities and is designed specifically for film and TV post-production. Now, however, it’s available for all Resolve users.

Blackmagic has made the integration of Fairlight with the rest of DaVinci Resolve as smooth as possible. When over-riding your Fairlight FX into QuickTime from the Edit page to the Fairlight page, the play head is in the same spot. Furthermore, any changes made to the audio in the Edit page are directly mirrored in the Fairlight page. In the Fairlight page, users have the option to open a Mixer with a channel strip for each track, and each channel strip has its own equalizer, pan options and dynamics processing.

Once you select a channel strip in the Timeline, it is highlighted in the mixer, and vice versa. The equalizer opens up to six-band parametric equalizer, which allows you to precisely adjust the quality and character of the sound. Users with the Blackmagic Fairlight PCIe Audio Accelerator can get up to a thousand tracks with real-time parametric equaliser, dynamics and effects; other users get around 60 tracks.

The Bussing architecture in Fairlight gives users the ability to easily create a new bus. A bus in audio is essentially a destination channel, to which you route multiple audio feeds. They are then mixed together into a single signal which can be controlled via a single channel strip. The Bus Assign window lets users select tracks for output for the new bus; once assigned, the new bus appears in the meters.

DaVinci Resolve 14 has support for up to 450 outputs, which can then be routed to 16 different sets of multi-channel speaker systems for monitoring. The Effects Library has VST audio plug-ins – you can drag the effects onto individual audio clips in the Timeline, or onto the entire audio strip.

Fairlight Audio is an excellent addition to the DaVinci Resolve Suite. With Fairlight you can record on multi-channels, edit, mix and master audio as needed, and you no longer need to leave Resolve.

Deliver

The Deliver page in DaVinci Resolve 14 has a few small but powerful new upgrades. Users have new options in the Custom settings, and QuickTime Format now features Grass Valley HQ and Grass Valley HX codec support, ideal for maintaining quality when re-encoding. QuickTime also has a new ‘Stereophonic 3D’ option allowing you to mix audio at various bit-depths. Another great update to QuickTime Format is within the H.264 codec, with the option of single or multi-pass.

Overall, this release is an excellent addition to the media world. Blackmagic is no longer just king of the colour grading and editing world — it has made a name for itself in audio as well. DaVinci Resolve 14 has become a universal program allowing access to all types of media users, who can now start a project in DaVinci Resolve, do their 3D work in Blackmagic Fusion, flush up their audio work in Fairlight and output their media — all within DaVinci Resolve 14.
"A space-based cloud storage network would provide government and private organisations with an independent cloud infrastructure platform, completely isolating and protecting sensitive data from the outside world."

Thinking outside the terrestrial box

The media and entertainment industries have faced unprecedented cyber security challenges over the last year. One studio suffered the theft of an entire season of a popular show, and another had an unreleased film stolen. In both cases, the material was held for ransom by cyber criminals.

Global spending on information security is estimated to have reached $90 billion in 2017, according to Gartner. Yet the data breaches keep coming. The switch from perimeter to endpoint network security has not happened quickly enough, and alone is insufficient to meet today’s advanced threats.

The Internet of Things is a virtual minefield of security challenges. The US Federal Trade Commission’s recent suit against a router manufacturer speaks to the severity of the threats that can be caused by everyday devices. Last year’s massive Mirai botnet attack, which took most of the US offline for a day, is a case in point.

Experian highlighted several trends in its yearly Data Breach Industry Forecast that took centre stage in 2017. One of them was the potential to cause significant problems for multinational companies, particularly in light of an EU regulation about to take effect (see the following note on GDPR).

Another Experian prediction is downright frightening: government-sponsored cyber attacks will escalate from espionage to proactive cyber war. One movie studio may have fallen victim to this type of attack in 2014 when it was hacked on the eve of releasing a film that portrayed a nation’s totalitarian leader unfavourably. This could be the shape of things to come for companies that create or distribute content foreign governments may find offensive.

**Jurisdictional burdens**

Global cyber security concerns have led to increasing security measures and legislation, culminating in the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It requires greater oversight of where and how sensitive data – such as personal, banking, health and credit card information – is stored and transferred. The regulation applies to all organisations processing personal data of people residing in the EU, regardless of the company’s location.

This creates a jurisdictional nightmare for companies. There are only two solutions to the dilemma of GDPR compliance. The majority of affected organisations will scramble to erect infrastructure and processes and deploy personnel to make sure they meet the stringent requirements. The other option is to remove the relevant data from the GDPR’s jurisdiction altogether, which means taking it ‘off-world’.

**Storage based in space**

The time has come to think outside the terrestrial box. There are already satellites ringing the Earth that regularly receive and transmit information; why not develop a system for secure, internet-free data storage and transmission?

A space-based cloud storage network would provide government and private organisations with an independent cloud infrastructure platform, completely isolating and protecting sensitive data from the outside world.

New technologies have just recently been designed to deliver this type of independent space-based network infrastructure for cloud service providers, enterprises and governments to experience secure storage and provisioning of sensitive data around the world.

Space-based storage and transmission, though, offers a radically different alternative to data security for media and entertainment. In addition, delivery speed will increase, creating new broadcast possibilities. For greater safety, speed and peace of mind, space-based storage is the new media star.

Cliff Beek is President of Cloud Constellation Corporation.

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