Improving audience engagement tops agenda at MENA OTT roundtable
Recently, I had the pleasure of moderating a panel of women filmmakers in the region, on behalf of Canon. I’m usually sceptical when I meet aspiring young filmmakers with dreams of changing the world or, more importantly, executing the story they have worked out in their head for years. Over the years, we have seen many of them fall by the wayside and take to better-paying jobs.

Not this lot, though. These are 30-something women or older who have endured that first phase of pain and have managed to sustain themselves despite the many challenges they continue to face making films.

One of them is well-known among us. I still remember Nayla Al Khaja, straight out of college with her Canadian friends, gearing up to shoot her first project in the UAE. I interviewed her then. Since then, I have seen her blossom from an aspiring young filmmaker with sparkles in her eyes, always brimming with laughter, to a more mature filmmaker who has used her skills to strike a fine balance between the projects that bring in the revenue and fulfilling her dreams. She still has the sparkle and the laughter.

The other filmmakers in the room haven’t achieved as much success in the commercial world but haven’t lost that spark either. As these women agree, it is a beautiful time to be making films in the Middle East. There is plenty of publicised support, very few fish in the pond and a lot of festivals at which to screen one’s films.

On another note, as these magazines reach your desk, I will have completed seven years at CPI and, with me, BroadcastPro ME. What a fantastic journey it has been! I have loved every moment of it. In fact, I think we are just getting started, with lots of new ideas in the bag to take BroadcastPro and SatellitePro to new heights.

Thank you for being with us on this journey. See you at the party!

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director
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Zee Entertainment's newly founded digital team in Dubai, under the leadership of Nadine Samra, has launched a fantasy football app aimed at football fans. The game, titled GRINTA, reflects the spirit and passion of football fans and that of Zee’s digital team, and is available on the website and the iOS and Android platforms.

“The main aim of our digital team at present is to focus on building our VOD platform, which is due to launch soon, but the fantasy football initiative is a team passion and was developed on the side as an experiment,” commented Nadine Samra, Head of Digital Business - MiddleEast at Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited.

“With GRINTA, we are targeting anyone who has a passion for the game. Our platform has both English and Arabic interfaces. Essentially, you go into the game, you are given a budget with which you may purchase players and compile your team, and then play with other players in real life,” she added.

Samra claims that unlike most such platforms, which feature only one league, GRINTA has four: the English Premier League, the Champions League, the Saudi League and the Egyptian League.

GRINTA is still presently in its soft launch phase. No date has been set for a more concrete launch, as the team is presently working towards the launch of Zee’s global VOD platform, which is due to launch around the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Iflix launches in eight territories across MENA

SVoD service iflix has launched in eight territories across the MENA region. Consumers in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan can now sign up for a 30-day free trial, giving them unlimited access to thousands of the world’s best TV shows, movies and more on every device they own, with no credit card required.

With its MENA launch, iflix has established itself as an international SVoD service with full-scale localised operations in each of its territories and a total global headcount of 700 staff across 24 offices worldwide, including new regional headquarters for MENA based in Dubai, UAE.

Iflix Group Co-founder and CEO, Mark Britt commented: “Our launch in the Middle East and North Africa represents the incredible vision, hard work and sacrifice by everyone in the iflix team. To have grown from a small, but ambitious 20-person operation without a live service to launching a global business in a matter of months, is a testament to that commitment. “MENA is one of the fastest growing and most exciting online markets in the world with data savvy consumers who share a passion for entertainment. We are thrilled to make iflix’s world-class service, premier digital experience and the most comprehensive selection of content available to them, as part of our mission to redefine entertainment in emerging markets.”

Abu Dhabi Media’s board restructured; Noura Al Kaabi appointed Chairperson

Abu Dhabi Media has announced a restructuring of its board of directors. Her Excellency Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs, has been appointed Chairperson of Abu Dhabi Media and twofour54. She was previously CEO of the company and joined the Federal Ministry in February 2016.

In her new role, Al Kaabi has been tasked to ensure the success of a sustainable media industry. His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, in his capacity as Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, issued a resolution restructuring the board. It named Ali Khalfan Al Daheri, Maryam Eid Al Muhairi, Humaid Saeed Al Mansouri, Mohammad Khalifa Al Nuaimi and Sultan Hamad Al Daheri as members of the board.
PLC trials Video Assistant Referee (VAR)

The UAE Pro League Committee recently experimented with Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology for the Arabian Gulf Cup Final between Al Ahli and Al Shabab at Al Makhtoum Stadium in Dubai. The technology was tested throughout the 90 minutes of the game without interfering with the match referee’s decisions.

LIVE HD deployed a Xeebra system from EVS to provide a solution for video refereeing. The UAE Football Association attended the trials through a specialised team from UAEFA’s refereeing department to oversee the technical aspects.

Abu Dhabi studio announces big-budget action series

IP Studios, a new multi-channel production house from Abu Dhabi, was launched at MIPTV, which was recently concluded in Cannes. With offices in Abu Dhabi and London, the production house offers a wide array of content including feature films, series, drama, kids’ entertainment, sports programming and digital content. Founded by director, producer and media consultant Mohamed Yehia, IP Studios announced a suite of productions at Cannes, including a big-budget action series called SEVEN, which features Hollywood and Arab stars.

“Overall, there is a growing appetite within the market for smart, adrenaline-induced and action-packed series. With SEVEN, we are aiming to produce a high-calibre show that adheres to international standards.”

Lifting the Curtain: World Class Goes Digital.

For decades Sennheiser has been a reliable and innovative partner in broadcast and theatre. Therefore, we understand that world-class sound engineers have the highest of demands and expectations. With this firmly in mind, we took all of our extensive experience and rolled it into our first digital multi-channel wireless system. This is it and it’s in a class all by itself. DIGITAL 9000 provides uncompressed digital audio transmission, free from intermodulation, and delivers stunning sound and dynamics with a cable-like purity.

Additionally, DIGITAL 9000 offers control functions that make system setup simple and fail-safe. The highly intuitive user interface provides a complete overview of system performance offering peace of mind in challenging live situations. A pinnacle of innovation, DIGITAL 9000 is the best-in-class digital wireless system available and represents a future-proof investment. We’re lifting the curtain. You’ll get to know it.

www.sennheiser.com
VICE Media partners with Moby Group for MENA

VICE Media is planning to bring the company’s youth-oriented digital, mobile and linear programming to the MENA region by launching operations in the UAE, in partnership with Moby Group. During his recent visit to Abu Dhabi, VICE Media Co-founder and CEO Shane Smith met with Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs and Chairwoman of Abu Dhabi’s media zone, twofour54, to discuss how VICE Media will help meet the huge demand for youth-focused programming in the region through telling honest and compelling stories adapted to the region’s interests and sensitivities.

In setting up in the region, VICE will partner with Moby Group, which has been established in the region for more than a decade. Commenting on the media partnership, Saad Mohseni, Chairman and CEO of Moby Group, said: “By leveraging the UAE as headquarters for the most exciting new media platform in the region, we hope to make a transformative contribution to the development of the media industry here.”

Starz Play to stream NBCUniversal content

Starz Play will now offer content from NBCUniversal. Following a recent deal signed between the streaming company and the Hollywood studio, MENA subscribers to Starz Play will have a range of TV box sets and TV series and films from NBCUniversal.

New content on the video-on-demand (VOD) platform includes TV show Mr. Robot, classic Hitchcock thriller Psycho and Bates Motel. Other shows in the package include 12 Monkeys, a sci-fi drama based on Terry Gilliam’s 1995 film, and superhero drama Heroes.

Subscribers will also be able to watch both seasons of Shades of Blue, while movies such as Luc Besson’s Lucy and The Bourne Legacy will also be available.

Disney auditions UAE actors for Aladdin film

Disney has been scouting for actors in the UAE for lead roles in the live action version of animated film Aladdin. The musical, to be directed by Guy Ritchie, is a world and offer the content to viewers in the region and beyond.

“We want to offer a single platform for channels that offer Islamic and cultural content, which will be of interest to the Arabic-speaking audience. We are hoping to add up to 50 channels by the end of the first year of this platform’s launch with subscriptions growing to more than 100,000. Peace TV has already come on board with more channels to follow suit. The other channels joining the platform will reach Al Majd TV’s hundreds of thousands of subscribers, thereby receiving excellent exposure in the region.”

“This is the third deployment of an OTT platform from CMT, after Mobile and Saudi broadcast. “This deployment provides us scalability and flexibility to grow the platform in the future. We are working with multiple CDNs to host the content and offer a customised platform based on SaaS/Oppex model.”

CMT builds OTT platform for Al Majd TV

CMT Technologies has built an Islamic OTT platform for the Saudi Arabian TV network Al Majd TV.

The network broadcasts an array of live and VOD programming ranging from news, current affairs, Quran channels, documentaries, soap, religious and kids’ entertainment.

The OTT platform called Hostif was officially launched on April 25 by the Minister of Islamic Affairs in the Holy City of Makkah, Saudi Arabia with 12 live streams. These streams will be available across the globe on the platform, which can be accessed on various front-end platforms like iOS, Android, Roku, Smart TV as well as on browsers.

Hostif will offer catch-up service for seven days on all of the 12 channels onboard along with live streaming and more than 5000 hours of VOD.

“we are offering a seven-day free trial to start with, but later subscription will be required,” said Hisham Arafat, CEO of CMT Technologies.

Arafat added that the objective of Hostif is to collate more such channels broadcasting from around the world and offer the content to viewers in the region and beyond.

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My-HD opts for cloud-based security

Dubai-based pay-TV platform My-HD has extended its collaboration with Conax to deploy a new cloud platform, Contego-as-a-Service, for content protection. This is the first deployment for the service in the Middle East. The solution’s flexible architecture and outsourced operational security has resulted in reduced hardware investment for My-HD.

My-HD provides a range of consumer packages featuring 300 channels via DTH (satellite pay TV) services to subscribers in the MENA region.

The Conax solution provides a wide range of modular features and functionality, coupled with the benefits of cloud scalability, offering the pay-TV operator a natural path for rapid deployment of new and advanced features as the operation expands.

Carmen Chen, Chairman of the Board, My-HD Media, said: “With operational security managed by Conax, our new model for protecting content revenues enables My-HD to focus on our core business – cultivating profitable, enticing packages and services for our customers. Security partner Conax is providing My-HD with a highly viable model that reduces hardware costs and operational complexity – a comprehensive solution that will enable us to position for launching new features and offerings quickly and securely, as demands from content-savvy consumers evolve.”

Daniel Johansson, EVP Global Sales & Marketing, Conax, added: “A Conax customer since 2012, we are pleased to further strengthen our relationship with My-HD, providing security expertise and future-proof solutions to support its next phases of growth. The Contego-as-a-Service platform provides My-HD operations with the Conax pay-as-you-grow, modular solutions principle, making it easy to facilitate adoption of new services, such as content delivery to popular, unmanaged consumer devices.”

City 7 TV relaunched

Dubai-based City 7 TV channel, owned by Bin Hendi Group, has been relaunched as an educational television channel. The rebranded channel is now called ‘City 7 Dubai-Education’ and is available in the UAE on OSN, Etisalat’s elife and du.

The new channel is a joint venture between Mumbai-headquartered Wetel TV and Arab venture corporation City 7 Dubai. Adil Matin, President and Chief Editor of Wetel TV-City 7 Dubai, said that the channel is already on-air with educational content that covers news and current affairs programmes from schools and universities around the world. “With expertise in education, the objective of this new venture is to keep students in the UAE up to date with the latest news from the education sector. We will be covering campus news from colleges in the UAE as well.”

E-Vision and MBC Group have signed a strategic partnership deal to distribute MBC channels in the UAE. This means any platform that wishes to carry or renew carriage of MBC channels in the UAE will need to enter into a contract with E-Vision for that purpose. elife now offers two additional channels from MBC – MBC+ Variety and MBC+ Drama as well as an exclusive channel launched by MBC and E-Vision.

elife customers will also be able to gain access to Shahid content, MBC’s VOD service in the MENA region, and Shahid Plus (including Ramadan series) at no extra charge to their IPTV service and via the elife ON App, free to all elife customers.

Commenting on the exclusive agreement, Humaid Sahoo Al Suwaidi, E-Vision’s CEO, said: “Entering into this strategic partnership ratifies E-Vision’s position to acquire distribution rights to world-class channels and content. E-Vision is constantly striving to bring comprehensive turnkey solutions for content aggregation and content management for IPTV platforms and multiscreens (OTT).”

Sam Barnett, MBC Group CEO, added: “MBC Group is committed to bringing premium content to the UAE and the region at large. This partnership with E-Vision is yet another step in the optimisation of our audience’s experience on E-Vision’s innovative platforms.”
TMG, Friend MTS provide anti-piracy services to beIN

beIN has announced compliance and anti-piracy services provider TMG to monitor online streaming piracy on a global scale. beIN will deploy an anti-piracy strategy to counter threats to its assets and services.

TMG will provide beIN with a complete view of online content usage, which will serve as a basis for analysis. Concrete measures taken following the new partnership will include live content removal, pirate link takedowns and ultimately legal action to close non-compliant websites permanently.

The broadcaster has also deployed a live watermarking service from Friend MTS to counter the threat of digital piracy.

beIN is joining a number of the 10 broadcasters using the Friend MTS ASID service to make it the most widely deployed and actively used digital watermarking system in the world. ASID uses a sophisticated but lightweight watermarking technology to identify originating subscriber accounts that are being used to retransmit live channels and events.

The technology can be implemented without any changes to the video delivery infrastructure, and enables accounts to be identified and video access blocked within just minutes.

Dubai Film and TV Commission partners with YouTube for VIDXB 2017

The Dubai Film and TV Commission (DFTC) announced a partnership with YouTube to support VIDXB 2017 during the opening press conference for Middle East Film and Comic Con 2017 (MEFCC).

VIDXB will be produced in collaboration with The Alliance LLC, organisers of MEFCC.

“From left: Jamal Al Sharif, Diana Baddar and Ben Caddy at the Middle East Film and Comic Con 2017 opening press conference. The new partnership will include live content removal, pirate link takedowns and ultimately legal action to close non-compliant websites permanently.”

“Delusionists, as a novel with the bestseller, Ibraheem Abbas’ novel, is being deployed a live streaming piracy on a global scale. beIN will deploy an anti-piracy strategy to counter threats to its assets and services. The new partnership will include live content removal, pirate link takedowns and ultimately legal action to close non-compliant websites permanently.”

“The technology can be implemented without any changes to the video delivery infrastructure, and enables accounts to be identified and video access blocked within just minutes.”

Ooredoo Oman launches multiscreen TV with Netgem

Ooredoo Oman has selected Netgem to deploy its multiscreen TV-as-a-service solution in Oman. This agreement is the first deployment of Netgem in the Middle East, with its solution now available in Arabic and supported by local content providers and deployment partners.

Ooredoo is one of the four new market operators in the Middle East, with its fixed and mobile integrated services being used to retransmit tier 1 broadcasters using its fixed and mobile integrated services. In due course, the partnership will ensure that VIDXB is the definitive gathering where emerging and established creators, influencers, industry experts, fans and brands connect. This platform will empower talent from this region to continually create compelling content.”

New Solutions from AJA

Offering by providing a fully connected TV solution to its customers, one that delivers a unified experience across devices.

Powerful Tools for HDR

AJA extends your HDR creative range.

Realtime Conversions: The new FS-HDR in partnership with Colorfront, converts between Camera/HDR formats, such as Slog3 to HLG, or SDR to HLG; T7000.

Desktop I/O: ROKA4 and ROKA4K for HLG 10 and HLG needs.

Mini Converters: HS-4K-Plus and HS-4KX for HDR 10 display and analysis to and from HDMI.

Ki Pro Ultra Plus

Introducing Ki Pro Ultra Plus.

The new multi-channel HD and single channel 4K 60p recorder from AJA.

With up to 4 Channels of HD 60p recording in ProRes™ with rollover support, single channel 4K 60p recording, full HDMI 2.0 input and output, plus 16 embedded channels of audio.

Broadcast IP

The IP revolution continues its steady march.

NONA (IP) device offers TR-01 support for JPEG 2000 over IP workflows and 2110 support around the content. The new RT-G1S2 and RT-G2CHD boardable to IP Bridge Mini Converters join their sibling receivers for the transport of JPEG 2000 streams over IP whenever you need it.
Gulf Film launches production arm

Gulf Film has launched its film equity brand, Novo Pictures, with a focus on English-language projects. The brand will cover the complete film supply chain - production by Novo Pictures, distribution via Gulf Film, and finally exhibition with Novo Cinemas. Novo Pictures’ first venture is already underway, in collaboration with industry heavyweight EuropaCorp, to produce Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets. The $130 million film, partly financed by Novo Pictures, is based on French science fiction comics series Valerian and Laureline and will be released in cinemas globally this July.

"Gulf Film has dominated the regional film market in the Middle East since its inception in 1989. Our passion for film, commitment to the industry and our expertise have culminated in our inevitable evolution as a film production entity. We are thrilled to add Novo Pictures to our portfolio and to be partnering with the legendary director and writer Luc Besson on our inaugural project. We look forward to sharing his creative genius with movie lovers everywhere," commented Selim El Anzar, CEO, Gulf Film.

Yahlive adds PMC music channel to Farsi bouquet

Yahlive has announced that North Telecom will be broadcasting PMC Music exclusively via Yahlive over Yahsat Al Yaht satellite. The free-to-air music channel, which targets Farsi, Afghan and Kurdish communities in Southwest Asia and the Middle East, is being broadcast by Yahlive’s East beam, a hotspot available to more than 140 million viewers in the region. Ammar Baranbo, Yahlive’s COO, said: “We are delighted that North Telecom has chosen to broadcast PMC Music exclusively on Yahlive. We enjoy an impressive retention rate of 88% across Farsi-speaking communities, which are found in multiple markets including Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan and the UAE. This figure is the highest in the industry, and is directly linked to our efforts to deliver premium content that people enjoy viewing regularly.”

ABS Broadcast launches Nolly Africa on Inview

Nigerian channel Nolly Africa has joined the Inview platform in Nigeria. The channel is part of ABS’s cloud-based ABSolute AMC channel management system. Nolly Africa joins both AMC and AMC Series in showcasing popular African TV series and Nollywood movie content, which is now the second largest global film industry.

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- 100 antenna, 100 beltpack system capacity
- Best-in-class voice clarity
- “Touch&Go” beltpack registration
- 6-channel beltpack plus dedicated REPLY button
- Built-in microphone and speaker for Walkie-Talkie mode
- Smartphone integration via Bluetooth
- Ergonomic, robust beltpack design
- Sunlight-readable display with Gorilla Glass™
- Decentralized AES67 IP networked antennas
- Seamless integration into RIEDEL’S ARTIST intercom matrix
ADM re Launches Radio 1 and Radio 2

Abu Dhabi Media (ADM) has announced the official launch of English-language stations Radio 1 and Radio 2, part of the Abu Dhabi Radio Network, bringing the total number of stations under its umbrella to 11. Each station brings ADM’s number of brands up to 27.

Radio 1 launched on 108.5 FM in Abu Dhabi and on 104.41 FM in Dubai. Radio 2 started airing on 106FM in Abu Dhabi and on 99.3 FM in Dubai. Abu Dhabi Media revealed that Radio 1 has been transformed to specialise in delivering music content that targets 18- to 30-year-olds, while Radio 2 will broadcast content catering to 30- to 45-year-olds interested in music from the 1980s and 1990s.

H.E. Mohamed Ebrahim Al Mahmoud, Chairman and Managing Director at Abu Dhabi Media, said: “The official launch of Radio 1 and Radio 2 under Abu Dhabi Media underscores our strategic efforts to create tangible change in media content at Abu Dhabi Media and diversify the media brands under its umbrella. H.E. Dr Ali bin Tamim, Director General, Abu Dhabi Media, added: “Radio 1 and Radio 2 represent a new phase in Abu Dhabi Media’s journey, aimed at reaching a more diverse radio audience with a new cultural perspective that imitates the lifestyle of listeners, seeking to provide content that is compatible with their interests.”

UAE producer’s film to be screened at Cannes

The official selection for Cannes Film Festival’s 70th annual edition boasts a film by UAE-based Producer Raveh Farnam, CEO of Advanced Media and film enthusiast. It is part of the 44 films to be screened at Festival De Cannes to be held from 17-28 May, 2017.

Farnam has been supporting the regional film industry through a series of initiatives such as sponsoring the Iranian Film Festival in Prague, hosting the Dubai leg of the 48-Hour Film Project, supporting up and coming filmmakers with kit as well as screening independent productions locally, to name a few. Directed by independent filmmaker Mohammad Rassouli, the Persian-language film titled Lord (Droga) will be a part of the section of short films that are screened as a part of the program at the festival. More details about the film will be revealed after the screening next month.

Multiple award-winning director Rassouli is a regular at Cannes, who has won critical acclaim and best director awards for his previous films.

Yahlive expands channel offering to Tajik community

Yahlive has signed a long-term agreement with the Committee for Television and Radio under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan to broadcast six Tajikistan government channels across its East Beam, covering the Middle East and South West Asia.

This latest tie-up will see the addition of six Tajik-language channels covering news and entertainment including ‘Tojikiston, Safina, Bahoriston, Jahonnamo, Sinamo and TV Vazirat.

Yahlive announces the launch of its new Mena channel exclusively designed to cater to audiences in the MENA region.

Pay TV households in MENA cross 5m – IHS Markit report

An analysis released by IHS Markit shows that the pay TV market in the MENA region saw record growth in 2016 despite harsh economic conditions. Pay TV households topped the five million mark for the first time in the region’s history, growing 8% year on year. Revenues rose 15% to $2.72bn, double digit growth year-on-year.

The MENA region is one of the fastest growing regions for pay TV in both subscriber numbers and subscription revenues,” said Constantinos Papavassilopoulos, Senior Analyst at IHS Markit.

The launch of revenues such as Netflix is fuelling the market and is a good sign for further growth. IHS Markit expects growth to continue, with pay TV homes reaching seven million in 2021.

Revenues will almost double to $4.03 billion by 2021, beIN Media Group and OSN dominate the market, controlling more than 60% of subscribers and over 95% of revenues for the last seven years. 2016 marks the first full year that beIN Media Group and OSN competed directly against each other.

Total online video market revenues in the Middle East and North Africa region stood at $506m in 2016, indicating a year-on-year growth of 51% from 2015.

Advertising remains the most successful business model for monetising online video, representing more than 60% of total revenue in 2016. The prevalence of advertising is corroborated by YouTube’s huge appeal in the region, representing more than 65% of total revenue.

“Countries such as Saudi Arabia are second only to the US in terms of time spent per person watching videos on YouTube.” However, IHS Markit forecasts that the subscription business model will gain ground in the MENA region at the expense of advertising, with subscription online video revenues coming from online subscription sources by 2020. Before that forward, subscription video will drive revenue growth.

Subscription services in the region saw 137% growth in 2016, spurred by the launch of Netflix and strong performance by local players. Subscription is expected to contribute 65% of total market revenues by 2020. IHS Markit expects total online video revenues to grow by more than $1.5bn by 2020.
Ghana broadcaster upgrades to 4K with Blackmagic

Ghana’s largest private television broadcaster, GH One, has completed an upgrade of its studio and outside broadcast facilities to support Ultra HD 4K production. The solution for GH One was built around 12G-SDI broadcast infrastructure products from Blackmagic Design.

The multi-studio complex, as well as a 14m OB truck, were designed by systems integrator Axel Technology, as part of a complete overhaul of the broadcaster’s production infrastructure.

“We knew from the outset that 12G-SDI would be the cornerstone of this installation, as it not only affords a more streamlined cabling infrastructure, but also delivers a more efficient and reliable signal delivery path for broadcasters working with the 2160p60 format,” said Marco Brumanti, Video Projects Manager at Axel Technology.

Branzanti explained that once this was in place, it was a simple choice to design the studio around Blackmagic Design’s broadcast-grade routers, production switches and converters, as they allowed Axel to develop a robust ultra HD 4K workflow within GH One’s budget.

“The new studio has one main set and a virtual studio with green screen, and both are equipped with an ATEM 2 M/E Production Studio 4K and the corresponding 2 M/E broadcast panel. Also, each has access to CG and playback applications developed by Axel Technology, which gives the production team all of the transitions, effects and graphics they need to produce their wide range of programming.”

To switch between GH One’s two channels’ signals, a Smart Videohub Clean Switch 12x12 was installed to act as a mixer switch.

“For this installation, we needed to ensure there was glitch-free switching with genlocked signals. With the clean switch, there is full re-synchronisation on every input, so the production team can switch from a camera feed to a recorded source or graphics using a simple and straightforward interface, and still get flawless switching.”

GH One’s truck has the capacity for a twenty-strong team and includes an expandable production gallery as well as a stand-alone television studio workflow.

“That means the vehicle can be used comfortably for longer periods, allowing multiple productions to take place without the space becoming too cramped. For example, the truck can have a full-fledged television studio up and running for several days, rather than on a short-term, event-oriented basis,” he added.

Signal routing onboard is managed via a Smart Videohub 40×40 from Blackmagic Design. Housed in the OB’s technical control room, it sits alongside a rack of HyperDeck Studio Pro broadcast decks, which allow production GH One to standardise any incoming video sources from external contributors.

Al Jazeera announces tech deal with Google

Al Jazeera Media Network and Google have announced a global partnership to work towards a more sustainable news ecosystem by promoting digital journalism.

The partnership focuses on several key areas such as attracting and retaining audiences, building products for video and mobile, maximising advertising revenues and imparting digital skills to journalists. Abdulla Al Najjar, Executive Director of Global Brand & Communications at Al Jazeera Media Network commented: “Our commitment to our users has always compelled us to seek out and leverage the best technology platforms in the world and Google’s proven track record of delivering makes it the ideal partner for Al Jazeera Media Network. We look forward to this partnership with Google as we continue to create exceptional value for our users.”

Alfonso De Gaetano, Director of Global Partnerships – Emerging Markets at Google added: “We are delighted to partner with Al Jazeera Media Network to bring the best technology platforms in the world and Google’s proven track record of delivering makes it the ideal partner for Al Jazeera Media Network. We look forward to this partnership with Google as we continue to create exceptional value for our users.”

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BroadcastPro ME recently hosted a roundtable discussion in association with video security solutions company Verimatrix on ‘Enhancing Competitiveness for Video Services in the Middle East’. We bring you a detailed report.

High internet penetration, a proliferation of smart devices and a large proportion of the population under the age of 30 are some of the factors that have led to a revolution of sorts for OTT in the MENA region. As the market gets more competitive, with a growing number of global and homegrown services entering the region, it is throwing open a whole new world of opportunities for both operators and consumers.

BroadcastPro Middle East recently hosted a roundtable discussion in association with video security solutions company Verimatrix on ‘Enhancing Competitiveness for Video Services in the Middle East’. The roundtable addressed some of the key issues facing OTT and pay TV companies, such as creating robust digital models to provide quality content to viewers, and the role of technology and services in providing better audience engagement and optimally monetising and safeguarding OTT assets.

The discussion was moderated by Steve Christian, Senior Vice President, Marketing at Verimatrix, with a panel of C-level executives from leading pay-TV and OTT services in the region. The speakers were Samir Geissah, Vice President – Innovation at du; Dr Raed Kharsim, CIO of Selevision; Neil Martin, Chief Commercial Officer, OSN; Marco Bonomi, Regional Vice President of Sales, International (EMEA & Asia) at Minerva Networks; Amine Lalami, Chief Commercial Officer at icflix; Roque Manuel Solabarrieta Chedeh, COO, E-Vision; Danny Bates, CCO and Co-founder of Starz Play; Hisham Arafat, CIO of CMT Technologies, Amarjeet Panesar, Head of Broadcast and Information Technology, Econet Vision; and Nadine Samra, Head of Digital Business – Middle East at Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited.
Christian began by asking the panellists whether OTT, as a phenomenon, is additive or subtractive to the business of pay TV and existing linear services.

“How do you see internet-delivered TV versus other modes of delivery?” he asked.

The panellists were unanimous in their view of OTT being complimentary to traditional pay TV, though with its own set of challenges. For starters, the amount of content available on the internet is, at times, overwhelming for a viewer and serves no purpose unless it is directed to the right viewers.

E-Vision’s Roque Manuel Solabarrieta Chelch questioned: how does the consumer navigate the immense amount of content available on several OTT platforms? Hisham Arafat of CMT Technologies said it might be a good idea to integrate various OTT services and serve them on a common platform, which will simplify the process of content discovery and give the users what they want.

“Telco operators should have open platforms where they can integrate apps such as Netflix, iclfix, beIN and so on. The operators should work towards bringing together all the brands and operate as cohesive units rather than competing with each other,” Arafat said.

Panesar added that while all of the OTT platforms are important, and consumers should be given the choice to opt for what works best for them, collaborating on a single platform will be a good value proposition in the long run.

“The overall cost will come down if networks join and collaborate,” he noted, adding that consumers want content at the cheapest price point.

“They don’t care how it reaches them. Technology is only for enablement. We need the right business approach that works collaboratively instead of working in silos, which is the case presently. For a consumer, one single market works better. One platform offering a variety of content might be the answer. Just like a mall with various brands in one place, we need a common platform for content as well.”

OSN’s Neil Martin queried: “Unlike linear TV, where you know what to expect from a certain channel, it’s a challenge to find content effectively on OTT platforms. For OTT providers to have an open library to make content searchable through a search repository might lead to an interesting dynamic. How do you then prioritise your search? If five people are offering the same thing, how do you choose one?”

Martin seconded that and added: “The dollars we have invested may be 10 times more than others have. I want to make sure I get a return on my investment proportionately within the ecosystem. First, for individual customers – you create a functional perspective followed by a content discovery perspective. How they knit together; that’s a much more difficult conversation. There is a commercial overlay on top of what you want to do for customer experience.”

Arafat is the CEO of CMT Technologies with each other” operate as cohesive units together all the brands and iclfix, beIN and so on. The operators should work towards bringing together all the brands and operate as cohesive units rather than competing with each other,” Arafat said.

“OTT as a phenomenon – is it additive or subtractive to the business of pay TV and existing linear services?”

Steve Christian, Senior Vice President, Verimatrix

Panesar stepped in at this point to add that different service providers should not offer common content and compete with each other, but should be supplementary.

“The platform is easy to manage. The real challenge will be in devising a business plan for monetizing this content, because different content is priced differently and each owner has paid a different price for a certain type of content.”

Martin seconded that and added: “The dollars we have invested may be 10 times more than others have. I want to make sure I get a return on my investment proportionately within the ecosystem. First, for individual customers – you create a functional perspective followed by a content discovery perspective. How they knit together; that’s a much more difficult conversation. There is a commercial overlay on top of what you want to do for customer experience.”

“Telco operators should have open platforms where they can integrate apps such as Netflix, iclfix, beIN and so on. The operators should work towards bringing together all the brands and operate as cohesive units rather than competing with each other” Hisham Arafat, CEO, CMT Technologies
more popular. The question is how do you differentiate your content from the herd. It’s a business case, and to succeed, we need to partner with the right content as well as platform providers.”

Martin pointed out that globally, pay TV traditionally was built on live sporting events and Hollywood movies.

“One of the things that has happened in the last 10 years of OTT has been a change in the consumption patterns. People have moved to binge viewing on box sets, which was not available five or six years ago. The trend has now gravitated towards box sets for series. The other thing through OTT and also what the telcos have done is there is greater emphasis on an early window cycle for movies. The consequence of this is that people are more sensitive to how they spend their money and there is a preference for exclusive, premium content.”

Martin further added that as a brand, OSN is associated with flexibility, better production value and exclusive premium content. It’s imperative for operators to have a good understanding of their customers, in order to service them better. He gave the example of Netflix reinventing itself by spending more money than Hollywood studios on original content.

Panesar observed that as a marketer, cost is not a predominant vector, but for the consumer it is. “Consumers will spend on services that are affordable. The idea is to keep growing volumes.”

He reiterated that collaboration is key to keeping the cost down and making services affordable to consumers. “Collaboration among platforms will bring the CDN cost down by 65-70%, which is a huge cut, and as a result of this, consumers will pay less, which in turn will convert into more subscribers.”

Amine Lalami of icflix shed light on how the streaming company takes decisions based on data gathered from users. “I think the biggest challenge is to offer the right content to the right people. Relevance is very important; consumers need to relate to the content they are being offered.”

Quality of experience is yet another piece of the puzzle. And then there is the question of billing. “The fact remains that content will be your key differentiator. The secret lies in original productions, which no one has, and that’s applicable to any platform, not just OTT. While exclusive content creation is important, equally important is what kind of content will work in a specific market. That knowledge comes from data,” Lalami pointed out.

Dr Raed Khraisheh of Televisionsaid that telcos are not the only option for consumers. It is impossible for telcos to cater to everyone’s needs. “Telcos provide a platform and they are good at it. To cut down on the cost of CDN, a nano-CDN might be the answer. We have tried it and it works just fine.”

He emphasised the role of social media in content discovery, adding that Dubai is not a true representation of the MENA region, which is a very heterogeneous territory. “Dubai has a huge range of content offerings and better infrastructure to deliver that to the end user. Not all MENA countries have that. Some MENA countries just introduced 4G. Owing to all these factors, PTA continues to dominate the region. Key PTA operators in the region acquire the best content and know what appeals to the viewers. Then we have a very strong community of YouTubers, and user-generated content is already making waves.”

Christian asked whether YouTube is a competitor. Samra’s response was that YouTube is mostly associated with small nuggets of user-generated content, which in turn gives an edge to operators with premium content. “It will be challenging for YouTube to bring premium content into the fold. What may work for them, however, is to have a mix of user-generated and curated content with robust search engines, but there is an overwhelming amount of content out there,” she added. Panesar pointed out that YouTube has been a driver for better bandwidth and it is a very strong brand, but he doesn’t consider it competition. Lalami reiterated that content will be the key differentiator, while Martin said flexibility of viewing is important to win eyeballs.

While great content and excellent user experience were key differentiators, how do operators combat illegitimate services, which are eating into their share of the business? “Offer content which is not available anywhere else before the pirates. Offer content which is not available anywhere else before the pirates. Content will be your key differentiator, how do operators combat illegitimate services, which are eating into their share of the business? “Offer content which is not available anywhere else before the pirates do, and there is a good chance of you getting the eyeballs,” Lalami said.

Martin raised an important point here about publishing content before the pirates. “It is almost impossible to do that, so offer exclusive content.
and a good user experience to beat illegitimate services. OSN Ya Hala is our second most popular channel, which is mainly driven by high-quality original productions.”

Geissah added that the ability to offer a better content window to popular content is what makes a better OTT experience. The idea is to get it out first. Martin mentioned yet another challenge pay TV operators often face in their relationship with telcos, which needs to improve to add value to the subscriber base. Lalami noted that the prepaid base makes up 90% for all operators. For an OTT company, it is a great value proposition to work with an operator that understands the market, has a large user base and controls the price.

E-Vision’s Chelech then brought in the telco perspective, saying, “Collaboration among platforms will bring the CDN cost down by 60-70%, which is a huge cut, and as a result of this, consumers will pay less, which in turn will convert into more subscriptions.”

Amarjeet Panesar, Head of Broadcast & IT Technology, Econet Vision

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Dr Raed Khusheim, CEO, Selevision

“Data is the core of our business. We practically apply all of our big decisions based on big data. Our content buying decisions are based on our understanding of the market in terms of what the customers are watching, what they are downloading from legitimate and illegitimate sites, and what kind of content is most consumed on our site. Everything we do is data-driven, even our marketing campaigns. We start with two thousand to three thousand creatives, then keep the ones that work based on conversion rates.”

Christian then directed the discussion towards big data, consumption models, device usage and patterns and piracy. Danny Bates, CEO and Co-founder of Starz Play, pointed out that big data analytics was a key driver for digital growth. “Data is the core of our business. We practically apply all of our big data, which is a $1.5 trillion business.

“Telcos invest billions in CAPEX most of the time in hard currency but earn in local currency, which makes it harder to balance the returns equation when substantial volatility exists in the currency market.”

Geissah said that telcos need to play a bigger role in adding value to the products they distribute. “We need to do more than being mere pipes. With all the data, we have the wherewithal to offer the right content at the right price, bundling it or giving it for free. The secret to success lies in segmentation and micro-segmentation of the market, and how we package content.”

Christian then drew the panel’s attention to retaining subscribers, given the high churn rates of OTT, and whether these churn rates are a cause for concern. Geissah said no one will own all types of content and a customer has loyalty only to content, not to any specific platform. Zee’s Imanu noted that MENA consumers are ready for multiple OTT services, and pointed out that households already have multiple subscriptions.

Martin said that having different business models, OTT services don’t regard churn rates as a deterrent to growth. There seems to be widespread acceptance among OTT companies about churn rates. “We should be cognisant of the fact that people will want to use different services at different times for different reasons.”

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“We study the various channels that bring in customers and everything around them. When we launch a new app or portal, we study the data around their consumption and how it impacts...
“Data is the core of our business. We practically apply all of our big decisions based on big data. Our content buying decisions are based on our understanding of the market in terms of what the customers are watching, what they are downloading from legitimate and illegitimate sites, and what kind of content is most consumed on our site.”

Danny Bates, CCO, Starz Play

customers. Do they explore more content or watch more content? Do they find more and disrupt content or watch more content?

Martin asked if a young company like Starz Play had enough data to know to what extent social media drives the content discovery process and how recommendations work. All data sources should be integrated to have the real picture of consumption patterns.

Christian asked the panel if there were “limitations to the kind of data platforms can collect, and whether you need permissions from authorities.”

He further added that the company is currently focused on its acquisition programme and hitting the figures for net growth.

Martin revealed that OSN is also ramping up its data analytics. “We have universally connected set-top boxes and thousands of our customers use companion products such as OSN Go, so we have a lot of data from OTT and connected boxes which goes into our repository. We are going through a process to use that. With our new products launching soon, data will be integral to them.”

Chelech agreed that E-Vision was also driven by data for all of their acquisition for TVOD.

“We know which content is being consumed where. In fact, we tailored our buying strategy around big demand for series and kids content. The e-Junior SVOD has revealed some fascinating results for us.”

There was a consensus that demand for content is leaning towards series instead of movies. Samra commented that drama is a leading content globally and that Arab viewers have traditionally consumed lots of series.

Some of the other questions around content revolved around whether Arab viewers preferred subtitles or native Arabic content.

Data gathering has shed light on what the customers are “actually doing on your platform”, Samra said, adding that the role of social media cannot be ignored in collecting data.

“As a platform owner, we need to know to what extent social media drives the content discovery process and how recommendations work. All data sources should be integrated to have the real picture of consumption patterns.”

Christian asked the panel if there were “limitations to the kind of data platforms can collect, and whether you need permissions from authorities.”

Dr Khusheim said that while there was no restriction on how much data a platform can collect for their own research and analysis, they cannot publish any of that.

Geissah said that platforms do not look for individual data records.

We look for trends, nationalities, viewing times, areas, to know where people are watching.”

Bonomi said that as a technology company, Minerva develops service management infrastructure for the delivery of connected entertainment. The tools and modules they provide are becoming more intelligent and helping operators with their decisions.

“From a business and administration perspective, our platform will tell in advance which linear or on-demand assets the public will most likely prefer, to make sure that operators provide users with the right content at the right time. From a consumer perspective, we are making our user experience smarter. Artificial Intelligence will eventually become part of the platform and drive the UI rendering engine, thanks to advanced caching mechanisms.”

He added that with devices becoming thinner and smaller, more intelligence is being offloaded to the cloud, unlike in the past when everything was on the set-top-box.

“A number of global players including Apple, Amazon, Google are now shipping their own devices: operators like du and Etisalat must now have applications for these platforms to deliver their content offerings in an effective way: Moreover, providers of on-demand content such as Netflix, Amazon, Google are now delivering linear offerings too. In this fast-moving environment, traditional on-premises solutions will be abandoned in favour of next generation, cloud-based, virtualised multi-tenant platforms, leveraging intelligent edge systems.”

Christian asked the panel about trends in device consumption patterns and whether the big screen is still the place to go. He also asked about user preference for browser versus app experiences on devices.

Geissah was quick to reply that the small screen is now mainly used for breaking news and updates, but the big screen drives most of the VOD traffic.

“We work closely with smart TV manufacturers to put our clients on those devices. There are specific proprietary services such as Roku (which is not present in the Middle East). Fire and other boxes such as Xbox, PlayStation, Smart TV’s are a big player in this domain.”

Bates said that mobile plays an important part in signing up customers. “80% of the customers that we sign up for our service sign up on the mobile. You are online most of the time, so that’s where you see the advertisement and that’s where companies can engage with potential customers. We have also seen a surge in big screen viewing numbers, which is up to 70% via either Samsung or LG TV’s or Sony PlayStation consoles. For us, Samsung is the predominant one with about 25% of viewing share, followed by LG, PlayStation and Xbox. The consumption of our content grew dramatically on Samsung since we started offering Starz Play as a preinstalled app. Even when people use tablets, they use Apple TV or Samsung if they want to watch content on the big screen.”

He also added that services need to go beyond apps, as Bates noted that 60% of viewing on its service happens on the Starz Play app now. Samra added that the kind of content that goes on various devices also varies based on what demographic or age-group is interested in it.

“The consumption of kids’ content is higher on IPADs and tablets, while for other age groups, the video consumption we have seen was at least 75% on iOS and Android applications – 20% on desktop and 5% on connected TV applications.”

Panesar pointed out that the high cost of data packages on mobile devices is a deterrent. Most of the consumption takes place on the big screen because it is connected to uncapped broadband.

“Telcos invest billions in CAPEX most of the time in local currency, which makes it harder to balance the returns equation when substantial volatility exists in the currency market.”

Reque Manuel Salabarrieta Chelech, CCO, E-Vision

“"As a platform owner, we need to know to what extent social media drives the content discovery process and how recommendations work. All data sources should be integrated to have the real picture of consumption patterns"”

Nadine Samra, Head of Digital Business – Middle East, Zee Entertainment

“We want to give operators the option to reuse their legacy infrastructure via native or browser-based clients for STB-based, native applications for consumer electronic devices. We give to operators the option to reuse their legacy infrastructure via native or browser-based clients for STB-based, native applications for consumer electronic devices, mobiles, tablets and web-based clients for...
“We want to give operators the option to reuse their legacy infrastructure via native or browser-based clients for STBs, native applications for consumer electronic devices, mobiles, tablets and web-based clients for PC and Mac. Interoperability and intercommunication between all these devices will be key, thanks to smart/software-based remote controls and voice recognition.”

Marc Benomi, Regional Vice President of Sales, International [EMEA & Asia], Minerva Networks

“PC and Mac. Interoperability and intercommunication between all those devices will be key, thanks to smart/software-based remote controls and voice recognition.”

Christian once again asked the panelists about piracy.

Dr Khushheim gave the analogy of piracy in media being like bacteria. "It's everywhere, and with better broadband speeds and improved infrastructure, even piracy is getting stronger. The more we fight it, people come up with more ingenious ways to sell content illegally. Live TV will beat piracy, but offline it's not easy."

Bates said the best way to counter piracy was to improve your own product offering and build the numbers.

"You can worry about fighting it or improve your own product to win more subscribers. Fight it with exclusive, better quality content."

Samaru agreed that offering content no one else has and improving the user experience are the best tools to fight piracy.

The panelists concurred that audiences in the MENA region are traditionally used to receiving free content, which makes it harder to fight piracy, as does the fact that piracy is often perpetrated by the younger generation.

Arafat noted that while free content is a big draw towards piracy, non-availability of content on legitimate sites is also a factor. Panesar agreed that pirate sites are capitalising on this.

"As a telco, Graishah said, du has been trying ways to combat piracy by cracking down on illegal sites and VPNs.

"In the UAE, using a VPN is illegal, and so is Dub TV. We intensify our anti-piracy drive during big sporting events and shut down sites that are streaming illegally. But that's not enough, as people come up with different forms of piracy. Egyptian African Cup matches were being live streamed on Facebook and P ecstatic, and we couldn't do anything about it, because these are legitimate sites.”

Bates commented that despite piracy, his company has a good growth trajectory.

Panesar said technologies such as watermarking are a good way to combat content theft. Benomi said that operators, with government support, might have to look into innovative ways to counter piracy; he gave the example of Switzerland, where downloading torrents is perfectly legal.

"Completely different business models might have to be in place to ensure nobody incurs losses.”

The panelists acknowledged the importance of high-quality content, technology and social media to win over consumers in a fast-changing and highly competitive OTT environment. They also agreed that collaboration between platforms may be the key to profitability.

"The fact remains that content will be your key differentiator. The secret lies in original productions which no one has, and that's applicable to any platform, not just OTT. While exclusive content creation is important, equally important is what kind of content will work in a specific market”

Amine Lalami, Chief Commercial Officer, iclix
Women filmmakers from the region discussed opportunities and challenges of the industry at a panel discussion hosted by Canon Middle East. We bring you some excerpts from the discussion.

Canon Middle East, together with The Scene Club, hosted an informal panel discussion on ‘Women Filmmakers in the Arab World’ on the second day of CABSAT 2017 as part of an initiative called #Canonmeets. The panel comprised women who work in both the film and documentary space from the region, including Nayla Al Khaja, Manahel Bedah, Khadijah Kudsi, Tanya Daud, Sheherzad Kaleem and costume designer Sandhya Laloo-Morar. Vijaya Cherian, Editor of BroadcastPro ME, moderated the discussion, which focused primarily on the challenges and opportunities for women from the region in the film industry.

The discussion centred on what it means to be a woman filmmaker in the Middle East – if the challenges women face in the regional film industry are any different from those of their male counterparts, and if gender really matters when it comes to the choice of subject matter, choosing protagonists and, more importantly, securing funds. It emerged that while some of the challenges are common to both men and women, there are some gender-specific problems that women face when they choose filmmaking as a career.

Cherian set the ball rolling by asking the panel: “What do women bring to the table that men can’t?” Kudsi, who hails from Saudi Arabia and has a number of short films to her credit, pointed out that as storytellers, women touch human emotions much more deeply than men as they bring more sensitivity and compassion to the subject matter than their male counterparts.

Kaleem agreed, saying that as a documentary filmmaker people find it easier to share their stories with her: “They don’t feel intimidated or threatened by me,” she said.

Al Khaja, who has won regional and international acclaim for her works, was sceptical about agreeing with that statement commenting that many of the first films in history were made by male directors and they were very sensitively portrayed. She did, however, agree that for documentaries, people do tend to find it easier to share their stories with women.

Daud’s take on this was that men and women bring different perspectives to the table and treat a subject quite differently.

In terms of the topics that women filmmakers choose, Al Khaja noted that more often than not, women tend to make films about women. “I have realised that women tend to work more with female protagonists,” she said.

Al Khaja is presently working on a biopic, her first feature attempt, which is scheduled for release at the end of 2018.

The entire session was live on Facebook, with a constant stream of questions from viewers. Cherian picked up questions from the social media site to engage the viewers watching the discussion remotely.

A Facebook follower asked: “Have you been able to make it because you have support, or you made it on your own?”

Most of the filmmakers agreed that support from the family was crucial.

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PROPANEL

Kudsi responded that she wouldn’t have made it had it not been for the support of her husband. Coming from Saudi Arabia, starting out was not easy for her because of the social stigma attached to the profession, but perseverance paid off.

“MY family and friends have stood by me and supported me. I am organising funding for a Nepalese trip for a documentary, and my friends have been so generous with their contributions. I could not have sustained myself had it not been for all the support I have received from the community and my family.”

Kudsi added that in the course of her documentaries she has had to go to remote areas with genuine security concerns, and at times even escorted by her husband. She credits her success to the unflinching support of her family. The next question addressed financing and the ability to sustain their efforts in filmmaking. Al Khaja said, and the panel agreed, that money is an important element of the business and cannot be ignored.

“You need to make money from what you are doing. There is a reason why our industry is called show biz and not show art.”

The panel noted that while it is important to do projects that stimulate them artistically, it is equally important to make money to keep aloft in the industry. Branded films and commercials are a good channel to make money, which can be used to fund passion projects such as documentaries or even shorts and other features one has in mind. Kudsi added that filmmaking is always about passion and creativity. “If it was purely for money, most of us would have exited a long time ago.”

Heading a successful company, Al Khaja shared some insights about filmmaking as a commercial business. “I have burnt my hands many times in this industry, but over the years I have realised that you cannot do everything, so delegating is an important aspect of surviving in the business. I have created a team that can act as ‘TV commercials without my input. With the right team in place, I can focus on features. I have been funding an independent film club, The Scene Club, for the last ten years, which is something I am very passionate about. We continue to show uncensored films from around the world. What started with 50 people has more than 11,000 members now.”

Daud voiced a common concern for independent filmmakers in this part of the world, pointing out that acquiring a freelancer licence involves huge sums of money, which is not feasible for many. Al Khaja interjected to say, “If you are an entrepreneur, you will find the funding. It’s out there – you just need to reach out for it. It’s a formula that you need to run any successful business.”

Kalemee made another interesting point about the way filmmaking is perceived, especially for women. “Many people think of filmmaking as a hobby. It is not. It’s as much our bread and butter as anyone else’s. When you make something your bread and butter, you have to be entrepreneurial,” she said.

Chohan queried if it was more challenging to get started or keep it going? There was a unanimous shout about how hard it is to sustain a career in this profession, notwithstanding the starting troubles. It is challenging in terms of both having a fresh stream of ideas that resonate with the audience and keeping the monetary channel open to convert these ideas into films. Creatives have to constantly juggle money-making projects and creative ones, which are mutually exclusive most of the time. As an example of the hardships she had to face when starting out, Al Khaja related an incident from her early days in filmmaking 13 years ago.

“It was excruciating to convince people to believe in my projects, to take me seriously. I had to hire my college English teacher to go with me for business meetings and pretend to be my business partner for people to take my work seriously. Starting out was not easy,” she said, adding that once she got into the business, it was a question of finding the right investors and business partners to keep the momentum going and to grow.

Daud pointed out that not many companies want to try out fresh ideas; they go after the tried and tested formats, which stunts creativity. Kudsi agreed, saying she has often rejected a script because it was not creatively stimulating enough for her. Manahel Bedah, whose most recent short film on Down’s Syndrome was screened at the discussion, noted that she “will never do a project just for monetary purposes.”

PROPANEL

Kudsi spoke of how difficult it is to balance the business and the creativity. “If it was purely for documentaries or even shorts and creative stimulation and juggling money-making projects and creative ones, which is not feasible for many. Al Khaja interjected to say, “If you are an entrepreneur, you will find the funding. It’s out there – you just need to reach out for it. It’s a formula that you need to run any successful business.”

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“It was excruciating to convince people to believe in my projects, to take me seriously. I had to hire my college English teacher to go with me for business meetings and pretend to be my business partner for people to take my work seriously. Starting out was not easy,” she said, adding that once she got into the business, it was a question of finding the right investors and business partners to keep the momentum going and to grow.

Daud pointed out that not many companies want to try out fresh ideas; they go after the tried and tested formats, which stunts creativity. Kudsi agreed, saying she has often rejected a script because it was not creatively stimulating enough for her. Manahel Bedah, whose most recent short film on Down’s Syndrome was screened at the discussion, noted that she “will never do a project just for monetary purposes.”

There is a social stigma attached to the profession (in Arab society). I could not have sustained myself here had it not been for all the support I have received from the community and my family”

Khadijah Kudsi

“I have to be convinced by the script and believe in the project to say yes to it.” Sandhya, who has designed costumes for films including the well-known feature film Sholay, chipped in that people always do some projects purely for creative stimulation and those projects may not always make her a lot of money.

“And then there are others that I do to sustain myself in the business. I have to keep a balance to keep my creativity alive,” she noted.

The panel was then asked if they felt shortchanged at any stage in their careers when a male counterpart won a pitch because of his gender or if female directors tend to get more emotional on set. Al Khaja pointed out that this was the perfect age and season for women filmmakers to bloom. She also reiterated that gender has

About the panellists

Most of our readers are familiar with Nayla Al Khaja, an Emirati director, screenwriter and producer, who stepped into the UAE filmmaking scene almost 13 years ago and has steadily built a portfolio of short films, corporate videos and TVCs since then. She has won both regional and international acclaim for her shorts, but more importantly, she has backed initiatives in the region such as The Scene Club, which started with 50 members and today has more than 11,000 members and was created to screen international and regional films, hold dialogues with their creators and enable greater appreciation for film. Al Khaja has been hailed in the UAE as an entrepreneur, who has been able to make a successful career within this space by maintaining a balance between undertaking corporate filming projects, TVCs and directing shorts.

Manahel Bedah is an up-and-coming Emirati filmmaker who has produced a number of shorts. Khadijah Khudsi is a Saudi Syrian filmmaker and a children’s author as well. Tanya Daud has worked as a filmmaker, a screenwriter, producer, and worked on a number of documentary projects in different capacities, from development (under the creative supervision of acclaimed filmmaker Tom Roberts in one case) to being part of the Social Action Campaign team for Ha Named Ma Malala in the UAE (Labour Accommodation Campaign and special screenings). Sheherazad Kaleem has a number of short films and documentaries to her name. Sandhya comes with a slightly different background and has designed costumes for several TVCs. Her most notable costume design was done for the film Bilal – New Breed of Hero.

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“Many people think of filmmaking as a hobby. It is not. It’s as much our bread and butter as anyone else’s. When you make something your bread and butter, you have to be entrepreneurial”

Sheherzad Kaleem

cautioned filmmakers to pick their battles carefully and not get into controversies unnecessarily.

Cherian asked if women filmmakers receive support from big organisations in the UAE in terms of grants and equipment, and whether private entities extend support as well.

Based on their individual experiences, the panellists commented that Dubai International Film Festival, Image Nation Abu Dhabi and twofour54 have been the most supportive entities on their journey in filmmaking.

“In DIFC there has been a great support, not so much in terms of direct funding but for marketing and PR, getting the right contacts and so on. Image Nation Abu Dhabi and twofour54 have been very supportive as well. These organisations are the backbone of our industry,” explained Al Khaja.

As for equipment support, Manahel said she hires equipment from friends, depending on budget and requirements.

Another key concern brought up was the need for specialisation. While Al Khaja commented that it always helps to don one hat, the rest of the panellists commented that while it would be ideal, their projects have always demanded that they don different hats as producer, director, scriptwriter, actor and even the tea girl. Kaleem said she often has to handle an entire project single-handedly.

“Funds were limited, the project couldn’t afford to hire specific people for specific jobs. In addition to being a director and producer, I also had to write the script and edit my films. I have edited more than I have directed.”

Whether the Middle East will have more women filmmakers anytime soon, only time will tell. Right now they are few and far between – only 8% of filmmakers in the region are women.

However, the panel saw that as an opportunity. Al Khaja said that being small in number should work in women’s favour.

“You go to international film festivals and see how much more support young filmmakers have but, there are also that many more women vying for that support. They also have so much more competition”

Naya Al Khaja

support young filmmakers there have, but there are also that many more women vying for that support. They also have so much more competition. We are in a much more enviable position, I feel.”

Al Khaja went on to elaborate that with the emergence of mobile devices and compact cameras, the availability of more platforms to showcase one’s talent and the increasing support for filmmakers in an emerging market such as the Arab world, women filmmakers in the region are lucky.

Since a film can be shot on a phone these days, women have no reason to hold back their aspirations to tell stories. Funding is a concern, but that’s not specific to women, and male filmmakers face the same problem.

The panel concluded that the Middle East is not a homogenous region, while there is a lot that remains to be achieved in terms of film funding and encouraging women to take up filmmaking as a profession, in the more cosmopolitan cities such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, there are many opportunities for women filmmakers to thrive.
Sennheiser Middle East gave me the opportunity to test out their latest dual channel slot-in audio receiver, the EK 6042. This receiver is predominantly designed to be fitted into the audio slot of broadcast cameras such as Panasonic, Sony, Ikegami and so on, and also the SuperSlot in the Sound Devices SL6. I heard about it a while ago and thought it was interesting, so it was great to have the opportunity to test it out.

One of the first things you notice when you take the EK 6042 out of the box is the build quality – it’s excellent, just as you would expect from a top-of-the-range product from Sennheiser. There is a good weight to it, but it’s certainly not heavy. The top of the unit, the part that will be in view, is quite tall and sticks out slightly more than the WisyCom units that I use. The antennas that are supplied are pretty large with solid plastic and metal SMA connectors at the base and a flexible rubber whip. They do seem very well made and feel like they will survive a lot of abuse in daily use. The slightly larger size of the receiver and the heavy-duty antennas indicate that this is aimed primarily at broadcast camera operators, as opposed to sound recordists.

One of the main selling points of this receiver is its flexibility. The EK 6042 is able to receive from digital and analogue transmitters simultaneously. So whether you are using transmitters from Sennheiser’s range-topping Digital 9000 series or the ever popular G3 series, you are covered. You are able to receive from transmitters made by other manufacturers as well. I tested it out with my WisyCom transmitters, and it worked flawlessly.

The top of the EK 6042 has four buttons, two SMA antenna sockets, an OLED display panel, a TA5 Aux output socket and status LEDs for the two channels. The OLED display is excellent and easy to read, even in direct sunlight. There is enough information at a glance and you can make most adjustments from the unit itself, but as with most dual channel receivers it can be a little fiddly. Sennheiser has added USB web server functionality, so you can connect to the unit using a laptop, tablet or phone and make adjustments. As a sound recordist, I would have liked to have seen display options that let you have the display stay on all the time or dim after a certain period of time. When working with receivers in a soundbag, being able to see information at a glance without having to press anything is essential.

This is obviously not an issue if the receiver is in a camera. The side of the receiver has an infrared port for synchronisation with transmitters and a micro USB port for connecting a computer for configuration via a web browser.

The basic package comes with the EK 6042 receiver, two antennas, a USB cable, a transport case and the printed manual. To be able to use the EK 6042 in cameras or audio equipment, you require a D-sub adapter for the type of kit you’re using. The 25-pin D-sub adapter is used for cameras and audio equipment with the UniSlot/SuperSlot interface, and the 15-pin D-sub adapter is for Sony cameras. If using the EK 6042 in a UniSlot/SuperSlot interface, both the audio channels are sent to the camera through the connector. However, Sony cameras only accept audio from channel 1 through the connector. To receive both channels, you have to use the 5-pin XLR socket at the top of the receiver and use a Y-adapter to send the audio to the camera.

A number of optional accessories are available for the EK 6042, and some of them are essential. As mentioned above, you have the options of D-sub adapters, but if you want to use the EK 6042 on its own then you require some, if not all, of the optional accessories. First, you need the back panel...
adapter (GA 6042 BP), which is a metal sled that you slot the receiver into. This has two Mini XLR (TA5) outputs (main output, either analogue or digital AES3, and Aux output), a HIROSE power socket, a headphone socket and battery pack connections.

I found this adapter made the EK 6042 too large – it was hard to fit into my soundbag, and the connectors rested on the bottom. I do have quite a compact set-up with a small bag, so if you are using a larger bag then you may not face the same issues, but it’s still much larger than similar devices from other manufacturers. I feel that there are potential fixes for this, but at the time of writing there was nothing available from Sennheiser.

The other accessory available is the Accupack adapter (GA 6042 BA), which adds space for two rechargeable Li-ion batteries (BA 61) to the back panel adapter. This is a very neat add-on and works very well. It certainly makes the unit even larger and heavier, but for stand-alone situations where you have no other power supply it’s a very neat solution. The batteries have to be purchased separately, and do not come with the adapter – they will give you approximately four hours of use, so having at least four batteries is advisable if using in stand-alone set-up. These are not standard batteries, so a dedicated charger (L60) is required.

Along with the EK 6042, I was also given Sennheiser’s SK 9000 bodypack and SKM 9000 handheld transmitters to test out. I won’t talk about them much, but they are well made and have a decided premium feel about them. They are unquestionably made to last a long time. The bodypack is about the size of a pack of playing cards and a similar weight. The display is small and gives basic status information; you can change some functionality on the unit itself, but it’s recommended to make the changes on the receiver and synchronise to the transmitter. There are two battery options, the BA 61 rechargeable accupacks, which are the same as I mentioned earlier, and the B 61 battery pack, which takes three standard AA batteries.

The antenna socket is a LEMO connection, standard with other high-end Sennheiser bodypacks. The microphone connector is a three-pin LEMO connector, these are small and robust but certainly more expensive than connectors used by other brands. Most makes of lavalier microphones offer the option for this connector or an adapter. The handheld has a great feel to it, with a perfect weight. The display is the same as on the bodypack and has the same menu and functionality.

### Pros
- Flexible options
- Excellent build quality
- Easy operation
- Web server configuration
- Fast syncing between devices

### Cons
- Very large when in backpack adapter
- Expensive batteries
- Lack of display visibility option
- Too large to be practical

I believe there may be ways to alleviate these concerns in the future, but for now slot-in use is the only practical application.

There are many microphone capsules you can get, both dynamic and condensers are available in various pick-up patterns. There are also two Neumann heads in cardioid and super-cardioid patterns. There are two power options, the BA 60 Accupack rechargeable battery and the B 60 battery pack, which takes two standard AA batteries. If using the B 61 or B 60 battery packs, you should only use alkaline or lithium batteries, as rechargeable batteries will give an incorrect value in the status display.

I feel the EK 6042 is definitely designed for broadcast cameras and the Sound Devices SL6 SuperSlot. Having to buy lots of other accessories to make it work in a soundbag without the SL6 makes it prohibitively expensive.

Simon Charles is a location sound recordist based in Dubai, working on a diverse range of projects from commercials to feature films, corporate productions and events.
BroadcastAsia2017, an international event for the pro-audio, film and broadcasting industries, takes place May 23-25 at Suntec Singapore. Its move to the newly refurbished Suntec Singapore provides an expanded exhibition area of 20,000sqm across three floors – levels 3, 4 and 6. Expect to see more exhibits and an exciting line-up of value-added fringe activities. In addition to featuring the entire broadcast and media ecosystem, the event will offer networking opportunities with professionals from broadcast, production, post-production, digital media, entertainment, system integrators, rental houses and education.

The seismic shifts in the broadcast, media and entertainment industry present numerous opportunities for all players. The industry is witnessing unprecedented growth of new markets, new players, new business models and new technologies all over the world. BroadcastAsia2017 International Conference will host visionaries and professionals from all over the region to exchange knowledge, network and collaborate in this ever-evolving broadcast, media and entertainment industry. From OTT, TV Everywhere, VR and content to IP, UHD, broadcast standards and video technologies, the conference will share insights on a number of topics trending in the industry today. The three-day BroadcastAsia2017 is held alongside CommunicAsia and EnterpriseIT2017, an info-communications technology exhibition at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore. The event will feature the technological advancements in the whole ICT ecosystem. CommunicAsia and EnterpriseIT incorporate SatComAsia2017, where the satellite communication industry can address key concerns, gather valuable insights and be updated with the latest technologies in Asia-Pacific markets. With topics ranging from the latest end-to-end solutions needed to stay ahead of the curve. "New technologies are expanding the broadcasting ecosystem and bringing forth exciting new possibilities to create and consume content, especially within Asia. We are therefore thrilled to be launching these new clusters to allow attendees to get first-hand experience using these technologies," said Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director of BroadcastAsia2017.

Last year, the international conference hosted more than 500 delegates and 130 speakers from over 40 countries. The exhibition floor, which will boast The TV Everywhere! Zone, back for its third showing, is expected to grow by 50% and act as a major focal point of BroadcastAsia2017. Brand-new clusters for drones and virtual reality will also make their debut, rounding up the event’s immersive showcase of products for next-generation broadcasting and the latest technologies needed to stay ahead of the curve. "New technologies are expanding the broadcasting ecosystem and bringing forth exciting new possibilities to create and consume content, especially within Asia. We are therefore thrilled to be launching these new clusters to allow attendees to get first-hand experience using these technologies," said Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director of BroadcastAsia2017.

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seems to be effective,” said Muller.

Widyatmiko added: “Pay TV should be combined with the interactive models that can be built in an OTT platform. A single subscription will be the future of monetising OTT in the future, just like mobile apps content.”

Speaking about data analytics, Muller said: “It’s critical for programmers and marketers to better understand the usage, the behaviour, the expectations of viewers, but also to advertisers and brands in general to maximise their ROI. It is definitely a key currency and component in the broadcasting space, but is simply crucial in the OTT world.”

Widyatmiko seconded that, saying that data analytics is always “a good reference to understand the viewing behaviour, however, for implementing the data, it is still unclear whether to understand the viewing behaviour or for potential advertising/retargeting”. The conference will also discuss some of the finer details of the business, which may lead to higher gains. One session will discuss content packaging and distribution across multiple screens, and will also share insights on finding new ways of packaging content and sharing it across multiple screens, making sure the content is linked on all the screens and across all the channels, and doing everything in real-time.

The power of live streaming will be the key topic for another session, which will touch upon using live streaming on social media, delivering live content to please audiences and connect people, providing a reliable and flexible live service.

David Goldstein, Head of Asia, Bitz, will speak about providing a differentiated brand experience amidst fierce competition. Creating stronger brands, more-differentiated content and more loyal fans, and offering skinnier packages, will be discussed as well.

The keynote on advertising on all screens and syncing advertisements within screens and consumer segments, advertising tailored for different screens, using programmatic personalised advertisements across screens will include playing real-time, packages, will be discussed as well.

More loyal fans, and offering skinnier brands, more differentiated content and fierce competition. Creating stronger differentiated brand experience amidst the future of monetising OTT in the next trend. Where do telecom operators, OTT service providers and other players fit in the value chain? Is content key, or is network key? How can we effectively monetise mobile? Evolving mobile offerings for an enhanced and seamless user experience is also on the agenda.

BroadcastAsia2017 and its partner, Genius Digital, will offer participants at the conference the chance to take part in a workshop that will bring the promise of Big Data in TV to life. There is constant industry talk about Big Data, but there can be a lack of concrete examples of it in action in the TV Industry and of how to practically apply it to the day-to-day workings of a TV business.

This workshop will give participants the opportunity to get a better understanding of how Big Data can really make a difference to their businesses. It is designed for executives who work for organisations that have not yet undertaken a Big Data strategy, or for organisations who have commenced a Big Data strategy, but want to refine it.

By drawing on real-life examples, case studies and experience, the workshop will take participants through a number of exercises using Big Data to solve problems in a TV environment. Participants will then be able to put this understanding into practice with a problem-solving exercise, using real data.

Some of the key takeaways from the workshop will include:
- Assessing your current capabilities and preparing for future upgrades
- Using real-time insights into how consumers are engaging with broadcasts and live streams
- Gaining a greater understanding of consumer behaviour and consumption patterns for strategic business decisions
- Improving consumer engagement and maximising viewers and revenue.

**What’s new in 2017**
- OTT 2.0 and Monetisation
- Optimising Content and Branding Strategies
- Maximising Experience on All Screens
- Virtual Reality as the Next Game-Changer
- Maximising Revenue and Monetising Data Analytics
- UHD vs 1080p: Network Capabilities and Business Models
- IP in Broadcasting: Delivery and Production
- HDR Delivery Roadmap For The Future
- Broadcast Standards, HBBTV 2.0.1 and Hybrid Delivery
- Workflow and Automation
- Subtitling and Captioning Technology
- Sportscasting and Newscasting

Confirmed speakers include:
- Chris Fehrer, Director of Global Media Engineering and Partnerships, Netflix
- Chial Chwee Kong, Chief Content Officer, Mediacorp
- Anil Nihalani, Head of Connected Media, Mediacorp
- Adam Bachtar, Director of Business & Development, TVRI
- Joddy Hernady, 5VP Media and Digital Business, PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia, Tbk
- Jeremy Kong, Vice President, Telekom Malaysia
- Krishnan Rajagopalan, co-founder, Chief Content and Distribution Officer, HOOQ
- Alexandre Muller, Managing Director APAC, TV5Monde
- Charles Seaver, Chief Technology Officer, Dell EMC
- Brendan O'Shaughnessy, APAC Head, Amazon Web Services

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**Cantar Mini**

Digital on-site audio recorder

**Best of Show NAB 2017**
Ross Video has brought mobile monitoring to an all-new level with its new VUER app. The app can support up to four live video feeds and can stream to more than 10 iOS devices in high definition. For multi-camera productions, the VUER app can support up to four live video feeds. Additionally, this self-contained Carbonite engine brings high-definition real-time video monitoring to iPhones and iPads over WiFi. At just four frames of latency, VUER app can support monitoring to any possible computer monitor kit. Serv and Serv Pro can be mounted on the camera or at video village and offer up to 300K of range using their built-in WiFi. Access points or much further distances when connected to a WiFi access point. The HDMI-only Serv model supports up to four devices at one time, while the dual input Serv Pro can stream to more than 10 devices in high definition. Teradek developed VUER, a free iOS application that gives users insights into their live video feeds. For multi-camera productions, the VUER app can support up to four live video feeds.

Said Bacho, Chief Business Development and Marketing Officer at Snell Advanced Media (SAM): “We have broken all previous records. We had more than 700 customer meetings fixed at NAB even before the show started. More than 300 partners registered for our partner event during the show. While the rest of the market experienced maybe 7-9% growth, we had a 20% growth in 2016. That is indicative of the fact we are outgrowing the market and have taken business away from the competition. We brought 40 new products and product enhancements to NAB this year.”

Snell Advanced Media (SAM) demonstrated support for 120 SDI, providing customers with a greater choice in making their transition to 4K/UHD live production. 120-SDI capable cards have now been added to a range of products, providing everything customers need to integrate 120-SDI into their production workflow. From production switchers to routers, master control, servers and converters through to distribution amplifiers and monitoring solutions. In response to clear demand from the market, SAM now offers a straightforward alternative to UHD migration that overcomes operational worries surrounding IP systems. In the OB, flyaway and rental sector, SDI is a very well-known and understood technology. 120-SDI can handle UHD signals on a single coax cable, delivering greater efficiency. Among the products now supporting 120 are SAM’s Hydra and Kahuna production switches, Masterpiece master control switcher and Multiviewer monitoring solutions.

Blackmagic Design has announced ATEM Television Studio Pro HD, a broadcast-quality all-in-one live production switcher with integrated hardware control panel designed for both broadcast and professional AV users. ATEM Television Studio Pro HD features eight inputs, multiview, auxiliary and programme outputs, analogue audio inputs, built-in talkback, two flash-based media players, professional creative transitions, a DE-2 effects and more.

Blackmagic Design has added a 120-SDI UHD capability to products Snell Advanced Media (SAM) to create, distribute, and monetise the most watched, loved and listened to media in the world. It includes four SDI and four HDMI inputs, all with re-sync, so customers can connect a total of up to eight different sources, such as professional SDI broadcast cameras, consumer HDMI cameras, computers and even video game consoles. Blackmagic also announced DaVinci Resolve 16 as well as a new open protocol for the URSA Mini Pro camera and Blackmagic Video Assist 4K update, which adds multilingual support.

Avid announces cloud strategy
Avid announced the news of the Avid MediaCentral Platform extending to the cloud, showcasing end-to-end 4K/IP workflows, enhancing immersive workflows, and expanding the Alliance Partner ecosystem, with major advancements across all product suites. By extending the Avid MediaCentral Platform to the cloud on Microsoft Azure, media organisations now have the complete flexibility to create, distribute, and monetise their content using the deployment type that works best for them. The cloud offerings are complimentary to what Avid’s clients may already have deployed on premises. Regardless of their deployment model—in premises, private data centre, public cloud, or hybrid—media organisations of every type and size will have the same user experience, workflow power, speed, efficiency and collaboration capabilities they’ve come to rely on from Avid. These advancements are claimed to be the greatest expansion of Avid Everywhere since its launch four years ago.
PROGUEST

This is not to announce the death of SDI (Serial Digital Interface)... SDI is not dead, at least not yet. However, the writing has been on the wall for a few years now – SDI can no longer cope with the ever-increasing demands of the media industry.

With the dawn of bandwidth-guzzling formats like UHD that can use up to 144Gbps for streaming a single uncompressed channel, SDI just can’t cope. Currently, we have to use four 3G-SDI cables/router ports to cater for one low-spec uncompressed 4K channel. A high-spec uncompressed 4K channel would need 36Gbps – would anyone be willing to sacrifice 12 3G-SDI cables/router ports to accommodate a single 4K channel? This is just one reason why there has to be a transition from SDI to IP technologies.

When planning for any transition, it is wise to look back at similar transitions in the past – there are lessons to be learnt. Many years ago, at the advent of the transition from analogue to SDI, I remember what life was like for many of my colleagues. They had established routines, they could repair a broken Betacam or U-Matic VTR in their sleep, they could troubleshoot complex transmission problems in seconds. Any form of change was an unwelcome disruption to an ecosystem that was working and which everyone was comfortable with.

The transition from analogue to SDI meant building new toolboxes, working long hours, learning new skills, concepts and workflows... and to the senior executives on the top floor, it meant a huge CAPEX dent. Many were so consumed by fear that they last sight of the big picture. I recall how many of the fears my colleagues had were based on misconceptions and speculation that ended up being far from reality – that’s exactly what fear of change thrives on.

Needless to say, after the labour pains of the transition had passed, everyone grew to love SDI. What made the transition more seamless and acceptable to my colleagues was that we had a hybrid analogue/SDI ecosystem.

Since SDI gained popularity in the 90s, it has evolved from SD-SDI at 270Mbps to the more recent 3G-SDI at 2.97Gbps – a ten-fold increase from when it started. There are 6G and 12G versions of SDI, but these are failing to gain traction. Some of the advantages of SDI that have won our confidence include: noise immunity, good signal fidelity over long distances (typically 100-300m), an open standard with full interoperability, inherently easy frame-accurate switching, easy to deploy, embedded audio, timecode and other ancillary data in a single link.

Any worthy successor to SDI needs to at least have the major benefits of SDI and beyond. IP seems like it is going to take the baton from SDI. IP has advanced way beyond SDI in the past few years. A typical IP stream with RTP (Real Time Protocol) over UDP and PTP (Precision Time Protocol) combined with the payload is as reliable and frame-accurate as SDI.

Final thoughts

Though IP has its drawbacks, the opportunities it presents are much greater. The transition to IP will be gradual, and SDI will die a slow death. Until that time comes, hybrid SDI/IP environments will be the norm – and the tomb prepared for SDI will remain open.

Simba Tagwirei is a broadcast IT consultant based in Qatar. He has successfully delivered projects in the Middle East, Africa and Europe.
There is more to see inside.
A fluid video head with a technologic core featuring a nitrogen piston capable to continuously counterbalance your gear. Discover the new Manfrotto Nitrotech N8.