TV network steps into future with multiplatform delivery and 4K content

**AGAINST ALL ODDS**
Commercial radio in Palestine grows strong

**CONTENT KINGS**
TV formats reign at MIPCOM

**THE PITCH**
David Sternberg on Manchester United TV’s Middle East strategy

**ROTANA UNLEASHED**
One of the big puzzles that most of the older broadcasters have not been able to solve successfully is the archiving challenge. Tons of tape lying in the warehouse can be digitised. But what next? Hire people to sit and listen to those tapes for months on end and transcribe them? How many months or years would that take? A US-based Arab who has spent more than half his life developing human language technologies says there is now a simple and easy solution.

Machine translation (MT), automatic speech recognition, audio fingerprinting and such technologies have been used extensively in other industries for a long time and have now been developed to very high standards. Broadcasters across the world have begun to understand the potential of this technology to undertake a host of tasks that could make archiving a breeze while also ensuring that their content can be simultaneously translated into several different languages, thereby extending their reach and audience across the globe.

Mohammad Shababah will be with us at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards on November 11 to share the power of human language technologies. But he is only one of 25 professionals from the production, broadcast, info and OTT industries joining us from around the MENA market to debate the business of television entertainment, its commercial viability, the technical challenges of streaming content to multiple platforms, the increasing role of IT and whether telecoms are ready to face a new future in broadcast.

I am equally delighted to announce that Her Excellency Sameera Rajab, Minister of Information Affairs, Bahrain, will be delivering the keynote at our Summit. Her keynote comes at a time when the region’s most talked about channel, Alarab, gets ready to launch. We are pleased to know the news channel’s team will be joining us for the summit and awards.

On another note, we shall end the day with a gala awards evening. We were very ambitious this year by introducing difficult categories, because our aim is and has always been to encourage the region’s frontrunners and innovators – both individual and corporate – to come forward. Join us for the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit to learn more and network with the largest regional gathering of industry professionals. See you on November 11.
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What’s new in digitally networked audio?
Bahrain’s Minister of State for Information Affairs and Official Government Spokesperson, Her Excellency Sameera Ebrahim bin Rajab, will deliver the keynote at the ASBU BroadcastPro Middle East Summit, which will be held on November 11, 2014, at Jumeirah Beach Hotel in Dubai.

Rajab, who is also the Vice President of Higher Authority for Media and Communications in Bahrain, among several other ministerial roles, is well known in the industry for her dynamic vision and helping to reform media laws in the Kingdom.

Her Excellency’s keynote will focus on the Evolving Broadcast Landscape of Bahrain. She will highlight the direction the industry is headed in and her perspective on the future of media in the Middle East.

Bahrain recently floated more than 20 tenders for major media projects in the Kingdom and is home to Alarab news channel, which is owned by Saudi Prince and entrepreneur Al-Waleed bin Talal. Alarab is due to launch before the end of this year.

Kuwait will launch an independent television and radio organisation to compete globally. The Gulf state recently shut down media outlets that carried anti-government points of view, alleging that such news stories had a negative impact on Kuwait’s image. The new station will be free from government interference, Minister of Information Sheikh Salman Sabah Salem Al Humoud Al Sabah said in a statement.

Former SPT Arabia President Ziad Kebbi launches production company

Former Sony Pictures Television Arabia President Ziad Kebbi has launched his own Dubai-based production company, Maximum Media, which will sell local and international formats in the Middle East. Kebbi is also the CEO of Talpa Middle East.

Maximum Media is developing original scripted and non-scripted Arab projects. It will also act as a distributor for global formats in the Middle East’s rapidly growing Arabic-language TV market.

“Maximum is already developing formats that will give the reality genre a surprising twist, and new game show concepts specifically for the region,” Kebbi said.

Before launching SPT Arabia, Kebbi was Managing Director at Endemol Middle East, which he launched in 2007 with Arabic-language versions of international TV formats such as Deal or No Deal.

Joop Janssen, Managing Director and CEO of EVS, has stepped down due to differences in view with the company’s board of directors about implementation of the company’s long-term strategy. Muriel De Lathouwer, Chairperson of the Strategy Committee, has been appointed as President of the Executive Committee on an interim basis.

Former Sony Pictures Television Arabia

Kuwait to launch international TV station

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IBC has named Tim Richards as the Chairman of its Partnership Board. Richards will take over from Mike Martin, who retires at the end of 2014.
PRONEWS

Qvest Media announces completion of Alarab project

Qvest Media has completed the delivery and implementation of all production, broadcast and distribution facilities for the Arab region’s latest news channel, Alarab, the systems integrator announced. Based in Manama, the channel will include extensive news programming as well as regular news roundups and business information in association with Bloomberg. Alarab is scheduled to go live later this year.

Qvest Media has managed all aspects of the project, including design, planning and technical integration for the channel. The scope includes two studios with affiliated control rooms as well as the latest technologies for monitoring, video and graphics editing.

End-to-end file-based workflows, a high level of automation for all production processes and a centralised media asset management system, as well as HDTV distribution for satellite, multi-platform live streaming and an IPTV solution, are just a few of the key features that Qvest Media has designed and integrated. The news channel has also adopted Elemental video processing systems for its live linear as well as multiscreen TV service.

Speaking about the choice of technology, Jamal Khashoggi, GM, Alarab TV said: “Image quality and high availability are both extremely important to us as we aim to offer the best service to our viewers.”

BKP fortifies video arm with Collective

UAE-based production house and audio expert BKP, which recently rebranded as BKP Media Group, has fortified its video content arm by merging its video post-production division with Collective, a content creation company. The resultant entity, Collective®BKP, is aimed at further strengthening BKP’s visual arm.

Commenting on the evolution of his company and what the new partnership entails, Collective’s Tim Ash said: “We have grown from a group of enthusiastic and creative individuals into a brand that can now deliver on time, on budget and to client expectations. In an industry, where reputation is everything, we feel this partnership has created a real power house.”

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BKP Media Group, told BroadcastPro ME: “The partnership between BKP Video and Collective is a tremendous addition to the vision of developing BKP Media Group. We have invested heavily into refurbishment and are procuring the latest hardware and software to accommodate this expansion.”

Collective is a film production and content creation company that uses crowdsourcing and technology to create video content for TV, web and mobile screens. It is headed by Film Director Omar Abbas, Executive Producer Peter Simons and Managing Director Rema Hameeda.

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Introducing Canon’s latest addition to the Cinema EOS range – the CN20x50 cine servo lens, offering a native 50-1000 focal range. It is the industry’s first ever to include a built-in 1.5x extender, which combines with a class-leading 20x magnification and a removable servo drive.

INC delivers second MCR presentation room for Kuwait TV’s Channel One

INC System Integrations completed integration of a second presentation room for Kuwait TV’s Channel One, last month, BroadcastPro ME can reveal. The presentation room is equipped primarily with solutions from Grass Valley, Avid and furniture from Lund Halsey. A GV Maestro Master Control Switcher, K2 media server system, 128x128 Concerto routing facility, multiviewers and Avid Motion Graphics have been deployed at the facility. It took INC three months to complete the project, according to Adob Abid, General Manager at INC System Integrations.

“We have completed the integration of two presentation rooms out of six that the broadcaster plans to build. The first one was delivered last year. The end user was happy with our previous two projects and has awarded the contract to execute the third presentation room as well,” he said. INC will start work on the third MCR early next year.

Region’s first children’s radio station launches with MGI

Media Group International (MGI) has built the entire infrastructure for the newly launched children’s FM radio station, PearlFM. The channel claims to be the first radio station of its kind in the region, offering exclusive programming for children. The project involved designing and installing two radio studios as well as a back-up studio. MGI also installed server rooms where live broadcast material can be stored for up to 60 days.

The equipment chosen for the new station includes Clyde Broadcast Synergy Master Control systems in all studios. These are complemented by RCS playout systems; mics from Clyde Broadcast, Shure and Beyerdynamic; Sonifex delay units; and a range of production and control software.
Ross Video has opened its EMEA headquarters at Pinewood Studios in west London, on the site of the film studio’s historical props department. As well as providing office space, the new Ross EMEA HQ will include a full studio demonstration suite allowing the team to showcase the entire Ross product range, including the new Acuity switcher, Ross Robotics, virtual studio and openGear solutions.

Alrai TV upgrades graphics module

Kuwait-based Alrai TV recently upgraded its WASP 1.3 system to WASP 2014. In September 2014, Alrai added a new module called the WASP3D Stock Feed Handler, which is used to display the stock exchange news bar. This replaces its legacy inserter used for Stock Exchange with the latest feed handler. The upgrade was carried out without affecting the current installation of the on-air graphics. WASP3D is used in news and production control rooms of the Kuwaiti broadcaster. With this installation, Alrai has become the first TV station in the region to upgrade to the latest edition of WASP3D. Alrai TV was also the first TV station in the region to integrate WASP3D with its ENPS news system back in 2007.

In addition to this, the TV station has also replaced its legacy playout graphics on air—Pinnacle DekoCast—with the WASP3D system. A new Sting Client/Sting Server from WASP3D has been added to the existing system. The TV station is presently expanding its ENG Camera line with the Sony PMW 300K and deploying a new MAM solution.

Radio Sultanate of Oman opts for NETIA

Radio Sultanate of Oman is to use NETIA’s Radio-Assist suite of digital audio software programmes at radio stations in Muscat and Salalah to provide complete automation of operations and support digitisation and preservation of the national archives. The custom Radio-Assist implementations, which will run in both English and Arabic, will provide secure digitisation of the broadcaster’s audio archives, currently stored on a collection of 80,000 tapes. Speaking about the installation, Philippe Fort, CEO at NETIA, said: “We worked closely with our systems integrator, Bahwan IT, and the Radio Sultanate of Oman to engineer a stable, secure and reliable solution for preserving the valuable audio assets and for making that media readily available for future broadcast.”

Radio Sultanate of Oman

Saudi Arabia’s second biggest telecom operator, Ethad Etisalat (Mobily), has appointed Serkan Okandan as its Deputy Chief Executive. The position was created in order to support the company’s daily operations. Okandan is presently Chief Financial Officer at UAE-based Etisalat and will remain as finance head of Etisalat. He represents Etisalat as a board member in its operations in Pakistan, Morocco and Nigeria. Etisalat owns 28% of Mobily. Khalid bin Omar Al Kat, MD and CEO of Mobily said that the introduction of this position comes as part of Mobily’s new strategy of becoming an ICT player. Okandan joined Etisalat as the group CFO in January 2012.

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Visitor numbers at InfoComm MEA grow by 12% in 2014

The fourth InfoComm MEA attracted 14,570 visitors, 12% higher compared to the event last year. The exhibition attracted 184 companies from 42 countries, who showcased the latest in audio, visual, and information communications technologies, including production, display, audio, lighting, conferencing and interactive touch technologies and systems, spanning education, government, transportation, entertainment, hospitality, building, enterprise, and media.

Driven by large infrastructure developments such as the World Expo 2020 in Dubai and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the MEA audiovisual market is projected to grow from USD 2.79 billion in 2012 to USD 4.63 billion by 2016, according to InfoComm International.

“The Middle East and Africa is witnessing tremendous growth in the audiovisual market and that’s clearly the case here in Dubai,” said Richard Tan, Executive Director, InfoCommAsia Pte Ltd.

“The strong growth we have seen this year in visitor numbers and the range of solutions we have seen from exhibitors highlights just how well positioned this region is for the future,” he added.

IN FIGURES

40%

Nearly 40% of the GCC population aged between 15 and 35 are technologically savvy web users, and 80% use the internet daily.

Source: Dubai Film and TV Commission

OSN secures exclusive MENA rights to ICC events till 2023

OSN has secured exclusive regional rights to all 18 ICC tournaments and qualifiers for the next eight years.

OSN already holds the rights to the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup and has renewed the rights from 2015 to 2023, through an exclusive arrangement with STAR, which was awarded the global rights by the ICC.

STC and Manchester United TV ink exclusive Gulf deal

As part of their ongoing partnership, Manchester United and STC have announced the telecommunication giant’s exclusive rights to broadcast the club’s dedicated MUTV (Manchester United TV) channel in the Gulf region.

This is the first time MUTV has been broadcast continuously in the Middle East, giving STC Invision subscribers access to behind-the-scenes footage of the club, documentaries and breaking news, as well as live commentary of every Manchester United match, including reserve and youth team games.

Not only is this the first time MUTV will be shown continuously in the region but the channel will also be broadcast in HD.

STC signed a five-year marketing agreement with the UK-based football club in 2018 to feature STC’s branding on the club’s website and inside Manchester United’s main stadium.

UAE capital among top filming destinations in the world

Abu Dhabi has been named the only city in the Middle East alongside a list of countries such as Australia, Canada, and Germany on the list of top international locations for film production in the latest issue of online magazine, P3 Update.

The Hollywood-based digital publication cites the Emirate’s vibrant locations and 30% cash rebate offered by Abu Dhabi Film Commission on the total production cost as major attractions for producers to come and shoot here.

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Du chooses Cisco’s cloud-based ACI

Du has selected Cisco to deploy Application Centric Infrastructure (ACI), which offers full visibility and integrated management of both physical and virtual networked IT resources. It is built around the needs of applications. Du will be the first telecom company in the world to deploy this solution.

With rapid growth and ever-increasing demand for faster networks from end users and enterprises looking for faster ways of doing business, home automation and smart city data centre infrastructure is quickly transitioning from an environment that supports relatively static workloads confined to specific infrastructure silos to a highly dynamic and flexible cloud environment for greater efficiency.

DMI launches Snapchat account

DMI has launched its account on the social application Snapchat becoming the first Arab government entity to do so.

Heba Al Samt, Director of Digital Media Department for TV and Radio at DMI, said: “DMI is committed to providing the latest and the most advanced digital services. This account is in line with that commitment. Snapchat is still in its infancy; there are no statistics that show its uptake among government entities.”
Rotana Media Group recently went to air with a fully revamped 14-channel playout system to enable content delivery across multiple platforms. The project is one of many phases undertaken by the media conglomerate to achieve a full file-based HD infrastructure across its broadcast workflow. In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Dr. Naser Refaat, Technical Executive Services Manager and Acting CTO of Rotana TV Network and a leading technologist in MENA, elaborates on the recent project and sheds light on other parallel projects that will help the Arab film industry to bring its famed library of old Arabic content back to the screen as new
Rotana Group has one of the oldest and largest movie libraries in the Arab world, with Arabic-language movies dating back to at least 1921. It is also one of the largest producers and owners of Arabic content and owns a film production company, print media, TV network, radio stations and a record label as well. The media house presently operates 26 channels worldwide, with 14 SD channels on Nilesat and Arabsat, and 11 HD channels on Arabsat only. 13 channels are streamed through IP to European and US distribution cable partners. It also broadcasts to European and US distribution on Arabsat only. 13 HD channels on Arabsat, and 11 SD channels presently operates 26 channels worldwide, with 14 SD channels and 11 HD channels on Arabsat only. As phase one of this project, Rotana’s Cairo facility recently went to air with a 14-channel playout system from Imagine Communications under the leadership of Dr. Naser Refaat, Technical ExecutiveServices Manager and Acting CTO of Rotana TV Network. Egypt-based system integrator Systems Design implemented the project in Cairo while also coordinating the media migration processes, ensuring quality control of the content and providing on-site support. "We are constantly growing and upgrading," explains Dr. Refaat. “This project is also a bigger project for Rotana to upgrade to HD infrastructure, and increase the number of channels. This new implementation triples the existing storage that Rotana has available for higher bitrates. Additionally, it has increased the system channel capacity to accommodate the growing demand for new channels.”

To put the project in perspective, Rotana had a system that could only play out four channels in 2009. Back then, Imagine Communications was contracted to provide a 10-channel, fully redundant system. This full end-to-end solution incorporated ABC playout automation, Nexio servers, graphics, glue, routers and multiviewers. However, as and when needed. With the migration from SD to HD transmission, Rotana now has the ability to upgrade most of this, enabling Rotana to play out 14 channels while providing it with HD capabilities. The current upgrade also includes a massive revamp of the media asset storage system. The existing system storage capacity has been replaced with the latest Nexio Farad scalable online storage system from Imagine Communications. Rotana’s current online storage capability is 4TB, although the new system provides the broadcaster with the ability to upgrade to up to 1PB of online SAN. In addition to this, Rotana has deployed Imagine Communications’ Nexio Volt servers to allow it to increase the number of channels it can play out in increments.

"In essence, with the Nexio Volt servers, Rotana now has the ability to add up to 400+ channels," explains Dr. Refaat. One of the big challenges with this implementation was data migration. Wallis addresses this: “It was handled smoothly through our Nexio Motion digital asset management system.”
“With the Nexio Volt servers, Rotana now has the ability to add up to 400+ channels”
Dr. Naser Refaat, Technical Executive Services Manager and Acting CTO of Rotana TV Network

As with most facilities, they also had limited rack space. This was overcome by using the Nexio Volt 1RU servers instead of the traditional Nexio AMP 3RU servers.

“Imagine Communications completed a seamless transition from its existing storage system to a fully redundant Farad storage system involving the data migration of 35k of hi-res media content to Imagine’s Nexio Motion digital asset management system. This was completed without any interruptions to the on-air process. As the Nexio server architecture is designed with full redundancy in mind, the migration from the original playout server to the new Farad storage system went smoothly,” Wallis explains.

Imagine Communications has also added the core for a fully expandable system, from the storage capacity point of view as well as the channel counts.

“This implementation is the first step in this major project to implement a file-based workflow that would work across all of Rotana’s departments in Cairo, enhancing both productivity and efficiencies within and between our departments,” explains Dr. Refaat.

Once the installation was completed, a quick-start introduction was provided to the resident team. Comprehensive in-depth training will take place at Imagine Communications’ Academy in Dubai Media City in coming weeks.

“We have a large support team based in the UAE that covers the region and has a lot of local spare parts in stock as well. This combination enables us to deliver a seamless solution that helps the transition to a file-based HD with the Nexio Volt servers, Rotana now has the ability to add up to 400+ channels.”

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RIEDEL’S NEXT STEP

News from IBC
PROCOVER

workflow without any service interruptions,” adds Wallis.

This project, however, is only one of several milestones for Rotana under Dr. Refaat’s leadership. Elaborating on some of the tech teams achievements and work in progress, he explains: “We have not only upgraded our facility from SD to HD for some of our channels, but are also undertaking the same to migrate to 4K using Imagine Communications. In addition to that, we maximised on the old 2009 structure and started using it for streaming to Europe, the US and Canada. We offer exclusive channels to stream online content to these countries.”

While the new systems have streamlined several different processes for Rotana Group, handling such large volumes of data across different platforms has been a task in itself, Dr. Refaat points out. “Multichannel delivery poses a huge challenge. We are not just looking at distributing content on 26 channels anymore, but across multiple platforms as well. Now, we have a fully automated solution that includes a fully redundant system. The router is completely redundant and our new MCR caters to all of our requirements. The redundancy is 1 plus 1 plus 1. “We receive feeds from live studios – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai and Lebanon at times, and from Europe and the US for events. We also manage emergency playout for Fox and Fox Movies. Their delivery to different satellites comes from our central Cairo-based facility. “The Imagine platform is being used to move all of our content to 2K and 4K when needed. This is a massive project and Imagine manages the delivery part of this process. The conversion of our material from 35mm to 2K and 4K is being undertaken by Prasad Corporation in India. We have invested heavily in the relevant hardware and are using their expertise to convert the content under the supervision of Rotana’s Head of Film Library, Tarek Gabali and Michael Cairns, COO at Rotana Media Group. “Simultaneously, we are working with a storage company to make content available online. Parallel to this, we have issued a tender for a MAM project and are in the process of identifying the right partners. The aim eventually is to ensure that our catch-up content can be made available to our viewers within minutes of it being on air. Previously, it used to take us two days to make our material ready for catch-up. Now, within 30-60 minutes of it being on air, you can find it on the web,” Dr. Refaat explains.

Dr. Naser Refaat has been overseeing the technical upgrade of Rotana’s TV channels since 2009.

This project is phase one of a bigger project for Rotana to upgrade all of our channels to HD and have the ability to add more TV channels in the future as and when needed.”

“Dr. Naser Refaat, Technical Executive Services Manager and Acting CTO of Rotana TV Network

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The converted content is routed through a BTS traffic and channel scheduling system and then, eventually, the Imagine Communications system. Although the BTS solution handles most of the traditional scheduling and playlist operations, Rotana’s media buying house, Rotana Media Services (RMS), now has much more sophisticated traffic and scheduling requirements, managing not just the various ad sale spots on TV channels but also other ad media such as street banners, exhibitions, radio spots and so on. This is beyond the scope of a traditional broadcast traffic system.

“We had a traffic and scheduling system tailored to our requirements by German media solutions company, Cataneo,” explains Dr. Refaat, placing the project in perspective. “The project began in bits and pieces in 2009. Then we integrated the BTS traffic system and completed the flow with Cataneo. We simultaneously started the restoration project and, in parallel, scouted for an IP distribution platform. We have now expanded on Imagine Communications to achieve that in partnership with Nilesat.”

In essence, he says, with the new solution in place since summer this year, Rotana Media Group is fully geared for rollout and delivery via IPTV, IP and OTT, with its catch-up service hugely improved as well. The media house intends to upgrade its post-production facilities to support 2K and 4K in the coming months.

With an enviable content library, a restoration project due for completion in a few years, the conversion of data to 2K and 4K formats, a proper MAM system in place in the near future and metadata requirements being addressed, Rotana Group is poised for a future of even greater success.

- Vijaya Cherian and Vibhuti Arora

The Bigger Picture

Rotana’s film division produces or acquires up to 35 movies per year, representing 70% of the total movie business in the Arab world. It recently co-produced Emirati filmmaker Ali Mostafa’s film From A to B, which premiered at Abu Dhabi Film Festival this year. Rotana has also bought the TV rights to the film.

“We have acquired most of the Arabic-language films from the local industry over the years and are the only rights holder to these films, making Rotana the largest content owner in the region,” claims Refaat. “We started a project to restore legacy films from as far back as 1921 that don’t exist anywhere else in the world, and have managed to restore and convert them to 4K successfully. Our objective is to use this content and monetise it effectively.

“When we first undertook a restoration project in 2004, it took us several days to restore just one film because the equipment was fairly outdated and the processes more tedious. From 2007 onwards, we have, therefore, been looking at multiple avenues to improve efficiencies. On the one hand, we began to outsource some of the tedious elements of the work that were not part of our core business. This is why we chose to outsource the restoration to a India-based Prasad Corporation, which specialises in this work.

We are working in conjunction with some major data centres in Egypt as it cannot be achieved completely in India. Some of the movies we have are of very low quality, with scratches and so on. We are working on the movies first and then we will move on to other legacy programmes that we have inherited from the industry.”

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Celeb 400 DMX wins Best of Show at NAB 2014

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Commercial radio in Palestine is growing strong despite obstacles, and remains a popular source of news and entertainment. Vibhuti Arora finds out what it takes to broadcast from a conflict zone.

While in many international markets, radio has suffered a decline in revenues as a result of the shift to digital platforms, it remains resilient in the Arab region. In fact, radio has displayed a robust growth rate in most Arab countries, owing to a proliferation of private FM channels. Radio remains a preferred medium in conflict zones for its reach and accessibility, and Palestine is no exception.

Commercial radio has been going strong in Palestine despite the conflict, with success attributed to daytime usage on the roads and mobile phone applications. According to JMCC.org (Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre), 62% of Palestinians listen to radio frequently between 6am and 6pm.

With more than 80 stations, radio continues to be a popular medium for news and entertainment in Palestine and it is constantly evolving, according to Walid Nassar, CEO of Ajyal Radio Network, a homegrown Palestinian radio station. Ajyal Radio has grown steadily since its launch in 1999. Focusing mainly on Palestinian and regional news, the network covers politics, social services, finance, sports commentary and religious programming.

97% of its programming is produced in Palestine. The network boasts of three channels under the ARN (Ajyal Radio Network) umbrella: Ajyal FM – ‘Ajyal’ means ‘generations’ – targeting a broad spectrum of listeners; Angham FM, with an all-female presenter team, targeting young people; and Ramallah FM, which plays non-stop music from Ramallah City, for an age-group that is between 13 and 25 years.

“We offer many music shows with 70% Arabic music and 30% Palestinian music. Although we do not have a big library of Palestinian music, we do offer local music shows to keep the focus on locally generated content, as that’s what our audience wants,” comments Nassar.

The network offers 22 FM frequencies in all Palestinian cities, covering the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. It is broadcast in Palestine, with some spillover into Jordan (Palestine also receives Jordanian radio channels).

“We have a number of listeners outside Palestine. We re-run some programmes due to the time difference, especially with North and South America, where Ajyal Radio is quite popular,” says Nassar.

“We mainly broadcast local news from Palestine, almost 30% of listeners in Palestine tune in to Ajyal Radio Network. According to a private survey made by the British Council, Ajyal Radio Network has 1.5 million listeners. That’s why

**Against All Odds**

**Ajyal Radio Network (ARN) at a glance**
- The radio network offers 22 frequencies in all Palestinian cities
- 1.5m listeners tune in to Palestine’s Ajyal Radio Network
- The network was launched in 1999
- Its staff comprises 50 personnel

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Walid Nassar, CEO, Ajyal Radio Network

Radio challenges
The topography of Palestine poses a major challenge in establishing a terrestrial broadcast infrastructure. 75% of Palestinians live in cities surrounded by mountains, and in conflict zones, it is hard to cover news from all parts of the state.

“Our reporters have been attacked and violated by Israeli soldiers on several occasions. Our staff cannot reach the radio station, especially if they live outside the central station city of Ramallah, as they are stopped at Israeli checkpoints. We face the same problem when we go to inspect our stations outside the cities for maintenance purposes. There is interference with our frequencies from the Israeli side, especially from their settlements in the West Bank,” comments Nassar. However, he claims that the network “has very smart engineers to keep up with the latest advancements in technology, despite the many hurdles we face”.

“We also have a new fibre terrestrial network infrastructure in Palestine.” Ajyal Radio Network uses the fibre SHDSL VPN system, which allows us to connect all our FM sites with excellent connectivity.

“In the West Bank and Jerusalem, we have many frequencies that are given by the Israeli Army to the settlers in Israeli settlements. If we do not use these, Israeli will.” Nassar laments the challenge of living off short-term plans and implementing them as quickly as possible because of the volatile situation in the state.

“Long-term plans don’t work for us. We have to act quickly lest it’s too late, as the future is so uncertain for us. I hope to see a day when I can plan just like my peers do in other parts of the world. But living in a conflict zone, we don’t have that luxury; we take each day as it comes. We have to act quickly lest it’s too late, as the future is so uncertain for us. I hope to see a day when I can plan just like my peers do in other parts of the world.”

Walid Nassar, CEO of Ajyal Radio.
The ARN network has 22 stations across the state, giving locals a sense of association with their station.

D, as our A, B and C plans fail. My dream is to live in a free country with no more occupation. We take it as our duty to reach out to our people and keep them well informed.”

ARN offers each Palestinian city its own dedicated radio station. The network has 22 stations across the state, giving locals a sense of association with their station.

The 22 radios include one central and ten repeaters for Ajyal FM, which makes 11 frequencies; one central and nine repeaters for Angham FM; and one central for Ramallah FM. Nassar explains that any repeater can become the central one if there is a big event in that city. For instance, if Nablus has an event, it becomes the central station and the other cities are repeaters.

Popular programmes

Radio Magazine, presented by Mayson Manasra, has been driving the ratings up with 70% of ARN listeners tuning into the show. Ajyal This Morning is another popular show, and Shadows on the Other Side, presented by Fat’hi Barqawi, has a high percentage of listeners in the morning and during midday. However, the most listened-to programme features folk songs.

The stations are manned by 38 full-time staff and 12 part-timers, and are mainly funded by advertising revenues from various sectors including telecom, internet, banking, consumer goods and education.

“The network has very smart engineers to keep up with the latest advancements in technology, despite the many hurdles we face”

Waild Nassar,
CEO, Ajyal Radio Network

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The 30th edition of MIPCOM welcomed executives from a record 112 countries and an all-time high 13,700 delegates – including more than 4,600 buyers of which 1,300 were acquiring digital and VOD rights. Throughout the week, it was clear that the industry’s priority was to get original global content out to a growing global audience. With content driving the business, distributors are diversifying their catalogues to meet new consumer and broadcaster demands.

“This has been a record-breaking and a particularly memorable edition of MIPCOM,” noted Laurine Garaude, Director of Reed MIDEM’s Television Division.

“We saw extensive deal making and energy on the show floor, with Mexico as Country of Honour, a record number of key programme launches at the MIPCOM World Premiere TV Screening and the first MIPJunior World Premiere TV Screening – and an amazing line-up of top industry executives and celebrities.”

The drive for original content was the focus of this year’s MIPCOM. The increasingly competitive market and the explosion of delivery platforms are fueling the hunger for original content. Traditional business models and metrics are fast disappearing as players experiment with new ways of doing business. This was brought to the forefront at a series of discussions during the event.

James Murdoch, Co-Chief Operating Officer, 21st Century Fox, described the pre-MIPCOM merger of Shine, Endemol and Core Media with RAI as a game-changer for the industry. Murdoch also discussed the challenges of operating in a rapidly changing landscape and the importance of content partnerships to succeed.

Clockwise from left: Film director M Night Shyamalan; Fred Groves of Twitter; James Murdoch of 21st Century Fox; and Indian film actor Amir Khan.
Abu Dhabi goes to Cannes
Sameer Al Jaberi, Production and Location Coordinator at Abu Dhabi Film Commission (ADFC), spoke about filming in Abu Dhabi during a session on ‘What’s Hot in the Middle East’ at this year’s MIPCOM in Cannes. Al Jaberi emphasised the 30% industry rebate offered by ADFC on all qualifying production spend in the Emirate and explained the eligibility, qualifications and process for the incentive.
Abu Dhabi has been attracting productions from all over the world in recent months. This year alone, twofour54 wrapped up filming in September this year. Al Jaberi has provided end-to-end production solutions alongside ADFC’s cash rebate for major productions such as Star Wars: Episode VII, Furious 7, Syrian TV drama Al Ikhwa, and Bollywood thriller, Baby which wrapped up filming in September this year.

We saw extensive deal making and energy on the show floor, with Mexico as Country of Honour, a record number of key programme launches, at the MIPCOM World Premiere TV Screening and the first MIPJunior World Premiere TV Screening – and an amazing line-up of top industry executives and celebrities
Laurine Garaude, Director of Reed Midem’s Television Division

as being an opportunity too good to miss, creating a global leader in entertainment production.
Director M Night Shyamalan, attending his inaugural MIPCOM, explained that his decision to finally direct his first TV series, Fox’s Wayward Pines, was spurred by the power of TV to create art for audiences, with budgets and artistic freedom that are becoming rarer in the film sector. Shyamalan isn’t alone in making the move into TV. Harlan Coben, best-selling author of mystery and thriller novels, came to Cannes with TF1’s No Second Chance, the first of his books ever to be adapted for TV. Coben admitted that he had never really been interested in television until he began to see the quality of series such as Breaking Bad.
Reflecting the blurring of lines between film and TV, MIPCOM hosted the first Film Commissions Day. Olivier-René Veillon, CEO of the Be-de-France Films Commission, told his conference audience that the commissions are becoming increasingly aware that they need to consider the importance of TV for their business.

8.36

He said Disney’s acquisition of Maker Studios extended the media giant’s business into short-form and allowed Maker Studios to leverage the global Disney resources. Chinese internet entrepreneur and Sohu.com CEO, Charles Zhang, said the Chinese Netflix equivalent would invest heavily in original content, develop 24-hour online series, increase acquisitions from independent Chinese producers and begin buying Hollywood movies. Danish toymaker Lego is following on from its megahit feature The Lego Movie, by moving into television next year.
The TV and film producer, music label boss and internationally-renowned talent show judge Simon Cowell received the MIPCOM Personality of the Year Award.
MIPCOM’s Country of Honour programme, produced in partnership with ProMexico, saw a record 125 Mexican companies in Cannes.
The multitude of deals signed during the week was diverse in nature. Viacom closed a multi-year agreement with Amazon Prime in the UK, which included UK rights to Kung Fu Panda and Awkward. Mexico’s TV Azteca tied with Electus International to take Mexican rights to Netflix’s feature The Lego Movie, by moving into television next year.

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In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, David Sternberg, Head of Media at Manchester United, speaks about the club’s recent partnership with Saudi Telecom Company.

How long have you been associated with Manchester United?

I am relatively new in this role, having joined Manchester United a year and a half ago. I have been in sports media for 15 years in the US, first with Fox Sports and then with NBCUniversal. I have a background in broadcast coverage of global sport, and more recently, there is more emphasis on digital platforms. My mandate at the club is to grow our media assets and make them into a meaningful contributor to the club.

What are your plans for the Middle East region?

The Middle East is a very important region for us. Some key steps in growing our presence in the region is to grow the distribution of Manchester United TV, which is our club’s TV channel. With this new a partnership with STC, the channel is now available on STC’s Invision IPTV platform, which means our fans in Saudi Arabia will be able to watch the channel and follow the team much more closely. Also on the agenda is to develop more digital channels for Arabic speakers. We have introduced the Arabic language version of our website as well as our Twitter feeds in Arabic. In addition to this, we produce content in Arabic for Facebook. We are also in talks with other social media portals to establish a presence on them.

Is your deal with STC exclusive?

The rights granted by Manchester United to STC are exclusive to its territories in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Our partnership covers these territories in the Middle East. Meanwhile, we are talking to other operators in the UAE and other parts of the MENA region about complementing the distribution deal.

Sports is such a huge revenue generator. How do you plan to leverage the real power of sport?

Sport is important to media in general and TV in particular. It’s the only programme that is DVR-proof and Netflix-proof, and it has the power to aggregate massive audiences. This is a great development from our perspective because we compete in the Premier League arena, which is, by far, the most widely viewed football competition in the world. We participate in the growth of revenue streams by licencing live Premier League games. The role of my department is to match that rate of growth, if not exceed it.

Can you share some statistics?

We have the biggest club football website. Our website receives 2.2 million unique visitors per month. We have 60 million fans on Facebook and our Twitter followers are close to 4 million. This is a great impetus, considering that we launched our official presence on Twitter just last July. More importantly, we have the highest levels of engagement of any football club and the number of posts that are shared or liked. Within this region, in Saudi Arabia alone, we have 3.4 million fans and followers. The ratings for our matches in this region are very high. We are excited about being exposed to a new group of fans subscribed to the Invision TV platform, which our partnership with STC will offer.

Are you creating any new platforms?

We have a couple of things in the pipeline from a product development standpoint. One of the things we are looking at very closely is creating content for global messaging apps such as WhatsApp and VChat. We recently launched online in Japanese and Thai. We are also looking at developing different types of devices, not just phones and tablets but also gaming consoles and set-top boxes.

What are the challenges you face in your current role?

Our objective is to ensure that we create content that is unique, exclusive and relevant to Manchester United fans around the world and is accessible to them in their language and the types of devices they use. It should be valuable enough to them that they spend time on it and potentially, money. To achieve that, we have to work hard on the football side of the company and offer more value to our fans.

What, according to you, are the latest trends in technology driving sports? Anything portable and mobile is driving sports these days. The out-of-home viewing is close to 20% of audience measured at home watching our live games. We have done some research with a few companies to look at that in greater detail and have observed that during a live match, the usage of our mobile apps is seven times higher than the rest of the week. Giving a second screen experience to the audience is really important.

What are the trends within sports in terms of formats and content? Technologically, all is coming up in a big way. We have just upgraded to HD, but we will be there sooner rather than later. The attention span of viewers is getting shorter. In order to cater to that, we do short form video clips, about 30-second duration. It’s far more efficient. It’s critical to ensure that our programmes are relevant to different devices.

Region-wise, what are the differences in demand between, say, the US and UK and the Middle East?

Live sport generally is very powerful, no matter where you go. Here, it’s a premium product distributed in multiple territories. If you look at the big players in sports, in the MENA region, they tend to have a pan-regional focus, which is not the case in the UK. In fact, in the US, you need to have a sub-regional focus, given the size of the country. They use very powerful dedicated networks that cater to local markets like Los Angeles, Chicago and so on. The media is organised a little bit differently here because of the different ways in which the content reaches the audience. Satellite TV is widespread in the MENA region and pay-TV is relatively small compared to Europe or the United States. The region doesn’t have a robust advertising revenue stream, unlike the States.

Is there a second screen experience to the audience to the club’s recent partnership with Saudi Telecom Company?

“Sport is important to media in general and TV in particular.”

David Sternberg, Head of Media at Manchester United

“During a live match, the usage of our mobile apps is seven times higher than the rest of the week. Giving a second screen experience to the audience is really important.”

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PROINTERVIEW

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Content Delivery Networks (CDNs) evolved to offload content delivery from websites. Whether to handle traffic surges or geographic issues, the CDN is a shared resource, which has the practical effect of making a web service look bigger and more powerful than it actually is by absorbing and then delivering peak traffic.

The basic economic decision for a CDN customer is to trade the capital cost of building their own network to handle peak demand against the rental cost of using the capacity of the CDN as needed. It follows when a CDN customer reaches a certain size, the economics of building their own CDN starts to become attractive, though even with an in-house CDN it may still be cost-effective to use a third party to handle traffic spikes.

The capital costs of building a global CDN are huge, and there are significant ongoing costs for supporting customers and expanding capacity in the face of ever-increasing demand. However, for a network provider, it costs even more to expand network capacity without a CDN, since video delivery is growing at a rate that exceeds the ability to expand by conventional network builds. In practical terms, CDNs are essential to allow the delivery of video-based content in a way that allows a business case to work.

The business case logic becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy here. Installing additional CDN capacity leads to improved video quality, which leads to new users and hence, increased demand.

The growth in video traffic in the Middle East over the last few years has been huge, for multiple reasons. The biggest single factor is probably the advent of software, which is easy to use. Put that software on affordable devices and place those devices in the hands of a population that readily adopts new ideas, and there is instant demand. Add to the mixture, good quality content, both live and archived, and the means to deliver it – now the CDN becomes important – and it is easy to understand the growth and why it will continue.

One of the unusual features of the Middle East market is the Ramadan effect – the growth in video consumption during the holy month. This year, video traffic during Ramadan was up by seven times pre-Ramadan level, providing an emphatic health check for the performance of the network infrastructure in the region. Given that the start of Ramadan overlapped the final days of the World Cup, end users can be confident that the investments made by the various players in the market have been effective.

Once the level of CDN traffic...
reaches a critical mass in a given market, the statistics start to be useful because they visibly represent human behaviour. The essential difference between broadcast television consumption over a satellite channel and the same service over an IP / Internet / CDN connection is that the statistics are accurate and in real-time. The IP provider does not need to ask people if they watched a programme, nor does it need to install systems to monitor viewing habits. The end user initiates the connection and maintains that connection for as long as they are interested in watching. This creates multiple opportunities to gather statistics and identify which content is in popular, as well as more specific data, such as which device type is most popular in a given country. The statistics can be useful to programme-makers – the impact of repeats of popular shows, say – or in terms of internal rivalry – noting that Arabic content is more popular than English-language content.

Using a CDN gives even the smallest of operators a very cost-effective global reach – and the market for Arabic language content is truly global, with Arabic speakers everywhere in the world. The same is true of other languages, Farsi for example. From a business perspective, expat populations tend to be more willing to pay for content in their own language than they would be in their home country. The Middle East is an exporter of Arabic-language content, but an importer of English, French, Tagalog and many other language-specific types of content. Whether news, sport or entertainment, this creates a healthy market, which encourages investment; this generates more content, which in turn expands the audience and the market improves further – a virtuous circle.

The chart here shows the Ramadan effect on entertainment content. Ramadan started on June 28, 2014 and ended on July 27.

The increase in traffic at the start of the month is dramatic, while the fall-off at the end of the period is much more gradual – very good for the broadcaster. The demand has been created by very effective scheduling, and the supply is simply huge network capacity. Put the two together and it becomes obvious what CDN technology can achieve.

One of the first regional demonstrations of CDN delivery was the news traffic during the Arab Spring. Although the peak traffic was 6-8 times the average, it lasted for shorter durations as compared to Ramadan traffic, because it was news content.

The main difference between then and now is that the huge level of traffic can be sustained over time. The regional networks have improved, interconnectivity has been enhanced and end-user bandwidth has improved. As an indication of what is now possible, the Ramadan streaming for entertainment content peaked at over 100 Gbps. If we assume that average user bandwidth is 1 Mbps (for simplicity), that means around 100,000 people were watching an Arabic IP video stream. This is alongside the normal satellite broadcasting, which has always been the mainstay of regional entertainment.

Regional network capacity has improved greatly over the last few years; there is now much more local peering and far less need for traffic between GCC countries to travel via Europe. While capacity has increased, so has the demand. A new generation sees tablets and smartphones as primary sources of video entertainment. The big TV in the living room is not going away, but the people watching that TV are also likely to be updating Facebook, or checking what happens next in the programme they’re watching.

Regional content owners now have the means to deliver their content in high quality to both local and global audiences. The question of how to monetise that content is still open, and there are as many business models as there are service providers. We have a healthy market in which people are willing to invest, and that is good news for content owners and users, alike.
For Emirati filmmaker, Nujoom Al Ghanem, making films is like writing poetry or sculpting or painting. It’s a way of contributing towards making beauty, she says. Filmmaking is a liberating experience for Al Ghanem and gives her a sense of fulfilment. “Making films keeps me happy; accomplished and brings satisfaction. Sometimes I feel I’m mediating through my films. The flamingos and sea creatures in my latest film, Sounds of the Sea, capture that feeling of happiness and contentment,” says Al Ghanem.

Sounds of the Sea is about an ageing folk singer, who wishes to cross the Umm al Quwain creek for the last time in his life on a fishing boat. The documentary brings to life the folklore and music of the fishermen and pearl divers of the UAE. It premiered at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival last month in the International Feature Documentaries section. The film was chosen for development funding by Sanad at last year and is jointly funded by Nahar Productions, Sanad and TwoFour54. Sanad is the development and post-production fund of Abu Dhabi Film Festival. The majority of the film’s shoot took place in Umm Al Quwain, with parts shot in Dubai and Fujairah.

As a SANAD-funded project, the film had a better chance of being selected for the film festival, according to Al Ghanem. “I’m really thrilled. I feel proud that we’ve made an important film that reflects the culture of our country. The audience’s reaction was very heartening and has inspired me greatly.”

Al Ghanem started making films while she was still a student in the US and Australia. Her first films released in 1997 were two short films called Ice Cream and The Park. “I believe my first short documentary, Between Two Banks in 1999, paved the ground for me as a film producer/director and taught me a lot. I had to make films here in the UAE during a time when filmmaking in our country was still in its infancy from an industrial perspective,” she explains. Between Two Banks was accepted to the YAMAGATA International Documentary Film Festival in Japan, and went on to feature at fifteen film festivals, not only in the Arab region but also in Europe and Southeast Asia.

Sounds of the Sea – an international project
Al Ghanem, a writer and poet as well as filmmaker, wrote the treatment and script for Sounds of the Sea. Her husband, Khalid Albudoor, a well-known Arabic poet and a qualified script-writer, did the research and content development for the project, while Sony provided equipment support. “Sony was quite generous, since they offered the camera equipment for免费使用.”
PROPRODUCTION

Sounds of the Sea follows the stories of elderly fishermen who live their lives at sea. The film sheds light on the heritage of the fishing community in the UAE.

and its lenses for free, which helped us greatly in reducing the cost of production. In fact, this contribution was so touching, it made me feel that I was finally rewarded for my hard work. It’s a great feeling to be trusted and appreciated for who you are and for your work,” says Al Ghanem.

The PMW-F5 was the main camera for this project. It has been used extensively for hand-held shots. The underwater shots were captured using a GoPro camera.

“I used several different lenses to create the arty shots. However, because of the long shooting hours and the constant motion of the boat, the zoom lens came in very handy as it allowed us to change the sizes of the shots easily and quickly,” she explains.

This being a documentary, Al Ghanem had to work with ordinary people, not actors.

“We used the crane for very few shots only for one day, because I was not sure how the actors would react to it. Shooting with the crane is time-consuming and the crew had to move quickly before the actors got bored or felt ill at ease, so we decided to give it a pass.”

Panel lights, in addition to the reflectors, were used extensively in the film.

“Our real treasures were the camera, lens box and, of course, the wireless mics and boom,” adds Al Ghanem.

The post production of the documentary was done in the UAE, Lebanon, France and Austria. The locked version of the film was delivered in Dubai, then sent to Beirut for sound design and sound mixing. The colour grading and DCP (digital cinema package) copy was done in Paris, and the original music was composed and recorded in Vienna.

“We’ve had the most amazing international team that contributed professionally and aesthetically towards making this film to international standards and with
"It was indeed a joy to work in studios and with professional people that work mainly on feature fiction and documentary films. Even the language they speak is different! It's the language of art and creativity."

Al Ghanem

Arab filmmaking - a work in progress

Al Ghanem says that as well as having being a big challenge for up-and-coming and even established filmmakers, a lack of professional studios and personnel are some of the issues that filmmakers in the Arab world have to contend with. "I feel that we have only a few choices, in which most of them are working on commercial projects. It was indeed a joy to work in studios and with professional people that work mainly on feature fiction and documentary films. Even the language they speak is different. It's the language of art and creativity."

"Through the TV industry is thriving in the region, films are still lagging behind, according to the filmmaker. "Today, things are much better than what we had in the nineties. Financial support has also become more an artistic sensibility," enthuses Al Ghanem.

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"We are a conservative society. Our people are modest, polite and humble. They don't like talking about themselves or their problems. They think they shouldn't share their sorrow or anguish with others as they don't want to bring more attention to themselves."

Al Ghanem speaks about the lack of interest in documentaries. "Documentaries need to expose, reveal, discuss and dissect. When we present our films to the outside world, they think that we don't have real or serious issues because our films are seldom a real representation of our society. I always find this unfair because they don't want to view our films from a different perspective," she explains.

Despite numerous challenges, however, the local film industry is moving forward and the filmmaker feels that it has progressed organically over the years. Only time will tell how the industry will blossom, as of now, the road ahead looks bright for Emirati filmmakers. 
The Future of Channel In-a-Box

Playout systems continue to improve function integration with an emphasis on play to air, but the robust functionality of the channel-in-a-box system raises questions of its utility in other applications. Andy Warman asks if these systems can be used for something other than scheduled channel playout.
focused on conventional one-box, one-function playback systems, and their use for premium channels shows that they’re here to stay.

With many of the same requirements as their counterparts in Europe and beyond, broadcasters in the Middle East stand to benefit from the use of CIAB systems for schedule-driven playout.

CIAB systems largely evolved from one of three origins — video server platforms, graphics systems, or schedule-based automation systems — other than those built for CIAB from day one. Systems that evolved from a video server or graphics system typically have core technology targeting more than just scheduled playout.

Indeed, classic video servers could be applied to many different workflows. So the concept of using this underlying technology for other purposes is plausible.

Systems based on existing automation systems may have access to workflows and technology on the control side that is visible beyond schedule-driven playout.

Other system elements must be examined for suitability with less predictable workflows.

For CIAB systems built from the ground up, determining utility in other applications is a more subjective exercise. They lack a legacy of existing intellectual property that could inform or limit future use and development.

While some niche applications lend themselves more easily to a fresh approach and design, other applications can prove enormously complex or entrenched in a workflow or process that deters newcomers.

In exploring the use of CIAB technology beyond scheduled, the key principle is responsive. The switcher element can then be extended to enable access to the graphics and clip playback components. Because this puts a great deal more functionality at operators’ fingertips, the control surface needs to be agile, and at the very least, configurable. Workflow preparation should ensure that clips and graphic templates can be recalled quickly. Buttons can be programed to play the same clip, recall the same logo or graphic sequence, or provide mix effects, DVE switching and more.

The CIAB system interface makes it easy to create and manage different setups for different use cases.

If the objective is to record the switched output of the CIAB system, users can access video, graphics, switching and effects, and roll in external device control. The potential application of these capabilities deserves detailed examination.

One key feature of CIAB systems is ease of replication. Requiring significantly less equipment than solutions based on single-function devices, CIAB technology allows users to introduce new services more quickly, even in applications other than schedule-driven playout.

For playout systems that are not schedule-driven, control protocols must be flexible and allow for fast-change moments without perceivable latency. It’s no good having long cue times, the need to cache content from a central storage system, or pre-processing of graphics. Likewise, if setup or reconfiguration is difficult, or if tricky or cumbersome methods define and modify effects, layers, switching, audio routing and mixing, then it can be difficult to change workflows as system-usage evolves over time.

In the Studio

In a studio environment, some CIAB systems can function as a small switcher, provided there is a reasonable number of inputs and

the final mix running through the CIAB hardware. In this case, all groups can be external, or some can come from the CIAB system.

What happens when the operator wants to stop in and out of the schedule to cover a live event? Conventional wisdom says that the air chain for playout is separate from the systems used for live and studio workflows.

CIAB systems make it possible to change that dynamic. Because the CIAB hardware can execute the functions that make up both the live and playout workflows, it can essentially become a shared resource.

A handshake mechanism enables the operator to take manual control at a scheduled time for a pre-programmed event, or when the master control operator breaks out of regular scheduled programming and assumes live control. Control can be switched back to the CIAB system, either with a return to the schedule at a predetermined time, by switching back to automated control at the next event, or simply joining an event in progress.

The simplicity of this approach is compelling, particularly for media management. Media can be maintained in one place, with graphics and clips available for both live and scheduled workflows.

Operators also realize greater continuity with lower-threshold, RS232 and database feeds remaining uninterrupted, rather than being driven from alternate sources.

Because some CIAB offerings can perform multiple roles, users have the opportunity to employ a hybrid system that is capable of both live and scheduled playout. Such deployments offer a deeper level of function integration (greater workflow collapse) and enable

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The Dubai Film Market (DFM) runs concurrently with the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), with a mission to support filmmakers by creating a hub for Arab cinema and a destination for sales and acquisitions of Arab films and TV content. Samr Al Marzooqi, Manager, Dubai Film Market, sheds light on the market’s new initiatives this year.

What are the new initiatives introduced by DFM this year?
This is our ninth year hosting the film market on the sidelines of DIFF. DFM has a very business-oriented format this year, and we are going beyond production into monetising and making films profitable. Our new strategy now extends to distribution, sales, marketing and packaging. The highlight of this year is that we now cover broadcast as well, and the TV market is now a part of DFM.

The Dubai Film Market has partnered with industry players such as Gulf Film, Vox, Front Row Filmed Entertainment and the Kuwait National Cinema Company. This collaboration involves each organisation selecting and securing distribution for at least one Arab title from DIFF’s 2014 film programme.

This new initiative for the 11th edition is a great opportunity for independent filmmakers to obtain distribution and showcase their films to a wider audience, both here in the region and on the world stage. Sales agents, distributors, broadcasters and other purchasers will have access to DIFF’s Cinetech, a digital library that houses more than 350 of the festival’s offerings, giving buyers a first look at the latest showcase of rich and diverse independent films. The market is also increasing the number of exhibitor stands for companies to take advantage of the excellent opportunities to interact with industry leaders, view their products and network with major players in the region and beyond.

There will also be networking opportunities with all the key decision-makers in the film and content industry throughout the MENA region. We will host panel discussions that focus on the latest global practices, screenings and industry events that will showcase emerging and established talent from the Arab world.

We have stepped up our initiatives and services. There is support for the production of films from different
quarters, but there is not much assistance available for distribution once the film is ready. With our new initiatives for distribution, we complete the picture.

We will have specific speakers to address different issues at this year’s DFM. There will be support for sales, agents, buyers and distributors, giving them a one-stop-shop for selling and buying Arabic films. We want to promote Arabic titles, globally and regionally, through these initiatives. The Cinetech will be accessible 24 hours a day. We are offering 100 titles from the region and beyond. Our exhibition area is also bigger this year, with more exhibition stands. It’s a full-on show, with exhibitor space, stands and service providers, completing the production and distribution chain.

How has DFM grown over the years?

In the last eight years, every year, we have introduced a new programme. We have announced 241 Arabic projects over the years. We’ve been supporting projects at different stages of production, including development, post-production and co-production. In 2012, DFM had eight stands from three countries and in 2013, the number of stands grew to 32 stands from 11 countries. That time we were aiming for 50-60 stands at the exhibition.

Service providers, production, film companies and entertainment companies will be a part of DFM this year. We have talent agencies as well as other online services for scouting cast and crew. Some of the countries represented this year include Sweden, Namibia, Thailand, South Africa and Egypt.

Some distributors don’t pick Arabic titles, thinking they are not commercially viable. To encourage more distribution to buy Arabic-language films, we have introduced the Dubai Distribution Programme, which seeks commitment from leading distribution companies in the region to redistribute these titles. The idea is to showcase as many films as possible. DFM helps form partnerships and deals between filmmakers and distributors; we just mediate the process and don’t interfere in the proceedings.

We have a commitment at the festival to support distributors in the marketing and release of their films. We also promote them on social media platforms.

What are you offering in terms of education and information?
The forum sessions of panel discussions, workshops, master classes and networking sessions, are our main vehicle of information transfer and education for the market attendees. Many a time, rights holders in the region lack knowledge about the business of distribution. There is no successful case study to learn from, as international distribution models are not applicable to our region. These initiatives will help develop the local market and address the commercial aspect of films.

Which companies are coming to DFM this year?
The confirmed companies coming this year are the Namibia Film Commission, Barajum Entertainment, the Association for Transformation in Film and Television (South Africa), MAD Solutions, Mada Arab Film Festival, Thai Film Office, Talent MENA, Advanced Media Tracking, Paradise Productions and DubaiPak Media.

MAD Solutions picked up a few titles last year, including Factory Girl, which went international and won critical acclaim. AlKatraz Productions, Central Picture Portugal, Dubai Film Institute, Victory Link – Egypt, Agenda Algérie pour le Rayonnement Culturel, and Ad Antra Films – France, Dubai Studio City and Dubai Films and TV Commission, will also participate in DFM 2014.

“Our new strategy now extends to distribution, sales, marketing and packaging. The highlight of this year is that we now cover broadcast as well, and the TV market is now a part of DFM.”

Samir Al Marzoqi, Manager, DFM

Dubai Film Market

The Dubai Film Market (DFM) is the business and trade hub of the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) and the destination for the sales and acquisitions of Arab films and TV content. It comprises a range of initiatives, services and partnerships that connect Arab and international film industry professionals to accelerate collaboration.

DIFF established the DFM in 2007 as a platform to raise the visibility of Arab cinema at an international level. Since its inception, DFM has supported more than 260 Arab films, many of them enjoying critical acclaim and finding new audiences across the globe. It is now considered the world’s leading industry stage for Arab cinema and a unique platform that contributes to shaping and developing the Emirati film industry.

DFM serves as the gateway to the forum, an exciting series of business and industry panels and workshops that take place during the festival.

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PROGOLF

The inaugural BroadcastPro Masters Cup at The Address Montgomerie Dubai last month brought together industry professionals for an afternoon of good golf and intense networking. Some happy moments from the event

"Brilliant event, great networking. It was good to be away from the usual corporate stuff and spend time on the golf course" Paul Wallis, Imagine Communications

"We usually interact with engineers from the industry but it was great to meet with film directors, finance and ad sales guys on the course today" John Aslett, MGI

"It was a fantastic opportunity to meet and connect with those from the industry who share either a passion for golf or simply spending a day in the sun! A big thank you to the organisers!" Zain Mirza, Glocom

"Very good job, overall a very well organised event" Grant Richmond-Doggan, Integr8

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More than 60 avid golfers from the regional broadcast industry gathered at The Address Montgomerie Dubai on October 23 for some tee time. BroadcastPro ME’s inaugural golf day brought together professionals from the regional broadcast arena to tee off with industry peers. The afternoon was marked by great camaraderie on the course as manufacturers, tech heads and systems integrators were joined by end users and media agencies.

With representation from OSN, MBC, Imagine Communications, Ericsson, MII, Glocom, Snell, Sony, du, Telstra and tweefour4, among others, the event was a huge success and will now be an annual feature on our events calendar.

Besides players from the broadcast industry, we were happy to have in our midst a few special guests like renowned boxer Roy Gumbs and Dubai-based “dollar” artist Jim Wheat, both avid golfers.

The 18-hole game culminated in a dinner party with winning teams awarded with appreciation certificates and prizes, including golf bags, artwork by Dollarsandart and gift vouchers.

The BroadcastPro Masters Cup was supported by Ericsson, Imagine Communications, Fujinon, Integracast, First Gulf Company, Talkabout Media and Dollarsandart.

Dubai-based production house Talkabout Media filmed the entire event from shotgun to dinner.

Some of the highlights from the event will be screened at the ASBU BroadcastPro Summit and Awards on November 11.

Congratulations to the winners!

1st place: Paul Wallis, Matthew Perman and Graham Barrett
2nd place: Zain Mirza, Roy Gumbs, Richard Ogung and David Burns
3rd place: Dipesh Makwana, Anthony Harwood, Im Golp in, Ehab post and Ewan Bailey
Nearest to the pin winner: Matthew Perman
Longest drive winner: Chris McCann

“Best game of golf I have ever had.
Fantastic event!”
Graham Barrett, MBC

“Very well organised event... it was great to see broadcast professionals get together for some social golf”
Byron Schmetz, Ericsson
Eurostar offers connected TV experience
Eurostar Group has launched Satellite Home Gateway, a device that enables users to enjoy live satellite content on a connected screen from anywhere at home. The Satellite Home Gateway, or ES 6505, is one of the first certified SATISHP servers and enables consumers to access live satellite content across multiple screens and locations by means of SATISHP clients (tablets, smartphones, PC, thin IP STBs, among others). The device is embedded with four DVB-S2 tuners and has a built-in WiFi access point with QoS, which makes it a fully autonomous product.

The device enables Ethernet connection, as a result of which end users can have a full connected TV experience. The ES 6505 is equipped with a 500GB data disk and can additionally support 2TB HHD for recording purposes.

www.eurostargroup.com

Avid goes compact with new suite
Avid has introduced a major addition to its suite of control surfaces for sound recording, mixing, and editing, further delivering on Avid Everywhere. The compact Pro Tools|S3 desktop control surface is a sonic solution that goes sound engineers a control to work more ergonomically and efficiently, in order to create quality mixes, and expand mixing capabilities. It comes with 16 channel strips, each with a touch-sensitive, motorised fader and 10-segment signal-level meter.

When used together, Avid Pro Tools|S3 and Pro Tools|Software — both part of the Avid Artist Family of creative tools powered by the Avid MediaCentral Platform — deliver tightly integrated approach to mixing and recording in smaller-sized studios or mobile settings. The new suite will be available in November 2014.

www.avid.com

Plura softens loudness with 30 monitors
Plura Broadcast has introduced new software-defined features within its 30 monitors. These cover audio loudness logging and V-Chip decoding, also further empower quality control across broadcast and production workflows, without adding complexity or increasing form factor.

The new features represent a software-driven evolution of the company's SFP-30 and PRM-30 monitoring portfolio. This is a continuation of company strategy that aligns its portfolio with the changing requirements of broadcasters and production professionals in the digital television age.

For broadcasters worldwide, Plura Broadcast will extend software-defined loudness monitoring and logging functionality within the same two monitor families — saving its customers another several thousand dollars in additional component and system integration costs.

www.plurabroadcast.com

NewTek packs a punch in TriCaster Mini
NewTek has unveiled TriCaster Mini, a portable system that allows anyone who doesn’t speak or understand the technical language of video production or broadcasting. Marketeers, corporate employees, small business managers, community administrators, educators, trainers, non-profit and worship service volunteers who are interested in delivering their messages like seasoned television professionals can use TriCaster Mini to assemble visually sophisticated multimedia presentations — and stream them live, publish to social media or upload to a website from the office, an event, or any location with an internet connection. Setup is fast, straightforward and uncomplicated, and within a matter of minutes, users can create a multimedia programme without any other broadcast studio equipment or a professional crew.

www.newtek.com

Ross Video’s Furio comes of age
Ross Video has introduced a new addition to the Furio line of Robotic camera systems. The new Furio Pedestal combines a stable three-wheeled pedestal base with the Furio 3-stage robotic lift.

The Furio Pedestal supports both the Furio VR1 and VR600 pan/tilt heads. This system provides a lower cost alternative for users who don’t need on-air floor movements, but still require fully robotic remote control of pan/tilt, tilt, elevation, zoom and focus. As the new pedestal is fully compatible with the existing Furio control systems, lifts, and VR-1VR600 heads, it can be easily retrofitted into existing installations, and share common spare parts with other Furio lifts and heads.

The Furio Pedestal comes in two packages that include either a VRM600 or VR-1 pan/tilt head, and all necessary accessories. It’s also available as an upgrade option to Ross virtual solutions packages, while the pedestal base can be purchased as an add-on.

www.rossvideo.com

Venera improves the pulse
Venera has unveiled Pulsar Pay-Per-Use (PPU), a new addition to its Pulsar automated file-based QC system. Pulsar is a file-based automated QC system designed to automate content QC seamlessly at various stages in the content workflow, such as ingest, archive and playback.

It’s new Pulsar pay-per-use offers users who don’t want to make an upfront investment, the option to convert their investments to operational expenditures and adopt QC immediately. This capability does not compromise content security or require additional infrastructure. Users can continue to use Pulsar within their facility with the added benefit of pay-per-use.

Boasting the flexibility of a cloud solution and the security of a dedicated on-site system, Pulsar PPU makes the advanced QC functions of Pulsar automated file-based QC solution available to facilities whenever those capabilities are needed on site.

www.veneratech.com

Sound Devices safeguards files
Sound Devices has introduced FireSD technology as part of its 2.02 firmware release for its multi-drive, network connected video and audio rack-mounted recorders. Incorporated into the Video Devices PIX products, including the 271, 260 and 250, as well as the Sound Devices 770, FastTrack recorder, FireSD safeguard video and audio files if, during recording, drives are unintentionally removed or power is lost.

During recording, data is written to a proprietary Sound Devices file format optimised for high-data rate, real-time video and audio recording. Video files have an .sde file extension and audio files have an .afile file and audio files have an .afile file.

In the event that files cannot be finalised, they still remain intact on the drive.

www.sounddevices.com

Nevion’s Sublime offering
Nevion has launched Sublime X³, a compact, 32x32 hybrid video/audio router. Designed for broadcasters, production companies and government agencies, the hybrid router offers the functionality in one box that normally requires multiple pieces of equipment, or a much larger router.

Combining routing with signal processing and a high level of redundancy, the Sublime X³ complements Nevion’s Vicki Sublime routers. With its cross-point, controller and power redundancy, Sublime X³ offers the reliability typically only found on modular routers.

The embedded multi-core signal processor of Sublime X² offers future-proofing by enabling feature upgrades through software.

The new Sublime X³ is a 2RU 32x32 30-SDI compatible compact router with built-in controller offering web interface, SNMP support, and support for all Nevion control panels.

The router’s hardware options include redundant controller, redundant cross-point, quad-core signal processor and AES 10 module.

www.nevion.com

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"One of the most promising trends in the audio sector in recent years has been the emergence of digital audio networking. Traditional analogue distribution systems are plagued by an inherent complexity as the logical and physical connections are one and the same."

The audio network

For audiophiles, ‘analogue sound’ is a romantic phrase. For audio technicians and systems integrators, however, it’s tricky business and fraught with challenges. With every termination a chance for a faulty connection or ground loop, every power source a potential cause of EMI, every cable a contributor to attenuation and each additional connection contributing to ever-growing cable jumbles, the industry is desperately in need of a better way to do things.

It’s no wonder, then, that one of the most promising trends in the audio sector in recent years has been the emergence of digital audio networking. Traditional analogue distribution systems are plagued by an inherent complexity as the logical and physical connections are one and the same. This means that building complex and flexible audio distribution systems is expensive and difficult, with complications including the need for large amounts of copper cabling and separate conduits for signals of differing voltages.

Digital audio networks do away with these challenges by instead using off-the-shelf Ethernet switches and cabling. The physical connections now become irrelevant, since software controls allow audio inputs to be dynamically routed from any input device to any output system, as long as they are both on the network. The Audio/Video Bridging (AVB) group of the IEEE is working on providing standards for transporting audio and video over ethernet. Their work will be vital to establishing standards that guarantee the interoperability of audio systems connected to digital networks.

Right now, there are several prominent players, including Dante by Audinate, EtherSound, CobraNet and Aviom. Each manufacturer and protocol has its drawbacks and quirks, but the main industry talking point is their latency. It is now common for sound engineers and designers to have to calculate total latency across a complete digital signal pathway, to ensure that it doesn’t mount up to an audible level. This is no mean feat when you consider that the conversion rates of a range of equipment – digital mixers, external processing and effects – have to be considered. All these individual components have varying rates of conversion and thus differing speeds, so keeping on top of it is a challenge. When you add in digital networking, you really are at the threshold of latency becoming audible. Though this may not be mission-critical for audio systems used in commercial install, it becomes a huge factor for live events.

Which standard – and which manufacturer – is best for your organisation’s digitally networked audio system? You should only make this decision after doing research to find out which one meets the highest of technical standards without requiring specialist switching gear and connectivity. Preference should be given to the protocols that are most popular across the industry and have not emerged from brand-specific protocols; these latter contribute to the development and funding of products that will ultimately diverge from industry standards.

Adhering to industry standards equips companies to optimally cater to customers in the broadcasting and live sound worlds. Sennheiser, for instance, follows the Dante protocol. Its Dante-enabled systems will be capable of transmitting and receiving audio channels to/from other Dante-enabled equipment over a standard local area network running internet protocols (TCP/IP, UDP/IP).

Ryan Burr is Technical Sales Manager at Sennheiser Middle East.
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