Sky News Arabia takes storytelling to next level with AR and VR
BeIN Sports let go of a fifth of its staff last month, and OSN, which has been trimming its staff periodically in recent months, has finally made the decision to discontinue Pehla on July 15, after the ICC Cricket World Cup concludes on July 14. Both companies have attributed their decisions to rampant piracy in the region. The question to ask, however, is if piracy alone is to blame, especially in the case of beIN Sports. There is no doubt that the media house has been seriously impacted by piracy. Sceptics, however, have also questioned the wisdom of paying ridiculously high rates to secure MENA broadcast rights for sports, when the ARPs in most North African countries are under $4. Of course, the GCC countries have higher spending power, but they don’t have the numbers to sustain a successful pay-TV model either. As far back as 2015 and 2016, I recall UAE broadcasters who had briefly dabbled in buying the rights to some big sporting events stating that it was just not commercially viable and they wouldn’t get their fingers burnt again. The solution? If all the broadcasters in the region collaborate and refuse to bid for sports rights unless they are available at an affordable premium that makes commercial sense in this market, we will eventually have a win-win situation. In the meantime, we have just returned from ConnecTechAsia in Singapore, where I always hear the start of conversations before they pick up pace at IBC, NAB and CABSAT. Although there were several interesting discussions, the one that caught my attention was 5G adoption. It is believed that the increasing demand for online video content, especially 4K, VR and UHD content, will be the main catalyst for 5G adoption. On the other hand, an industry professional at our anniversary party last month whispered ominously in my ear that 5G would see the end of television “as we know it”. Change is no longer coming. It is already here. Let’s move with the times. I leave you with that thought as I head to Tunis for ASBU’s 50th anniversary. Will you be there?
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An open approach is the best way to drive faster IP integration, says Chuck Meyer
Egypt’s state broadcaster chooses ATEME to cover Africa Cup of Nations

The Egyptian National Media Authority (ENMA) has employed ATEME’s converged video headend to cover the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, which began on June 21 and will conclude on July 19.

ATEME has provided ENMA with a complete video headend solution based on its Kyrian encoders/decoders and TITAN pure software multiplexer. The system is installed at 12 sites across Egypt to feed ASI signals to DTT television transmitters and the G.703 E3 standard to existing networks.

ENMA is using BISS-CA, the EBU Tech’s new standard for encryption – EBU Tech 3292-s1. The technology has allowed ENMA to install a high-quality video platform, which provides exceptional TV channel encoding from SDI to ASI with video/audio synchronisation. ATEME’s solution provides ENMA with premium remuxing capabilities, delivery of high-fidelity video quality to transmitters across the country and reduction of OPEX and CAPEX costs.

“Integrating ATEME’s Kyrian and TITAN family will allow us to not only provide outstanding video quality to our customers for the Africa Cup of Nations, but also expand the range of our services in the future,” commented Eng Mervat Hassan, Chairman of Broadcast Engineering, ENMA.

Royal Film Commission appoints Mohannad Al-Bakri as new MD

Mohannad Al-Bakri will head the Royal Film Commission of Jordan (RFC) as Managing Director, effective July 7. Al-Bakri is not new to RFC. He served as its Capacity Building Manager for five years (2007-2012) and has largely contributed to developing the country’s local and regional training programmes. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the Edu-Feature Programme, through which five Jordanian features were produced.

OSN to discontinue Pehla from July 15

The Saudi Entertainment Academy will be up and running in Riyadh, effective September 2019, thanks to a Memorandum of Understanding between two specialist companies and the General Entertainment Authority, as reported by Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The Academy will offer specialised entertainment courses and programmes, including a diploma in Entertainment Management aimed at training and qualifying Saudi Arabians to work in the sector. MNA Education and Development and Bunyan Development Ltd signed the MoU at GEA’s headquarters in Riyadh recently, in the presence of CEO Amr Bin Ahmed Banaja.

“This move will help integrate efforts of various authorities and achieve harmony between initiatives, so as to come up with projects that bear real added value to the entertainment sector,” Banaja commented.
Nayla Al Khaja film sees first Middle East use of ARRI’s new prime lenses

The Shadow, a horror film directed by Emirati filmmaker and producer Nayla Al Khaja, and produced by Epic Films and Seforita Films, will begin principal photography in Dubai with the support of the Dubai Film and TV Commission (DFTC). To ensure a smooth filming and production experience, DFTC worked closely with the director to fast-track the process and obtain all necessary filming permits. The film is a teaser for an extended feature set to be filmed in the upcoming months. Starting local action and using difficult topics based on more hard-hitting narratives. The UAE lacks female feature film directors of a certain calibre, and it’s about time we see a change in this category. “This project came to life thanks to the unconditional support of Sultan, Darmuk and Hassan Al Khaja, the Dubai Film and TV Commission, Filmique Media, who is supplying the equipment; and ARRI, which will be shipping its latest signature prime lenses for the shoot and taking care of the behind-the-scenes footage. This will be the first time ARRI’s new lenses will be used in the Middle East.” Robbie McAree, Executive Producer and Founding Partner of Epic Films, describes the film as “a unique approach to the genre, implementing a production model that will set new standards for the local independent film industry.” “We encourage local and international investors, and cinema enthusiasts in general, to get involved in future movie projects in the UAE. Our production value is undoubtedly reaching the calibre of international productions, and we pride ourselves on utilising as many locally-based movie professionals as possible. The bottom line is to showcase local talent and highlight the huge potential of the UAE’s film industry. The Shadow is a teaser that hopefully will help raise funds for the feature film and create employment opportunities for local screen workers.” Featuring acclaimed DoP Mik Allen, The Shadow’s crew will shoot across several locations in Dubai during the month of June, with an expected public release of the film at a launch event in Dubai in September, with the support of VOX Cinemas.

CTME becomes part of Disguise CSP network

Visual tools developer Disguise has announced the integration of AV supplier Creative Technology Middle East with the Disguise Certified Solution Provider (CSP) worldwide network. With invented offices in Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia Pacific, CT is a supplier of specialist AV equipment to the sports, corporate and entertainment industries. CTME used Disguise for the Special Olympics World Games Opening Ceremony in 2019, held in Abu Dhabi, with two 4x4 pros used as the main machines and a further two used as understudies. Two 2x2 pros were also used for the main production, one of the main and one as understudy. Disguise also supported CTME’s work on projection mapping the oldest building in Abu Dhabi, Qas Al Hosn, using a network of 4x4 pro main and understudy systems in three different locations, with the central location also using this set-up.

SAW launches Insight TV on second platform in MENA

SAW Rights Management launched Insight TV on second platform in MENA

The Knight and the Princess is set to become the first major documentary to be released in Saudi Arabia, on July 25, Front Row Filmed Entertainment and the Kuwait National Cinema Company (KNCC) own all MENA rights for the title, which will be released in VOX and AMC cinemas. Gianluca Chakra, CEO, Front Row Filmed Entertainment said: “We are incredibly proud to be representing Pavarotti and for it to be the first major documentary to be released in Saudi Arabia as we are firm believers in its potential to captivate audiences in KSA.”

For more information, please visit www.broadcastprome.com

Egypt’s first animated feature film to premiere in cinemas this October

Egypt’s first animated feature film, which has been 20 years in the making, will arrive in cinemas this October. Screenwriter Bashir al-Deeq commented that the production budget for the film is estimated to have been $6m.

The film is based on the story of a young man, Mohammed bin Qasim al-Thaqafi, who falls in love while leading the sovereignty of the Unyudoa State. Artist Mostapha Hussein drew all the characters, with the animation work carried out by Egyptian artists from the Magic Company, as reported by local dailies. The Egyptian director said that the exact 2D animation technique used in animated film the Lion King was employed in the film. The Knight and the Princess. A number of Egyptian celebrities lent their voices to the movie’s cartoon characters, including Mohamed Henady, Magid al-Kidwani, Aba Kamel, Mouhath Salem and Donia Samir Ghanem.
TAC Studios co-produces four new series across Africa

TAC Studios, The Africa Channel’s production arm, will produce four new series in Africa for the global marketplace, consisting of a combination of scripted and unscripted projects. They are May’s Kitchen, a cooking show featuring a talented celebrity chef May Yousif; a partnership with Filmed-in-Egypt; Second Husband, a scripted series based on the Nigerian film of the same name (a co-production with Biola Alabi Media in Nigeria); The Yard, a drama series set in the hip-hop scene in Nairobi (a co-production with Currency Media in Kenya); and My Design Rules, a competition reality series in the world of real estate design (a partnership with Candour Productions in South Africa). 

Brendan Gibb, Johannesburg-based Head of Creative and Production for TAC Studios, said, “We are really excited to continue to evolve our network of relationships across the continent, cementing our studios as a key hub for Pan African content creation. The producers and talent, both established and new, who are working with us form an authentic voice to their storytelling, and we want to ensure that their stories are now distributed globally and reach vast new audiences.”

Electriclimefilms moves to Alserkal Avenue

UAE boutique production house electriclimefilms Dubai, with offices in Singapore and Sydney, has relocated to a larger independent space in Unit 40 at Dubai’s arts hub Alserkal Avenue. The new open office space includes a reception/lounge area for clients and visitors to view the EL portfolio on a large screen, a working station where the creative and production teams come together to work and discuss ideas, an edit suite for live editing and colour grading sessions with clients, and an offline editing station separate to the main one.

National Geographic announces 2019-20 upfront slate

National Geographic Global Television Networks President Courtney Monroe has unveiled the latest line-up of premium science, adventure and exploration content throughout the 2019-20 upfront season. Highlights of the network’s announcements include the return of the Brain Games series; new series Race to the Centre of the Earth; pitting extreme adventurers on a one-of-a-kind journey to win $1m; and Last Cities with Albert Lin, showcasing up-and-coming National Geographic talent.

French court dismisses belN allegations of Arabsat links to BeoutQ

The new HyperDeck Extreme 8K HDR features innovations such as space saving H.265 files, built in scopes, optional internal cache, 3D LUTs, native BK and HDR support! The large touch screen ensures a perfect view of your recording as well as control over all deck settings. You can then add HyperDeck Extreme Control to transform it into a traditional broadcast deck!

Perfect for Live, Signage and Archive

With its amazing versatility, HyperDeck Extreme 8K HDR is also great for live production as a master recorder, clip player and for recording SDI cameras. The analog inputs allow you to record from old video tapes, helping get legacy displays for color correction or illegal levels. H i s t o g r a m  s h o w s  h i g h l i g h t s  o r shadows clipping. Plus all scopes are real time, even in 8K or HDR!

Record and Playback 8K

The latest Quad Link 12G-SDI allows record and playback in full resolution 8K for amazing quality! The SDI connections are multirate, so you can use Quad Link 12G-SDI for 8K, or switch to 3D, HD or Ultra HD using the single link 12G-SDI connection. To allow multiple iLUTs to be loaded in one go, the HyperDeck Extreme 8K HDR uses modern H.265 files for 8K recording and playback.

Learn more at www.blackmagicdesign.com/ae

*ISP and duties, shipping and sales tax.
Riedel fortifies presence in Middle East region with Venuetech partnership

Riedel Communications has appointed Venuetech, a UAE-based AV distributor, as its regional distributor in the Middle East. As part of the agreement, Venuetech will operate as a distributor for Riedel’s full line of real-time media network and communications solutions in the Middle East.

Based in Dubai, Venuetech is an AV systems integrator and distributor serving the broadcast and AV markets throughout the UAE. Ahmed Magd, GM, Riedel Middle East and Turkey, said: “Venuetech is the ideal partner to help us bring the Riedel reputation for excellence in signal transport and communications technologies to the UAE marketplace. In addition to their in-depth distribution expertise and local market experience, Venuetech has broad and deep knowledge of our product portfolio. The Venuetech team will expand local access to our solutions and provide an outstanding first line of support for our customers.”

Venuetech has installed Riedel’s MediaNet real-time media distribution network, the Artist digital matrix intercom and other product lines in its showroom in Dubai’s Business Bay. Nour Assafiri, CEO of Venuetech, added: “At Venuetech, we take pride in our partnerships with the most prestigious and innovative manufacturers of media networks and communications systems. Riedel is a fantastic addition to our roster.”

Ross Video appoints Trevor Mifsud as Solutions Architect

Ross Video has announced the appointment of Trevor Mifsud as its new Solutions Architect, part of the international pre-sales Oceania team, effective immediately. He will be working in Melbourne and the company’s Sydney office, and brings almost two decades of experience to Ross, having worked the past 14 years as a part of the Ross Video team, helping to deliver high-impact, high-efficiency production solutions to our customers. He is excited to be part of the Ross Video team, helping to deliver high-impact, high-efficiency production solutions to our customers. He is excited to be part of the Ross Video team, helping to deliver high-impact, high-efficiency production solutions to our customers.

Cinépolis to roll out 63 screens in Saudi Arabia

Cinépolis has announced the locations of six new movie theatres comprising 63 screens in Saudi Arabia. They will be rolled out across the Kingdom over the next two years, with the first due to open in Lulu Mall, Dammam, at the end of this year, four scheduled for 2020 and the sixth for 2021. The Saudi General Commission for Audiovisual Media (SCAM) issued the fourth Exhibitor Licence for Cinema Operation to Cinépolis International under the entity Luxury Entertainment LLC.

GatesAir buys ONElastic

GatesAir is bringing ONElastic under its banner. Founded in 2010, ONElastic develops television, digital radio and RF systems for broadcast, telecom, scientific and government verticals. The company’s work with high-efficiency, low-power TV and DAB radio transmitters will strengthen GatesAir’s presence in Europe. Commenting on the acquisition, Bruce D. Swail, CEO of GatesAir, said: “The acquisition of ONElastic underscores our commitment to the broadcast market and accelerates the investments we are making in our transmission portfolio. The addition of a research, development and services team from ONElastic expands our engineering and support expertise to create new innovations for the broadcast segment and beyond.”

MBC Group video-on-demand (VOD) platform Shahid had 27m unique monthly users, an increase of more than 23% compared to the same period last year, as of the end of Ramadan 2019. The content on Shahid’s platforms had also accumulated more than 24bn views, an increase of 46% compared to last year on Shahid, and of 62% in terms of Shahid PLUS paid subscribers. During Ramadan, Shahid added 50 premium programmes and shows to its offering, 28 of them exclusive to the platform. Shahid PLUS also added an attractive selection of kids’ content. During the first weeks of the holy month, the number of downloads of the Shahid mobile app quadrupled in comparison to regular monthly volumes. This is despite the fact that Shahid has enjoyed the highest mobile app penetration rate in the region for years, with the Shahid iOS and Android apps installed on more devices than any competitor by a considerable margin, according to mobile analytics and market data platform App Annie.

Johannes Larcher, Managing Director, MBC Digital, commented: “We announced major changes to our strategy and level of investment in Shahid early in 2019, and our solid performance during the first five months of 2019, including Ramadan, proves that audiences across MENA love where we are taking our service.”

Since January, Shahid has made significant progress in improving ease of use, viewing quality, speed and reliability of streaming, and discoverability of relevant content for users. Shahid has also introduced Chromecast and AirPlay functionality. Larcher also mentioned a 42% growth in unique users outside the MENA region, due to Arab diaspora audiences.

Larcher credits some of Shahid’s success to a comprehensive marketing strategy: “This year, we announced our Ramadan programming grid well before the beginning of the holy month through exclusive promotion on the special portal ramadan-Shahid.net. This was run in parallel with daily interaction with viewers across MBC’s various social media platforms. We also connected viewers with some of the region’s most prominent social media influencers.”

Looking towards H2 2019, Larcher added: “We aim to further develop and expand our viewership in the coming period, with locally-produced original content created exclusively for Shahid. We will also continue our efforts to make Shahid more accessible and easier to use for our viewers.”

Rohde & Schwarz appoints Cornelius Heinemann as EVP of Broadcast and Media

Cornelius Heinemann has been promoted to EVP Broadcast and Media at Rohde & Schwarz, effective July 2019. He will be appointed to the Board of Directors at the same time. He was previously responsible for the Transmitter and Amplifier Systems and File-Based Media Solutions business units within the Rohde & Schwarz, effective July 2019. He will be appointed to the Board of Directors at the same time. He was previously responsible for the Transmitter and Amplifier Systems and File-Based Media Solutions business units within the Rohde & Schwarz, effective July 2019. He will be appointed to the Board of Directors at the same time. He was previously responsible for the Transmitter and Amplifier Systems and File-Based Media Solutions business units within the Rohde & Schwarz, effective July 2019.
Shure launches MXA910 with IntelliMix

Shure has unveiled its Microflex Advance MXA910 ceiling array microphone with IntelliMix DSP at InfoComm 2019. The microphone promises to empower integrators, consultants and meeting participants to embrace collaborative speech environments. Designed for spaces that demand an effortless, seamless and connected audio solution, the MXA910 combines state-of-the-art array microphone technology with the Shure IntelliMix DSP, comprising an effective deployment in DSP enables broad, cost-effective deployment in corporate conference rooms, special event venues and rooms, government facilities, industrial design, suitable for a variety of rooms with specific aesthetic requirements.

Corporate conference rooms, government facilities, special event venues and even higher education campuses require an audio solution that easily integrates into the space and provides crystal-clear audio. The new MXA910 microphone combines state-of-the-art array microphone technology with the Shure IntelliMix DSP, comprising crystal-clear audio.

The MXA910 microphone with IntelliMix DSP features “ease of deployment” capabilities, the company said in a statement. According to Shure, these include simplified templates and auto-focus technology for immediate out-of-box set-up, designer software compatibility that supports ease of configuration, enabling quick and efficient installation, and direct connection to a hardware or software codec, using the DSP embedded in the ceiling microphone. When used with a Shure audio network interface (ANI), it provides users with a simplified room solution that provides a microphone and DSP in one cost-effective package.

Senna LED lighting systems now available in UAE

Creative company Senna Innovation Factory will be bringing demo units of its complete LED lighting systems with full wireless control and application. Senna’s product portfolio provides complete lighting support solutions for TV, film and broadcast. The company’s LightStation system is made up of four LED panels controlled with a wireless control unit or through a smartphone app. Remote settings include dimmer and temperature regulation. The lighting system stores six different light scenes that can be recalled at any point by simply pressing a button. Additionally, the fade speed control between light scenes is adjustable. The LightStation app for smartphone or tablet, allows users to make a variety of light scenes. Users can store different playlists of scenes, which can be loaded anytime. Scenes and playlists remain stored even when you turn off the system. The app allows users to give different names to scenes and playlists, set fading between them, and add strobe and chasing light effects.

Dubai Media Office deploys Sennheiser Digital 6000 as part of HQ audio upgrade

The Government of Dubai Media Office (GDMO) has deployed Sennheiser’s Digital 6000 solution as part of an upgrade to the conference hall at its headquarters at the Dubai World Trade Centre. A significant aspect of the upgrade was the GDMO’s decision to leverage networked audio. Salem Belyouha, Director – Media Services at GDMO, said: “Doing so has enabled us to significantly reduce the amount of cabling, simplify inter-connectivity, maintenance and troubleshooting, and streamline our technical operations.”

This year, Yamaha and Sennheiser collaborated to enable seamless integration between the Yamaha CL and QL series consoles and the Sennheiser Digital 6000. By choosing to leverage these two solutions, GDMO’s Engineering team has gained the ability to control several parameters of the wireless microphone system’s operating menu, also to monitor RF levels, gains and battery status of the wireless microphones, all through the console itself. With flexibility a main selection criteria for the microphone system, as stage layout and seating arrangements in the conference hall change from event to event, the end user looked for a wireless solution. However, as events held at the venue typically result in large numbers of mobile phones being used, it was imperative that the system address GDMO’s concerns regarding RF interference and noise. GDMO thus decided to install the Digital 6000. Commenting on this decision, Belyouha said “Our experience with the Sennheiser team has been fantastic. We have worked with them on numerous projects over the years, and they have proven time and time again that we can rely on them to assist with the implementation of our projects with a high level of expertise and professionalism. They supported us long before we issued any formal RFI, and long after the project was completed.”

A number of Sennheiser solutions were part of the GDMO set-up.

Dubai distributor United Broadcast & Media Solutions (UBMS) has partnered with Sennheiser to bring its secure video encoding and streaming devices to the Middle East and Africa region. Sennix is a Japanese supplier and developer of compact, lightweight video streaming technology. UBMS will supply and integrate Sennix technology and its solutions in the region to meet the needs of broadcasters, production companies and security applications. The Sennix Zao range of products enables bodycams, drone cameras and other external mobile cameras to transmit a secure encrypted video stream back to a command and control centre. It is designed for integration within a command room including thermal imagery, AI layers and more.

UBMS to distribute Soliton devices to the MEA region

The company’s LightStation app for smartphone or tablet, allows users to make a variety of light scenes. Users can store different playlists of scenes, which can be loaded anytime. Scenes and playlists remain stored even when you turn off the system. The app allows users to give different names to scenes and playlists, set fading between them, and add strobe and chasing light effects.

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A NEW ANCHOR IS COMING TO TOWN

Abu Dhabi Media and Chinese internet solutions provider Sogou Inc teamed up to develop an AI news anchor to present news on ADM’s channels. The AI news anchor incorporates industry-leading algorithms and the latest advances in speech synthesis, image detection and deep learning. Wang Yanfeng, GM of Sogou’s Voice Interaction Technology Centre, tells BroadcastPro ME what the AI anchor can do at present and how it can free up time for human anchors.

What elements of a news anchor’s job can the AI currently do?
The AI news anchor incorporates the latest advances in speech synthesis, image detection and prediction capabilities, and can simulate natural speech and expressions by integrating various language-centric technologies. The AI anchor can replicate the in-studio news reporting experience.

What are the advantages of an AI anchor over a human one?
We believe that human anchors and virtual anchors serve different purposes in a news organisation. We see the AI news anchor as a complement to the work of a human broadcaster. AI anchors won’t replace the human connection that human news anchors provide, but the technology will improve the efficiency of standard news broadcasts and free up human anchors to spend more time interviewing guests, reporting on issues outside of the studio and producing better quality content.

Can the AI anchor tackle anything that requires human interaction with people?
The AI anchor generates news reporting by generating life-like expressions based on textual inputs. The AI anchor can be transformed into corresponding lip movements, providing users with a highly customisable interactive experience.

Language lies at the core of Sogou’s AI platform and strategy. With a focus on natural language processing and machine learning, Sogou has developed unique capabilities in real-time audio and video synthesis.

What challenges do you face in creating such an anchor?
The pronunciation and expression of Arabic news anchors are different from English and Chinese news anchors, so a lot of work will go into developing an Arabic AI news anchor that can replicate a real-life news broadcaster. For example, there are several factors, such as the Arabic writing system, vowel recognition and the gender, number and case of Arabic words, that pose challenges to Arabic speech synthesis.

What can you do to make the anchor more sophisticated than those currently in use in China?
The AI anchor will eventually advance to a stage where natural human-machine interactions can be tailored to support various news scenarios. Our multi-language datasets, which are derived from Sogou’s Chinese-language input software and its AI R&D team’s expertise in algorithms, with Abu Dhabi Media’s position in the Arab media world, we are confident we can deliver a high-quality product and user experience.

Wang Yanfeng says technology will eventually advance to a stage where natural human-machine interactions can be tailored to support various news scenarios.
In an exclusive tour of the new facility in Abu Dhabi, Vijaya Cherian learns more about how the team intends to use this new generation of tools to drive audience engagement and participation.
Virtual reality (VR) studio production and augmented reality (AR) technologies are transforming news broadcasting by offering a more immersive experience that brings stories to life as never before. These technologies are also at the heart of Abu Dhabi-headquartered Sky News Arabia’s recent technology and content revamp – the first since its launch in 2012 – aimed at enabling greater audience engagement and cementing its position as a news major in the Arab world across TV, radio and digital platforms.

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Wissam Ayoub, Studio Operations Director, Sky News Arabia, saw the launch of one of the most advanced newsrooms in the region, with the addition of a brand-new wing that is now home to Studio B, a 406m² studio boasting the UAE’s largest chroma-key background at 15x11m. The large-chroma area gives the broadcaster ample room to use powerful LED backdrops over time, or to introduce new ones as the team gains more expertise in the technologies.

“Anyone who has been watching our programmes on TV since the launch would notice a huge difference, and the VR and AR sets have contributed to that wow factor,” Wissam Ayoub, Studio Operations Director at SNA, says.

Construction of the new studio and new gallery, complete with an outdoor landscape set, was done here. The large-chroma area gives the broadcaster ample room to use powerful LED backdrops over time, or to introduce new ones as the team gains more expertise in the technologies.

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Wissam Ayoub, Studio Operations Director, Sky News Arabia, says that leveraging AR and VR has enabled the channel to tap into new ways to reach audiences.

The result is three stunning virtual studio sets – one for sports programme Mala’eb, one for The Evening, which analyses some of the big stories in the Arab world; and one for Timeline, which provides periodic news updates. Ayoub says VR and AR, in combination with new camera and lighting solutions, do not just allow SNA to bring stunning visuals to viewers’ screens, but also create infinite possibilities to continuously revisit that we stay one step ahead of our competition,” says Ayoub.

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Construction of the new studio and new gallery, complete with an outdoor landscape set, was done here. The large-chroma area gives the broadcaster ample room to use powerful LED backdrops over time, or to introduce new ones as the team gains more expertise in the technologies.

Wissam Ayoub, Studio Operations Director, Sky News Arabia, says that leveraging AR and VR has enabled the channel to tap into new ways to reach audiences.

The result is three stunning virtual studio sets – one for sports programme Mala’eb, one for The Evening, which analyses some of the big stories in the Arab world; and one for Timeline, which provides periodic news updates. Ayoub says VR and AR, in combination with new camera and lighting solutions, do not just allow SNA to bring stunning visuals to viewers’ screens, but also create infinite possibilities to continuously revisit that we stay one step ahead of our competition,” says Ayoub.

“Anyone who has been watching our programmes on TV since the launch would notice a huge difference, and the VR and AR sets have contributed to that wow factor,” Wissam Ayoub, Studio Operations Director at SNA, says.
“Using our virtual sets, we can create different programmes on a single studio floor, and this really elevates our stories from a virtual perspective. It also cuts down the time for set-up, so our sets can be used in a rolling 24/7 news environment. Virtual sets have really helped us push the boundaries.”

Although SNA currently goes on air with just three sets, the combinations and permutations possible with VR and AR are limited only by the team’s imagination.

“It all depends on how well we can tell the story and how often we want to use it. We could use it 24 hours a day if we needed to. All our sets have been developed with Zero Density and NEP’s support. Their expertise has been great in kick-starting the project and helping us get on air. We have learnt a lot with NEP throughout this process. Now all of our concepts are done in-house, and within the next six to 12 months, we plan to see our staff produce more virtual sets as well as more AR being used,” reveals Clark.

One technology especially worth dwelling on is Zero Density’s virtual studio production technology. “This uses Epic Game’s Unreal Engine, the most photo-realistic real-time game engine, as a 3D renderer in combination with Nvidia graphics cards. This software engine has gained a lot of respect in the industry for its fast rendering capabilities and the creative flexibility it offers those working with real-time applications.

Zero Density was quick to adopt this technology to offer creative solutions within the broadcast industry. Virtual studio designs can be rendered in real-time with a delay of just one to four frames, depending on the tracking system and the 3D designs. This gives SNA the ability to get the most photo-realistic composite output possible.

A majority of TV technologies have also traditionally been designed for presenters with lighter skin tones, and such sets are easier to light. When presenters have darker skin tones or wear black attire, shadows have conventionally posed a problem. Addressing this with more light has in the past only led to more shadows and numerous lighting challenges.

Zero Density’s keyer has the ability to embed standard shadows coming from fixed real studio lights into a virtual set design, meaning a viewer cannot distinguish between a virtual and a physical set. The ability to combine the two thus offers limitless possibilities. Together with virtual lights, the look and feel of a set design can easily be readjusted, moving between day and night. The software allows shadows to change density intuitively, without changing the intensity of the fixed studio lights.

Similarly, when a presenter is holding an object like a bottle of water, the new keying technology allows the viewer to see through it, while the keying background continues to include natural shadows and reflections, and 3D AR objects appear completely real to the audience.

“Zero Density offers a lot more freedom when it comes to keying, which is essentially taking part of the video and making it transparent. If a presenter is on set, this solution gives us the freedom to work on various elements that enable us to feel like we are operating in a real environment. We faced huge challenges in trying to put this together, but it was a very important learning curve,” Clark elaborates.

To maximise the potential of the Zero Density technology, SNA had to ensure it had the right type of cameras and lighting in place. “We had to put a lot of attention to detail in what cameras would be suitable, how the sets would be lit and how much light would be captured by those cameras to give the best possible experience,” explains Clark.
David Clark, CTO at SNA, says the VR and AR components are the backbone of the launch.

Clark, adding that the new studios feature Sony HDC-1700 cameras and SNA also chose the Skype mapping system. With this, the broadcaster can create virtual sets even if the camera moves outside of the purview of the green key area, allowing the creation of ceilings and outside garden views, offering infinite possibilities for virtual sets.

"Zero Density not only gives us real depth but offers a real third dimension to the set, which has allowed us to have something far larger than our 15x11m surface area. From a news presenting experience, this is really exciting, as it enables us to capture a lot more in terms of the environment, as opposed to a news presenter simply sitting in front of a desk,” Clark points out.

Ayoub cites an example: “A presenter can be presenting a news story in our studio. With a few clicks of a button, the presenter could become a 3D model impacted by the ambiance of the 3D environment, such as artificial lights, the glow of artificial flames and the refraction of artificial glass.”

SNA can also incorporate multiple real-time virtual video screens into its virtual designs, including live feed interaction. The broadcaster can make virtual objects appear larger as they are brought closer to the viewer via camera, to mimic reality. NEP also delivered an interactive GUI allowing operators to easily control props like virtual screens, F1 cars and so on, and even control virtual lights, shadows and set changes. Depending on the complexity of the design, a virtual set can be built within one to three months.

This is another reason why having such a large green screen has been helpful. “We have gone with something that is large, in order to take that 3D object and give them the freedom to move within an environment. The presenters are still getting familiar with how to use the large area within that space. Going forward, the presenters will get a lot more confident and understand how the wide array of tools on offer can help them tell the story more effectively,” explains Clark.

Studio A, where 80% of the news programming takes place, is another spectacular example of how SNA is pushing the boundaries, with multiple sets and seven flexible moveable screens, as well as a 12m wide, 1.22mm pitch 4K videowall which can display very high-resolution graphics. “We are pushing the boundaries with such a large display. Vizrt with 4K has been implemented on those screens, and that has given us the option of having all of our on-air graphics on screen while the presenter is presenting in the same space. The system gives us the advantage of templating a lot of our content. For instance, a presenter can step into the studio and can use the screens to tell their story. With these tools, presenters can take their storytelling to another level...”

The new wing includes a new video and audio gallery, as well as edit and graphics suites, and can serve as a back-up for the main existing galleries, which presently control all the studios. “When Studio B was created, we also built a new gallery which works online and offline. The most interesting aspect is that it can be used to record content in Studio B as well. All our camera sources are connected across our two galleries, which means that Studio B is not only a back-up to Studio A, but it can act as the main gallery as well,” explains Ayoub.

Interestingly, SNA carried on with seamless production of news while Studio A was being revamped, a small studio in the territory was also converted into a virtual set, and the camera team moved there to continue producing news.

“Zero Density not only gives us real depth but offers a real third dimension to the set, which has allowed us to have something far larger than our 15x11m surface area”

David Clark, CTO, Sky News Arabia

backyard filled in during the transition. Most of the traditional integration was undertaken by Dubai-based TSL Systems Integration, in consultation with freelance Project Manager Arthur van der Ven, who was also involved in SNA’s integration seven years ago. Once the VR and AR workflows have become seamless, Ayoub says the team has plans to build more studios and further integrate elements on the studio floor. Besides Sony HDC-1700 cameras, SNA has invested in the latest Grass Valley Korona vision mixers.

With all these technologies in place, Clark is confident that SNA can significantly increase its editorial output. “We want to combine that by maintaining the quality of what we deliver and spread that across not just the entire Middle East region, but globally as well. We want to be the best Arabic news source for the entire world. Given that there has been a solid base for the last seven years, we now want to take that to another level and be a world-class organisation.”

“We really want to enable the storytelling and be a point of difference for not just an Arabic language news channel, but a channel that reaches across the region and into the rest of the world,” he concludes.
With 3,000 hours of footage from across the seven continents, the BBC hopes to release one of its most ambitious natural history productions in late 2019, in the run-up to its centenary in 2022. BroadcastPro ME learns more about how drone filming and music have enriched this production during a press interview with renowned naturalist David Attenborough; Executive Producer of One Planet: Seven Worlds, Jonny Keeling; and Academy Award-winning music composer Hans Zimmer.

The BBC recently announced five new natural history programmes in the run-up to its centenary in 2022. The line-up includes landmark title One Planet: Seven Worlds and other segments of the BBC Planet strand, including Planet Earth III, Green Planet, Perfect Planet and Frozen Planet II. Select sequences from the programme were played at the BBC Studios Showcase in Liverpool. Narrated by renowned naturalist David Attenborough, the seven-part series is expected to premiere this autumn.

At a roundtable with the press, Jonny Keeling, Executive Producer for One Planet: Seven Worlds, told us: “This is the first time we have told the story like this, which is continent by continent. From where each continent sits on the planet, and its history, its size and its shape, it has a big impact on the animal life that is found there. Each continent is a one-hour episode, and each has a very different character and personality based on its geology and geography, and that’s our story really. It’s based on the theory that the planet was initially one enormous continent that was broken apart hundreds of millions of years ago and this brought about a fundamental change that has partly driven the diversity on Earth. So, we have one episode for each of the continents, and they are very different from each other based on their geography and position on Earth.”

Asked about the criteria for selecting one story over the other to represent each continent, Keeling said: “For me, the question is, is it new? Does it have multiple beats to the story, and what is the range of emotional content in it, because we can’t have ten hunting sequences. We were looking at a different emotional range. In Australia, for instance, we found some very unusual animals, but they were pretty much sitting there doing nothing, so that is not a story. That makes for a great magazine photo. We looked at how to tell a story differently and how it helps to represent the theme of the continent.”

Africa, for instance, is showcased as a furnace, while Australia is depicted as isolated and Antarctica as hostile.
“Africa has the largest land mass around the equator and it’s a continent with the most solar radiation in the world, and the volcanic heat beneath it has caused it to lift up and crack. Like this, we have chosen a single point of entry for each of the continents. With South America, it is so rich because it sits on the equator and there is the wonderful bowl of the Amazon. We have some great desert stories from there,” said Keeling.

“What Africa has is include humanity… to bring our planet stories to the audience, to make them see Europe also has some incredible hidden wildernesses, and we have some great sequences from there that haven’t been shown before.”

Based on the select sequences we were privy to at the show, other impressive elements of the production are noteworthy.

For one, Academy Award-winner Hans Zimmer and Bleeding Fingers Music will compose the theme music will light up a whole forest, and it provided incredible insight into how much thought went into scoring a programme. Zimmer, who has scored more than 150 films as well as Planet II and Blue Planet II, told us: “What I have tried to do through my music in this programme is include humanity… to bring our neighborhoods with whom we live closer together. Our mission is to recognise that this world is in danger. We have run out of time. Telling people all the time that it is dangerous and frightening them is not as effective as moving them. Our mission now is to move audiences a little bit, by including everyone a little bit.”

One big aspect of this programme is the extensive use of drones for shooting. Drones are used to fly through caves in Europe, through volcanoes at night in Asia, and around waterfalls and really close to water and animals. Keeling explained why drone filming has been so crucial to this production and has provided “a brand-new perspective to the series”. “In some areas, you just could not have that footage if it wasn’t for a drone. The drones have helped us reach places we traditionally can’t. We’re able to see things from a long way off and film them, and that’s been the challenge in the past. To be able to look down and see that planned view perspective of the whales coming in, for instance, in one episode, could not have been done without having a drone in the air for most of the day. You can’t have a helicopter up all day because of the cost and the disturbance it creates. The view of the landscape from a helicopter is also mostly a forward-looking shot, as opposed to what you get with a drone. You will see that the view of the landscape, the shapes and patterns of nature we see from drone filming, are very different and it shows our world in a very different light. With a drone, you can film behaviour you wouldn’t normally see, and the perspective

to get a decent shot. With drones, you can convey the grandeur of these landscapes and the iconic animals that live in these habitats. The technology has moved onward in leaps and bounds and helps you to achieve so much more. You will see this sensational sequence that was shot in South America that you just could not have filmed without drones.”

Keeling explained that he had visited the Andes four previous times over the last few years, but this was the first time he managed to get some amazing footage – thanks to drones. The team spent 10-12 weeks with two camera operators to get the Andes footage. “It was a huge effort, but most of our drone pilots are young and have grown up with Xboxes and seem so good at flying and manoeuvring their drones through the forest. There are some really amazing shots where they come so close to the water or to the animals,” he said.

While the team joked about losing a few drones during filming, they also lamented the shrinking landscape as they return to some places. Madagascar, for instance, is said to have lost almost 80% of its forest, leaving behind just small pockets of wilderness. The sequences we saw, the music we heard and the stories the team narrated are without doubt a reflection of a huge commitment to natural history programming and keeping animals close to the hearts of the audience, with the aim of compelling us to do more to look after our natural resources.

This entire Planet strand was born with the launch of the BBC’s Planet Earth series in 2006. Green Planet, scheduled for 2021, will depict emotional stories and surprising heroes in the planet world. Perfect Planet, aiming for a 2020 release, will fuse natural history and earth sciences, while Frozen Planet II will dig deep into the wildernesses of the Arctic and Antarctica. The third season of Planet Earth will premiere in 2022.
Remote production is gaining traction all over the world for obvious reasons. It is easier on operators, who no longer need to travel to and fro; it allows broadcasters to control production costs; and broadcasters can make more efficient use of their most talented staff as well as their equipment. This has become possible thanks to the advent of IP as the transport medium of data (rather than signals) from a venue to the broadcaster’s premises and back, on a wide-area network (WAN).

Onward and upward
IP makes equal sense in an on-campus setting, and even for OB trucks. In this scenario, IP-based audio and video products offer the advantage of easy local networking, reducing footprint and flexible scalability.

Fibre-optic or CAT-5 cables can replace a whole bunch of audio and SDI cables, making patchbays and lengthy patching operations obsolete – excellent news for the weight that OB trucks carry around.

A broadcaster in Abu Dhabi, for instance, has equipped its high-definition OB fleet with IP-native video processing units, audio consoles and over- and understitching, vendor-agnostic VSM control systems. Quite a few radio stations in the area have followed suit.

SIMPLIFIED CABBING, STRATEGIC WEIGHT REDUCTION AND FLEXIBLE, FORMAT-AGNOSTIC CONNECTIVITY ARE ONLY THREE ADVANTAGES OFFERED BY NATIVE IP SOLUTIONS. CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MANUFACTURERS HAVE GONE ONE BETTER BY IMPLEMENTING OPEN STANDARDS TO AVOID MANUFACTURER LOCK-IN FROM THE START.

Network connections in the audio and broadcast world are nothing new. But until two years ago, there were almost as many formats as there were manufacturers. Everybody thought they had found the best solution, which also presented a pleasant side-effect: their proprietary format allowed them to sell more gear to existing customers. Or so they thought. This to previous format wars, open standards eventually prevailed. In the case of IP, they were instigated by the Alliance for IP Media Solutions (AIMS), which fosters the adoption of one set of common, ubiquitous, standards-based protocols for interoperability over IP.

A bunch of far-sighted manufacturers ventured into IP with open environments in mind and actively contributed to the development of standards like RAVENNA, ARB87 and Ember+ for interoperability; SMPTE 2110 for the accurate transmission of audio, video, control and timing data; and SMPTE 2022-7 for redundant operation. Nowadays, professional users expect vendors to follow the standards of the AIMS Roadmap.

While IP is starting to be considered a given in large operations, smaller outfits like regional TV stations and even local radio stations, are warming to the benefits of this lean way of processing and sharing video and audio data, says Klaus-Jörg Jaspers, Director, Lawo Middle East.

PROTECH NETWORKING, REDUCING FOOTPRINT AND FLEXIBLE SCALABILITY.

INNOVATION IN PRODUCTION

While IP has become a given in large operations, smaller outfits like regional TV stations and local radio stations are now warming up to the benefits of this lean way of processing and sharing video and audio data, says Klaus-Jörg Jaspers, Director, Lawo Middle East.

Resource pooling, scaling and clustering is unthinkable with baseband devices, which would require extensive physical repatching, while long-haul WAN connections are not even an option. The migration to IP can be a gradual process. Add-on gateways, however, are essentially an attempt to make old technology appear current.

BENEFITS OF IP

The benefits of IP include both interoperability and novel approaches to the service potential of IP devices. The most important of these is the possibility to re-task devices for a variety of applications: multiviewer applications, up/down/cross-format conversions, etc. Software-defined hardware allows users to flexibly match their resources according to production requirements, in the same way that computers are used for a variety of applications. Given the right control software, for instance, reconfiguring such a resource pool is lightning fast, at the press of a button, users can select the feature set they need for the task at hand. This reconfigures the hardware in front of them and all required connections (no repatching needed). Broadcast service suppliers and corporations in Germany, Australia, the US, the UK, Sweden and many other countries already work this way.
Some manufacturers have adopted an all-IP approach in order to grow in a smart and flexible way.

Devices based on field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs) – i.e. software-defined hardware – can additionally be used in clusters where several processing blades share the workload based on availability. Advanced routines take care of distributing tasks automatically among the members of a cluster. The processing blades do not need to be available in one physical location. Like gear hubs, they can be scattered across the globe, allowing operators in one part of the world to leverage the horsepower of FPGA modules in areas where the workload is much lower.

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Thanks to IP, a lot of users have developed distributed set-ups involving studios in two or more cities. Control formats like Ember+, which are also transported over IP lines, allow a user on the American east coast, say, to remotely control video cameras, mixing consoles and a variety of other devices on the west coast – or in Asia.

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Klaus-Jörg Jaspers, Sales Director, Lawo Middle East

Most users have started to leverage the WAN capability of their equipment to a point where the processing cores are centralised in one city or part of the world, while users in need of that processing power are located elsewhere. A device can be accessed from several locations and thus used to its full potential, which makes financial sense. Installing devices in every facility or studio is far more costly and leaves them unused for longer periods. Sharing them makes a lot of sense.

See you online
Are there any downsides to going IP? Not if you accept that IP requires a paradigm shift involving people able to think in terms of data packets and switch fabrics for broadcast applications. This is something that can be learned. While only a year ago the biggest challenge posed by an IP network was that nobody really knew the routes used by data packets or how to troubleshoot, this has since been overcome by system monitoring and telemetry software that makes the entire network transparent and easy to maintain.

IP is very much here to stay, and the migration is already in full swing. See you online soon, then.
Image Nation’s latest production, Emirati body-swapping film Rashid & Rajab, has attracted international attention with a sales agent secured at Cannes. The film’s producers share their experience with Rachel Dawson

While humour might be a sign of wit and intelligence, making a slapstick comedy involves tucking the right production boxes to ensure viewers are left with splitting laughter. Storyteller but had only worked in animation before.”

Speaking on the film’s translation from paper to screen, director-producer Rami Yasin said: “Working on this feature has been extremely interesting for several reasons. The first being that we’ve worked on the script for a long time, also the nature of the film and its storyline, which sees the coming together of different cultures; finally, working alongside Mohammed Saeed Harib, who is an extremely accomplished creative mind and storyteller but had only worked in animation before.”

The scriptwriting process lasted approximately two years, says Yasin. Despite the long incubation period, he says: “We all feel extremely proud of the film and the work that’s been done. It was amazing to see how Harib specifically translated his animation style and mood into a live-action feature film. I think people who know his work will see Mohammed Saeed Harib all over the film, even though it’s live action.”

The team of co-producers explain that without their creative collaboration with Harib, the film wouldn’t have been half as fulfilling. Yasin adds that their goal was to enable Harib to “translate the beautiful world he creates in his mind into live action with live performances.”

“This film has been through various stages. I was aware of the project being in the pipeline for years, but it has changed concept over time. So when the concept of Rashid & Rajab came about and I was asked to be onboard as a producer, I immediately said yes,” explains Mostafa, who is director, writer and producer.

He admits that on day one of filming, he observed everything going on and questioned the approach. “Unfortunately for me, I’m more a director than I am a producer. When I read the script for Rashid & Rajab, naturally, I envisioned the look and feel of the film very differently.

“At the end of day one, I understood that I was not familiar with seeing a bunch of layers of comedy happening, instead of just one. That day I got home and realised that the film offers the viewers comedy with a bunch of high production values. After that, I took off that director’s hat, burned it and threw it away. I put on my producer’s hat to make sure to do whatever it takes to ensure everything Harib envisioned was reflected on the screen.”

Rashid & Rajab is not the first project the three producers have worked on together. They previously collaborated on films such as From A to R, Sea Shadows, Zinzana and The Worthy.

Yasin says: “Since we’ve worked together before, we know our styles and strengths, and that’s why it’s very easy for us to work together. We don’t necessarily need to discuss and lay lines to separate ourselves, and yet we manage to do the same thing, each in our own forte. For us it’s simple – we’re all multi-taskers, we wear different hats, and we help each other with movies. So each of us naturally fell into place, collectively giving Harib the support he required."

“Mostafa adds: “I feel it would have been a tough set had we not had that personal background of working together.”

“I feel like even though the body-switch concept is not entirely new, we asked the producers to share their thoughts on comparisons with Hollywood body-switches. “I feel like even though the body-switch concept might be tried and tested a thousand times before, our film puts a spotlight on Emirati culture, and this is what makes it stand apart. This film is unique not because of the body-switch concept, but because of the characters,” Alansari explains. Shot across old and new Egyptian fast-food deliveryman Rajab (Shabbah Allom), who switch bodies after a freak accident on the way to work. As they desperately look for a way to revert to their former selves, the unlikely pair gain a different perspective into each other’s lives.

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“Three would have been a lot of blood and killing involved had we not known each other,” Alansari jokes. While this is the first full-fledged comedy the three have worked on together, they enjoy dabbling in other genres. They credit Image Nation for all its support and untapped opportunities to explore a diverse trajectory of films.

“Over the past three to four years, we’ve worked on From A to R, which is a psychological thriller. Next we went on to work on The Worthy, the first Arab-language post-apocalyptic film, and suddenly we landed Rashid & Rajab, which is 100% comedy, all thanks to Image Nation,” mutes Yasin. Despite this being the team’s first body-switch comedy, the concept is not entirely new. We asked the producers to share their thoughts on comparisons with Hollywood body-switches.

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Dubai, the film covers the entire city, from Downtown Dubai and Karama all the way to the Green Planet, Sheikh Zayed Road and more. “Dubai itself as a city is a character in the film,” says Yasin.

The shoot lasted 36 days. “This has been one of our longest shoots, and it’s probably not apparent in the film, but our days were chock-a-block. There wasn’t a single day where we finished before our twelve-hour mark, because there were a lot of shots and a lot of set-ups. As I mentioned before, having a good team around enabled us to achieve a lot,” Yasin explains.

The medium-budget film had single- and multi-camera days, depending on the sets needed. It also shot on ARRI cameras and used special heavy equipment, such as cranes, for specific scenes says Yasin.

While Yasin took care of the physical side of production, ensuring the crew followed routines and everything was done according to the vision of Harib, Mostafa oversaw various production aspects that dealt with the technical aspect of live-action shots. Alansari was involved in the development, delivery and post-production aspects.

Since music is a critical element of the comedy, Alansari says Harib ensured they got British composer Jerry Lane and the London Contemporary Orchestra to record approximately 80% of the high-energy musical pieces. He adds that Harib was extremely particular about the score.

Rashid & Rajab was acquired by international sales agent AGC International at the Cannes Film Festival in France in May, and as a result will be distributed globally. What do the producers hope international audiences take away from the film?

Mostafa says: “That we’re light-hearted and we can laugh at ourselves.”

Alansari adds: “It’s about showcasing our culture to the world.”

Yasin observes: “How can you do comedy if you can’t laugh at yourself too?”

“This film is almost like taking the mask off and saying this is who we really are, and these are the challenges in our lives. There’s an assumption that Arabs and Emiratis are all rich – but at the start of the film, you see a character who is bankrupt.

International audiences are used to Arab cinema that comes out of festivals – the festival darlings, as we call them.

“We with Rashid & Rajab, we’re trying to carve out a new generation of movies that attract regular customers to cinema so that we can grow our industry. Our hope is that just like audiences in the region, audiences elsewhere can experience a body-switch comedy, shot in Dubai, in the Arabic language.”

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Asia’s mega infocomm, media and technology event showcased the latest innovations to help the region thrive in the digital age.

#### Highlights from ConnecTechAsia2019

What’s unique this year at ConnecTechAsia is Informa’s involvement that brings along knowledge and intelligence verticals that supported our event. We worked very closely with Informa Tech verticals including Ovum, Tractica and Light Reading, and their involvement has put a lot of emphasis on AI, IoT and cloud technologies at our show, especially since these partners are the market leaders in some of these verticals. In partnership with our knowledge partners, we created a more interactive show floor with more opportunities for on-site content. Since early this year, our emphasis has been on generating content for our visitors, media partners and our associations.

The show featured several on-site venues for engagement, such as the TVExchange Zone, Innovation Hub, Content Stage, 5G Xperience, NatUmm Stage and Infoblic in the City.

Local and international exhibitors at the show

First-time exhibitors at BroadcastAsia included ARV/TEM (Italy), Anyware Video (France), AiP/STTRA (Netherlands), Audio UK, The Streaming Company UK, OPEN BROADCAST (UK) and Simplstream Limited (UK). 80% of these exhibitors were from overseas. We had over 50 country-specific pavilions at the show, including the UK, France, Russia, Romania, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The show had local and international players participating. One of the strengths of our show is the national government’s support internationally.

Networking and engagement opportunities for attendees

This year brought together approximately 200 thought leaders at the summit and overall 200+ activities and workshops. We provided exhibitors with complimentary networking opportunities such as the exhibitors’ breakfast and the sun downer sessions. Platforms such as the CIO and CIO Forum provided exhibitors and visitors with several networking opportunities.

The aim was to bring the exhibition to a new level. Instead of a stand-alone exhibition, we wanted to ensure visitors experienced a holistic conference as well as plenty of opportunities to engage with exhibitors and speakers.

### Trends in the APAC market

I think many of the industry players are looking at how AI can facilitate their operations. Some esports games have truly benefited from AI. We see AI playing a very significant role, especially in driving advertising.

Exhibitors have realised that with 5G in place, the certain reality is that convergence is going to impact all businesses, and we must come together. Businesses are trying to grapple with who has the best revenue model and how to sustain them.

I think we’re also exploring cybersecurity and content security with AI and blockchain to reduce piracy. These are some of the issues that can be addressed with our show coming together. Blockchain, for instance, can help counter piracy.

With the coming together of BroadcastAsia, NXT and CommunicAsia, we can expect AI and blockchain to be truly manifested in a bigger way.

### Expectations from ConnecTechAsia2020

Enterprises, media and telecommunication companies will eventually rely more on 5G. With that in mind, and in view of providing more convenience for visitors, we will bring the event back to Marina Bay Sands in 2020.

The show will take place from June 9 to 11, 2020.

One thing to look forward to next year is the continued partnership with our knowledge partner Ovum in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. These were part of our continuous engagement with key stakeholders and industry players.

The talks were for C- and senior-level executives and we had Andrew Milroy, Head of Advisory Services - Asia Pacific, Ovum, as well as speakers from each country, share insights on the latest innovations and new technologies, as well as highlight growth opportunities in a fast-evolving digital environment.

### “The aim was to bring the exhibition to a new level. Instead of a stand-alone exhibition, we wanted to ensure visitors experienced a holistic conference as well as plenty of opportunities to engage with exhibitors and speakers”

Calvin Koh, Sales Director, Telecom | Media | Technology, Informa Markets
VITEC offers ultra-low latency with new encoders

VITEC’s ultra-low latency and time-sliced IP contribution solutions in broadcast-grade HEVC and its EZ TV IPTV & Digital Signage Solution were in focus at BroadcastAsia this year.

"With ultra-low latency streaming in HEVC, VITEC provides a solution where every bit and milliseconds counts for workflows within the broadcast market. A high-quality and ultra-fast HEVC encoder is paramount to reducing latency and bit rate while maintaining excellent video quality during transmission," said Bruno Tesser, international sales and marketing director, VITEC.

Featured were the M98A Encoder and M98V-AEncoder pair that delivers zero-latency contribution with 15 ms glass-to-glass latency thanks to the VITEC HEVC GEN2 codec. This codec provides best-in-class HEVC video quality up to 1:2:2:10-bit, setting new industry standards in video quality.

"It’s the demand for online video content, especially VR, 4K and UHD content which require a lot of bandwidth, that will catalyse 5G adoption. I see broadcast starting the trend, followed by IoT, which will take advantage of the high speed that 5G offers, ensuring its more widespread adoption. The big technical issue is that the current LTE technology already uses a lot of cells. 5G will require even more transmitters within each location, and this requires a lot more investment and time to roll out."

"The LABM is looking to educate and help its members have common global standards for the usage of technologies like 5G. There are industry discussions on how 5G will work with DVB and ATSC, for instance. I see a hybrid solution that combines DVB and ATSC with 5G as the ideal solution, where devices can switch between DVB and 5G seamlessly as they move from linear live broadcasts to on-demand content on different devices." – Stan Moore, CTO, LABM

TAG Video Systems takes software approach

TAG Video Systems’ software IP-based UHD platform targets the three primary media applications - live production, playout and distribution. TAG’s software approach, operating on standard COTS server hardware, promises to enable broadcasters to leverage the scale and agility that comes with software deployed IP solutions. The company’s MCM-1006 platform combines monitoring of compressed and uncompressed signals. TAG’s technology allows low latency to display, along with features such as Tally and dynamic UMD integration for live production applications.

"The APAC market is huge for us when we include China. This is the first time we are offering the Bolero Standalone Application in the APAC market. The stand-alone product is a plug-and-play solution with no IP configuration needed. All you need is an antenna, the belt packs and the charger." – Christian Brockskopf, Head of Marketing and Communications, Riedel Communications

Grass Valley exhibits app-driven solutions

Grass Valley demonstrated how its solutions enable seamless workflows for live and at-home/remote production.

The latest version of Grass Valley’s live highlights and replay system LiveTouch, which integrates 4K UHD slow-motion replay, direct playout and full super-slow-motion support, was on display, along with the Kula production switcher with IP V4. This compact switcher packs the functionality of a larger switcher into a 2RU space, making it ideal for a wide range of applications.

"Vislink has come together with IMT and taken a best-of-breed approach. Our new product set comes with HEVC compression, which allows 4K transmission for the industry; it supports HDR compatibility and we have the smallest, lightest and lowest latency in the industry. We have just one-frame delay, and that’s something only we offer in HEVC compression. At APAC, we have demonstrated our wireless camera technology. MENA is largely similar to APAC in terms of the kind of technology needs. Their demands in terms of compression and modulation techniques are very similar. The need for low latency is a big driver for our products. Today, data and content is the new currency, whether it is social media or broadcasting. It essentially, people want much better picture quality and very high efficiency at the lowest possible bandwidth and latency. And that’s something we offer efficiently." – David Robbins, Global Sales Director, Vislink

ChyronHego in PRIME position at APAC show

ChyronHego’s PRIME graphics platform is the next generation of the ChyronHego Lyric real-time graphics solutions. Stacking an array of diverse applications into a single design, authoring, and playout solution, the PRIME Graphics Platform is designed to deliver complete solutions for any use case, resolution and new flow. Design without constraints in mind, the PRIME Graphics Platform can be configured for character generation, channel branding, clip server, video wall, and touch-screen production needs. ChyronHego was at BroadcastAsia with partner Magna Systems & Engineering.

"X-dream is a software distribution company offering desktop tools and server software for everything from ingest, transcoding and editing to workflow management, asset management, news production, cross-media publishing and scheduling.

"The big topics for our customers centre around archiving and making their content searchable on their platforms. All our software is on-premise or software-as-a-service (SaaS). Our European customers prefer on-premise solutions because they don’t want to share it on public cloud. Those with bad internet connectivity also prefer on-premise solutions. Our smaller customers prefer SaaS. Everybody needs to get content out of their archives and get it digitized, if they are to monetise it. Our job begins after the content has been digitized. Our tools have the ability to enrich metadata and use machine learning to add more metadata." – Jutta Schroenhaar, Managing Director, x-dream
Smartphone user numbers will reach 2.87bn worldwide by 2020, according to Statistica, driving consumers to access content in more diverse ways. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is no exception, seeing strong growth in mobile broadband usage; the GSMA expects penetration rates to reach 90% in 2025, up from 59% in 2017. Combined with the growing fragmentation of the market – thanks to new OTT and pay-TV providers – broadcasters are under pressure to deliver services across a wide range of platforms, giving consumers anytime, anywhere access on any screen. MENA SVOD revenues will reach $2.13bn by 2024, according to forecasts from Research and Markets, with SVOD subscriptions rising to 26.51m in the same period.

Major regional broadcast networks like MBC, Rotana, Nile TV and Dubai Media Inc (DMI) are responding by diversifying their offerings to OTT, on-demand and live streaming options. However, adding these new services brings added complexity to the back office and can slow down workflows.

At a time when the 4K transition is in progress, consumer demand for stunning images, simultaneous access to content on all platforms, social media integration and captivating viewing experiences puts enormous pressure on traditional SDI environments.

“An open IP approach enables [end users] to add workflows and spin up and take down services as needed”

Supporting multiplatform services, are format agnostic and can rapidly scale up or down as needed. The solution lies in Open IP. IP is an effective way of meeting the challenges that media organisations face. Work by bodies such as the Alliance for IP Media Solutions (AIMS) and the ratification of the SMPTE ST2110 standard have gone a long way to addressing early concerns about interoperability, price and the need for comparable functionality to SDI environments. This is driving market momentum. Initiatives by AIMS and SMPTE enable customers to select best-of-breed solutions from multiple vendors, knowing that they will all work together. Additionally, a standards-based approach allows facilities to operate in an all-IP environment, eliminating the need for separate SDI and IP switching and routing infrastructures.

As with any technology migration, the move to IP must align with customers’ strategic objectives. An open standards-based approach to IP allows OB companies and service providers to deliver the quality of service that clients have come to expect from SDI. SMPTE ST2110 also provides greater bandwidth efficiency; reliable, fast SDI-level performance; full operator transparency in IP environments; independent audio and video routing; and clean switching.

Proprietary, closed environments are limited in their ability to adapt as broadcast requirements change. In a market where the needs of broadcasters and media organisations can change in a six- to eight-month period, protecting investments long-term is critical. An open IP approach enables them to add workflows and spin up and take down services as needed.

The effort behind SMPTE ST2110 has gone a long way towards pushing IP migration forward. Many vendors today offer native IP connectivity – from cameras to production switchers, processing to multiviewers, routers and servers. Solutions from multiple vendors will be compatible with one another. This in turn further cements the need for open standards and their inherent interoperability.

OB customers such as Mobile TV Group (MTVG) are now investing in glass-to-glass open standards-based infrastructures for new trucks, and this trend will continue. The real potential of IP, however, lies in transforming the way production teams work – especially in the live production environment. Remote at-home production is just one way that IP can radically shift broadcasters’ approach. Using IP connections allows cameras and base stations to be separated by very long distances. Once signals are received in the production centre, operators can match the cameras using operational control panels (OCPs) and switch the programme as they would in a standard live production set-up.

As IP technology matures and price points come down, IP will no longer be a solution reserved for large facilities or premium events with big budgets. Customers are already looking at creating innovative workflows underpinned by scalable, agile IP infrastructures.

Chuck Meyer is CTO Production at Grass Valley

“An open IP approach enables [end users] to add workflows and spin up and take down services as needed”

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