Filmmaker Yusuf Thakur on the triumphs and travails of filming wildlife in the Arabian desert

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I have been working for 13 years in the region’s broadcast industry, and somewhere along that journey I met Yusuf Thakur, who makes corporate videos for a living but invests much of his profits into filming wildlife. He has gone to several remote areas across the UAE, where others have feared to tread, and followed specific animals for several months on end, filming with the latest technology during each of those shoots, whether HD then or 4K now. Back then, we agreed there were no takers for such content because there were neither regional factual channels nor the kind of backing we see for local content today. One would think all of that has changed.

Sadly, although he has made pretty decent videos, he has failed thus far to secure an audience with any of the regional broadcasters to acquire his content. Thakur is one of several others in this market. Does that indicate that if you do not have the backing of a high-profile investor to place you in front of the powers that be, your content will fail to make it on TV? Or does it mean that we are waiting for local content to get picked up by an international channel, to recognise and acknowledge its value, before we bid for it ourselves? I don’t necessarily know the answers or what the red tape entails, but I am concerned that good independent content created about this region by talented residents with technical know-how and strong capabilities does not receive the support it should.
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Domo Broadcast ties with GloCom

Domo Broadcast has announced that Dubai-based systems integrator GloCom will serve as its agent and distributor for the MENA region. Cobham recently divested its surveillance business, part of Cobham’s Communications and Connectivity Sector (TCS). The business will now be trading as Domo Tactical Communications (DTC) after being purchased by Marlin Equity Partners, with Domo Broadcast being the broadcast division of DTC.

Elaborating on the re-branding and status of the company, Simon Martin, Broadcast Sales Manager at Domo Broadcast, said: “Cobham PLC sold the TCS division to Marlin Equity, a US-based capital investment company and rebranded as DTC – Domo Broadcast. DTC includes a number of product portfolios and Domo Broadcast is part of this group.”

He further confirmed that GloCom had worked extensively with Domo Broadcast to provide various wireless transmitter solutions especially for some of the live sports events in the region.

Zain Mirza from Sales and Business Development at GloCom commented that the systems integrator has already been providing solutions for a number of live sports events in the UAE in partnership with Domo Broadcast.

“We started with a dhow racing event in Abu Dhabi around three years ago. Since then, there have been others. Be it the Volvo Ocean Race or the Rugby World Cup, these solutions give broadcasters the ability to provide their audience with new and immersive viewing experiences they haven’t been able to be part of before. It is in these live events that we primarily see a lot of demand,” Mirza added.

Domo Broadcast’s products lie within wireless video solutions, both of which are in the growth area of POV and IP Mesh technology.

Simon Martin explained: “Our very small transmitter is called the Nano. Well-suited to drone activity, we recently did a demo for an organisation in South Africa, where we attached the POV camera to a jockey. By miniaturising this technology, we’re now giving broadcasters the ability to use POV camera positions that were not possible before. Remote, live and often difficult environments provide a unique challenge, but viewers are now beginning to demand this immersive experience as standard.

“For traditional sports, news and entertainment, broadcasters are looking for the best picture quality. Our SOLO7-OBTX transmitter will be launched at NAB and has 4:2:2 capability, supports 1080p as well as 50/60 video formats. We have also launched the SOLO8 transmitter.”

Al Jazeera to axe 500 staff

Al Jazeera Media Network will cut 500 jobs, which amounts to 10% of its total workforce. The layoffs are part of a “workforce optimisation initiative”. While a majority of the layoffs will hit Doha staff, there will be cuts worldwide as well.
twofour54 employs Signiant Media Shuttle

Signiant has been working with twofour54 by providing the Signiant Media Shuttle as part of its production services for several major international blockbusters shot in the UAE capital including Star Wars: The Force Awakens and Fast & Furious 7. Signiant Media Shuttle is the de facto standard for hands-on movement of large files, to move terabytes of media files for its clients. Prior to working with Signiant, twofour54 used FTP to transfer large files or physically mailed hard drives to international partners.

With the growth of production and increased demand for high-resolution video including 8K, twofour54 needed a more reliable way for customers to upload and download files and overcome potential bandwidth challenges both in the region and in the customers’ locations. Signiant’s patented SaaS solution, Media Shuttle, facilitated fast, secure file transfers to partners around the world for twofour54.

ARN now available on OSN

Subscribers to OSN in the UAE can now tune into all nine radio brands of the Arabian Radio Network (ARN) on their television. This follows the signing of an agreement between OSN and ARN. Following the simulcast distribution agreement, access to the ARN Network will be added to each OSN subscriber package free of cost.

David Butorac, CEO of OSN, said: “Our simulcast distribution agreement with ARN is an industry first in the region that provides a wider choice of entertainment for our subscribers in the UAE at no extra cost. It marks a compelling integration of content delivered via television, adding value to our subscribers and enhancing the reach of ARN.”

ARN General Manager Mahmoud Al Rasheed added: “We started with streaming when it became available a few years back, then we launched apps and got busy on social network and now we are on TV.”

According to Steve Smith, COO of ARN, the move to TV was a natural progression. “When we align partners, we align with like-minded partners. The best technology sits in the living room with the flat screen and surround sound so you should have the best quality radio on that.”

beIN brings CBeebies to MENA, confirms Miramax purchase

BBC Worldwide has confirmed that its pre-schooler TV channel, CBeebies, is launching in the MENA region exclusively on the beIN DTH service from April 1, 2016. This is the first time CBeebies has entered this market as a full channel.

Speaking about the partnership, Yousef Al-Obaidly, Deputy CEO, beIN Media Group, said: “beIN is focused on providing a wide range of exclusive and premium content for children. This is in line with our vision of catering to the needs of the whole family. “Our partnership with BBC enhances our kids entertainment portfolio even further. I am sure that CBeebies content will be consumed by our subscribers.”

beIN Media Group has also put speculation to rest by confirming the purchase of Miramax from previous owners Qatar Investment Authority and Colony Capital. Miramax will continue to operate as an independent film and television studio under the new owner.

Peter Kyriakos has joined Sony Professional Solutions Middle East & Africa as head of Marketing. He will be responsible for marketing for all business segments that fall under the Sony PSMEa mandate, for the Middle East, Africa and CIS. He was previously with broadcast distributor UBMS.

Sherif Shaker has joined SAM as Regional Sales Manager. As part of his remit, he will look after sales for SAM’s entire broadcast portfolio in the Middle East including most of the Gulf countries and Egypt. He was previously Sales Manager at Sony PSMEA, where he worked for nine years.
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OSN partners with Eutelsat for more capacity

OSN is ramping up capacity on the EUTELSAT 8 West B satellite, operated by Eutelsat Communications. Additional capacity at the Middle East’s flagship TV neighbourhood will support more expansion for OSN, including new HD channels and the introduction of Ultra HD services.

OSN will use the additional capacity to introduce Ultra HD services that will bring the most cutting-edge TV experience to viewers in the Middle East, offering true immersion with an image quality four times richer than full HD. OSN also plans to ramp up its HD offer, with eight new channels announced recently and several new premium and exclusive channels to be launched soon.

Commenting on the new contract, Mark Billinge, CTO, OSN, said: “We are enthusiastic about this additional capacity, which will allow us to offer superior TV quality to our viewers. Our plans to move into Ultra HD reflect our continuous ambition to raise the bar and be at the forefront of the latest TV technology.”

AfricaXP selects Babeleye to manage EPG

AfricaXP has selected Babeleye to manage rich EPG metadata of its linear channels distributed to Zuku, a pan-African pay-TV platform, and WatchAfrica, which offers a premium subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service. Babeleye will provide total management and distribution of programming information to top TV platforms.

“By implementing Babeleye metadata solutions, AfricaXP can include rich programme descriptions and multilingual EPG information, thus increasing its programmes’ exposure on partners’ TV platforms,” said Hamid Ouddane, CEO of Babeleye.
Imagine Communications has secured the contract to transition the playout facilities at Jordan Media City (JMC) in Amman, Jordan, from SD to HD. The first phase of the expansion will allow JMC to add six new ART HD channels to support its growing roster of international clients.

At the heart of the JMC installation will be Imagine Communications’ Nexio servers. The Nexio AMP, a UHD-ready platform, delivers great reliability, flexibility and format transparency while providing HD-SDI ingest, preview and playout. Nexio Farad centralised online storage will enable true shared access for fast on-SAN editing for Apple Final Cut Pro editors. The Farad storage network’s intrinsic mirroring functionality provides resiliency, ensuring high availability of the platform.

Along with the new storage network, Imagine Communications is supplying its Platinum VX digital video router, as well as its monitoring, conversion, synchronisation and test and measurement solutions. The JMC system will also incorporate Imagine Communications’ Nexio IconLogo high-definition channel branding system to provide downstream branding for the new channels.

JMC opts for Harmonic’s headend solution

Jordan Media City (JMC) has chosen an end-to-end headend solution from Harmonic to support its direct-to-home (DTH) satellite service. JMC is using Harmonic’s ProView integrated receiver decoders (IRDs), Electra X2 advanced media processors, ProStream 9100 with ACE stream processors and transcoders and NMX Digital Service Manager to manage its entire DTH workflow, from channel acquisition to reception, descrambling, encoding, transcoding, multiplexing and scrambling. By providing JMC with a high-density, scalable video infrastructure solution that features the latest technologies for DVB-S2, MPEG-4 AVC and statistical multiplexing, Harmonic has increased the media company’s bandwidth efficiency, improved video quality and decreased operating expenses.

Tight integration between the Electra X2 processors and Harmonic’s ProStream 9100 stream processors with DiviTrackIP statmux technology maximises the efficiency and flexibility of JMC’s statistical multiplexing operations. Through the unified headend solution, JMC can support up to 100 services per statistically multiplexed pool, 14 pools per platform, and three pools within a single transport stream in order to increase bandwidth efficiency. Using a combination of Electra and ProStream for statistical multiplexing has led to significant cost savings and enhanced video quality for JMC.

The ProView, Electra and ProStream solutions are controlled by Harmonic’s NMX video network management solution, which provides mass configuration, monitoring and automated redundancy in centralised or distributed architectures.
Netflix acquires worldwide streaming rights to Zinzana

Netflix has acquired worldwide streaming rights to Image Nation Abu Dhabi’s recent Emirati feature film, Zinzana. Independent studio IM Global handled international sales rights (excluding Germany, the UK and the Middle East) on the deal via its foreign language label IM Global Anthem, on behalf of the filmmakers, and Cinetic Media oversaw US sales rights.

StudioCanal has picked up theatrical distribution rights to the film for Germany and the UK. Vox will release the film theatrically in the Middle East. Zinzana, a psychological thriller which marks the feature directorial debut of Emirati filmmaker Majid Al Ansari, had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest in Austin, Texas last September and its European premiere at the BFI London Film Festival last October.

Pebble Beach Systems deploys Stingray in Iraq

Pebble Beach Systems has confirmed that its first Stingray channel-in-a-box solution has been ordered by Iraq24. The broadcaster is relocating its production and playout operation from Jordan to a new purpose-built facility in Baghdad, and has selected Stingray to deliver a fully redundant HD ingest and playout solution.

Speaking about the order, Fuad Al-Rubaiey, Managing Director of Future Art Broadcast Trading, said: “We looked at a number of options across the price spectrum to meet Iraq24’s needs, but Stingray’s small footprint, and its ability to be deployed very quickly, made it the ideal solution.”

Qvest Media partners with Fairlight

Qvest Media has entered into a partnership with Fairlight to be its sales partner in the UAE. The partnership will also make Qvest Media the exclusive distributor of Fairlight’s range of digital audio products in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Fairlight manufactures professional audio technology, supplying audio post-processing systems used by a prestigious customer base around the world. Qvest Media will include Fairlight’s solutions in its portfolio of professional solutions.
Abu Dhabi University builds new studio with Al Futtaim Tech

The studio boasts an EVO16 Bay Base media server with 12TB shared storage, a Hyper Deck Recorder from Blackmagic, Vectorscope, and an IKAN PT3100 15-inch teleprompter. The cameras were networked in the studio system with a Blackmagic router 20x20 6G-SDI, supporting SD, HD and Ultra HD. Also deployed is a NewTek TriCaster 860-MS live production system including the Live Text and Virtual Set Editor. The project saw the first educational sector installation of the AVID S3L audio mixing solution.

LiveU appoints UBMS Middle East partner

LiveU has announced that it is increasing its presence across the Middle East with the appointment of United Broadcast and Media Solutions (UBMS) as regional sales partner. Dubai-headquartered UBMS works across the Middle East and Africa.

For content gathering, LiveU uses cellular networks rather than satellite or fibre for live transmission from any location worldwide. LiveU offers a wide range of devices for live video coverage, including mobile backpacks, smartphone apps, satellite/cellular hybrid and external antenna solutions. It also offers cloud-based services that augment its platform.

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OSN launches new TV app

OSN has launched a new app that offers subscribers easy access to their OSN Plus HD box with new ways to discover OSN’s vast library of content. Designed and developed by Accedo, the app’s intuitive interface allows subscribers to easily search OSN On Demand and OSN Store, keep track of new channel listings and search for previously recorded shows with ease. It also allows subscribers to control their OSN Plus HD box remotely and has social media sharing features.

Avid transforms workflow at twofour54

Twofour54 has announced that it has streamlined and centralised its production processes by leveraging advanced media management solutions from the Avid Media Suite and implementing an Avid Service Level Agreement. With Avid Everywhere, the facility can now offer its clients a flexible and cost-effective end-to-end 4K workflow based on the Avid MediaCentral Platform.

Twofour54 facilitates the development of Arabic media and entertainment content in the region and offers production and post-production services for film and broadcast projects. Working with a strict budget, the facility needed to replace its infrastructure with a more streamlined and future-proof solution.

Bluebell Opticom partners with EMEA Gateway

Bluebell Opticom has announced an agreement with UK-based EMEA Gateway as a channel partner. A sales and marketing outsourcing company for the broadcast and media industry, EMEA Gateway will develop and manage new sales channels for Bluebell products throughout the Middle East.

Paul McCann, MD, Bluebell Opticom, said: “EMEA Gateway’s industry expertise, along with its local knowledge and reseller network, will go a long way towards expanding our reach and driving sales in the Middle East. At the same time, we’ll be able to serve our many existing Middle Eastern customers more effectively.”

PerceptionTV and FANAP partner for Gulf expansion

PerceptionTV, a multi-screen IPTV platform provider, and FANAP, a major player in the ICT industry, have announced a joint venture dedicated to the Perception platform sales throughout Iran and other territories in the Gulf region. The joint venture business, Perception Gulf, has already secured its first deal with Baran Telecom, one of the five companies recently licensed to provide OTT/IPTV entertainment services throughout Iran.

The Perception platform delivers multi-screen TV entertainment combining live TV, catch-up services, video on demand and a cloud-based personal video recorder.
The 11th annual Capacity Middle East was held 1-3 March 2016 at the Grand Hyatt Dubai. The event was the largest yet, with 1,365 senior telecoms executives from 420+ companies representing 70+ countries in attendance.

The C-level conference and new hosted workshop invited more than 30 industry experts to speak and share their experiences, including Mahesh Jaishankar, Du; Ali Amiri, EVP Carrier and Wholesale Services, Etisalat; Khalid Al Mansouri, CEO, Ooredoo Global Services; and Dr Homoud AlKussayer, VP Wholesale Business, Saudi Telecoms Company.

The opening keynote panel discussion at the event discussed whether collaboration between wholesale carriers and new media services was the way forward. Another panel discussed the necessary services to equip the rise in SMEs. A workshop hosted by Datamena and DE-CIX gave an overview of how market and network changes are enabled through peering/UAE-IX. Iran was the key focus of a panel discussion featuring Iran Connect on investment opportunities for telcos in the Islamic Republic. Yet another key topic at the conference was utilising the UAE as the gateway to North Africa, India and Asia.

The speakers addressed critical market trends shaping the industry and topics included investment opportunities in Iran, generating new revenues through enterprises, developing LTE and 5G strategies, and commercialising submarine networks.

Capacity Middle East 2017 will be held from 7 - 9 March, 2017.
In an exclusive interview with veteran filmmaker Yusuf Thakur, BroadcastPro ME finds out about his latest three-part wildlife documentary on the Arabian desert and the triumphs and travails of shooting such films.
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Wildlife filmmaking is a labour of love and purely fuelled by passion, according to filmmaker Yusuf Thakur, who captures the flora and fauna of the Arabian desert and the jungles of Africa in producing 10 nature series in the last 20 years. A passionate naturalist, Thakur has funded and produced all of his wildlife films by himself alongside running his studio, VFX Productions in Dubai. Commercial film work is his bread and butter; wildlife filmmaking is his passion.

In his latest film on Arabian wildlife, Thakur documents the breeding cycle of the kestrel, a smaller breed in the falcon family. The kestrel is a bird of prey that catches smaller animals and insects.

The entire film follows a pair of kestrels and is filmed in 4K on the RED ONE and the RED EPIC.

“It's not a scripted documentary but an undiluted documentation of the natural environment. We don't feed the birds or simulate any behaviour in the film,” Thakur says.

The film covers a period of six months, the entire cycle from the time the birds arrive to the time they pair and bond and start to mate. The male then starts feeding the female on a high protein diet of lizards, mainly sandfish, to prepare her to lay eggs.

“We filmed the entire period from the laying of eggs to the chicks hatching, to being fed, until they left the nest. Besides the two birds, other birds living in the vicinity are also a part of the film and so are some indigenous species of insects and owls living in the same area.”

On this particular project, Thakur worked with a very lean crew, handling the camera with his gaffer and at times alone. His film has only four credits: himself, two camera assistants and a sound assistant. The entire film was produced in-house using his own equipment and lenses.

“Over the years I have devised my own ways of filming in the wild. I don't use any special lenses to follow wildlife, but I am quite comfortable using my DSLR lenses. I feel these are the best lenses, as they give you a full frame. I still have lenses that are five to seven years old and all of them have physical apertures. None of them have an auto focus. Wildlife filming doesn't work on auto aperture or auto focus, because filming is a completely different ball game from still photography, which is doable with auto functions.”

He adds that he avoids bringing unwieldy equipment to the desert and other remote locations.

“It’s not practical to walk in the deep desert at the peak of summer with unwieldy gear. I try to keep it...
"Over the years I have devised my own ways of filming in the wild. I don’t use any special lenses to follow wildlife, but I am quite comfortable using my DSLR lenses. I feel these are the best lenses, as they give you a full frame”

Yusuf Thakur, filmmaker

lean as much as possible. I like to use the lenses I have been using for years. My go-to lens in this film and most of my desert shoots is still a DSLR 50-500mm lens. I use an extender if required, but only if there’s no other way to get the right picture. The 50-500mm is closest to human vision, whereas adding an extender ruins the image sharpness.”

Thakur used the 120-300mm 2.8 lens for after-light shooting in the dark. For zooming he used the Angenieux cinema lens.

“The Angenieux cinema lens came in handy for zoom because a DSLR 50-500 doesn’t work so well as a zoom. I used it on the EPIC to capture some shots, which were impossible with a DSRL. Although Angenieux lenses work very well in 4K on the EPIC they vignette at 5K, but work just fine in 4K on the RED ONE.”

The kestrels are very commonly found here in the UAE, further down in the deep desert. Although these birds are not used in falconry to hunt, they are used as a lure to trap bigger migrating falcons. Falconers usually put a kestrel in a field and lay the net. When other falcons see a bird on the ground, they land there thinking there is something to feed on and are then trapped in the net.

The kestrel is one of the few breeds of falcon that breeds in the desert – other falcons are migratory birds and breed in cooler climates. Therefore, the breeding of the kestrel became the prime focus of the film.

Thakur shot about 100 hours of footage, which was later cut to about 45 minutes. He edited the film over a period of four months.

“I don’t work full-time on these projects. I was editing the film on the side while working on commercials and corporate films, which is my main business at VFX Productions. I like to work in pockets, which gives me respite from my day-to-day work and also doesn’t leave me exhausted with one kind of work,” he explains.

Patience is the key in wildlife film projects. “I don’t like to fake anything when I am filming. I film
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patiently and capture natural animal behaviour rather than simulate it. As a result, we end up with a large amount of footage that needs to be sorted at the editing desk. For me, it is difficult to tell an editor: here's the footage, cut it. I like to edit my films myself."

The film was graded raw in the RED camera software and then everything was imported into Adobe Premier. Thakur also used Resolve for editing, colour correction and effects.

“I like to work with the Resolve because it gives me editing, grading and colour correction tools in an all-in-one package. And I was quite happy with the results too.”

The film uses natural sound recorded using sound recorders in the field. Synchronized sound is also used, along with an original music score by VFX Productions’ in-house sound specialist.

“I don’t create sound in the studios. I have recorded the sound from the natural environment and then I did match editing in post-production. I don’t like the idea of doing Foley sound work, in order to keep the film as close to nature as possible.”

Thakur says that wildlife filmmaking is all about weaving a story in post production at the editing table. At the end of the day, what matters is whether the film manages to engage the viewer.

“I cut everything in 4K – the timeline is 4K and the display is in 2K. The way it works is you study the species before and understand everything. I note down the key points I observe in the behaviour of the bird or the animal and have to do a bit of back and forth to put together the ideas. It’s like putting together a jigsaw puzzle – while patience is the key, what drives you in such projects is passion.”

Once pre-mating starts, the kestrels mark their territory and stay there until the chicks can fly away on their own. Therefore, it was easy for Thakur to go back to the same place each time to continue filming. He filmed three-four days each week.

Thakur declines to reveal the exact location where he filmed the kestrels, saying only that the area is somewhere in the deep desert, not very far from the Hajar Mountains. The kestrels’ nest was on the top of a cliff in the middle of sand dunes, with a pair of owls nesting on the same cliff a few feet lower down. He has tried to capture the surrounding habitat and the creatures making up the desert ecosystem, although the main story of the film revolves around the falcons.

This is the first in a series of three films about the desert ecosystem. The filming on the other two is complete and they are now in post-production stage. The second part is also about another key Arabian desert species, which is predominantly nocturnal.

Thakur doesn’t give away much, saying that it’s too early to talk about it. The third film documents life in the desert itself. There are no people in any of these films. The filmmaker plans to release the three films as a series and his agent is already in talks with major broadcasters around the world.

Years of experience and filming in the desert helps in predicting animal behaviour and getting the best shots, says Thakur.

“There are no shortcuts to this. The more time you spend in the desert, the better it is. We sweat it out in unforgiving conditions for hours on end, at times just to capture a certain behaviour, and that in itself can be a joyous moment. It is equally important to keep track of your
health when working in wilderness.”

He is on his way to yet another overnight shoot in the desert when we speak to him.

“I found something very interesting recently and now I am quite excited to film it. I am always prepared to camp in the desert. My car is equipped with tents and sleeping bags and some food and water supplies when I venture out into the desert,” he enthuses.

The desert is not the only habitat Thakur has documented. He has filmed in Africa in the past and regularly flies to the savanna to study natural history.

“Shooting in Africa is obviously very different from the UAE. The accessibility and availability of wildlife in Africa is way more than the UAE. It’s hard to find animals in the desert, and most of the creatures living in arid conditions are quite elusive. Africa, on the other hand, has an abundance of animals. Filming in both locations is fulfilling, but the desert holds a special place in my heart.”

The other difference is how one prepares in terms of equipment and filming method.

“I don’t carry a lot of gear to Africa. The biggest worry is that you might lose equipment. I remember losing a very expensive lens pack once, which was very difficult to replicate. When filming in Africa, I cut down my equipment to the absolute minimum. None of my works are commissioned, which means I spend from my pocket, so budget is a constraint as well.”

A natural history film, according to Thakur, should document nature in its truest form.

“It’s not easy to film nature, and patience is the key here. To make the switch from my commercial work to wildlife filming is difficult for me. So I concentrate on one and then go to the other, mainly on weekends when I need to take a break. It is very important to stay safe in harsh conditions and be mindful of all the dangers lurking around, be it in the desert or in the deep African jungles.”

Thakur laments the fact that despite emphasis on local content, no regional broadcaster is willing to pay for his work while there are substantial sums of money being invested to acquire content from abroad.

“It’s ironical how local content doesn’t receive acceptance in the region. I have tried to contact several local broadcasters and with new documentary channels in the region one would think, regional broadcasters will be willing to support such projects but sadly, that’s not the case.”
The end-to-end broadcast infrastructure at the Al Jazeera studios in Doha is being revamped as part of the much talked-about Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project. Vibhuti Arora finds out more about the audio transformation at seven of the network’s studios.

As part of the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project, the entire infrastructure at Al Jazeera’s existing studios in Doha is being revamped. This covers cameras, vision mixers, audio control, editing facilities, post-production, MCR, transmission and ingest, which are some of the areas that have been renewed in the studio. In the two new studios and five existing ones, the audio infrastructure has also been built from scratch to include the latest solutions, to deliver the best audio quality and also future-proof them for any broadcast audio requirements.

Syed Yusuf Abdulla, Acting Solution Architect Broadcast, Technology Solution and Integration at Al Jazeera Media Network, says that building the digital audio infrastructure in both the revamped and new studios involved extensive networking and robust fibre connectivity.

“Even for the upgrade of the existing studios, it was only the studio area which was used, but in terms of equipment and engineering design, everything was built from the ground up. Before the upgrade, some studios were fitted with digital concepts while others had analogue, but now all of our studios across the network are being fitted with the same equipment that can be interlinked.”

Detailed planning went into drawing up the requirements for what was needed in all areas, says...
“Before the upgrade, some studios were fitted with digital concepts while others had analogue, but now all of our studios across the network are being fitted with the same equipment that can be interlinked”

Syed Yusuf Abdulla, Acting Solution Architect Broadcast, Technology Solution and Integration, Al Jazeera Media Network

Abdulla. A highlight of this project is that it is completely based on digital audio, which means the entire network was revamped to make room for new workflows and solutions. The connectivity is over fibre now and connects all points in a seamless way.

As with all sections, the audio is integral to the studios. Allie Kader Gaffoor, Network Specialist Sound & Audio Acoustics – Network Operations Standards, explains how the audio infrastructure is being deployed in the new and existing studios.

“We decided to go with Calrec, because we found it to be the best fit for our audio requirements both operationally as well as technically. TSL provided the audio metering solution and Genelec speakers have been deployed for audio monitoring. The music playback is on a SpotOn system, while Riedel provided the communications/talkback systems. We opted for a Sennheiser microphone D9000 series, the first deployment of the system in the region, as well as the Sennheiser IEM system.”

Due to the digital element and the interconnection of the equipment, a detailed connectivity plan was designed by the engineering team, led by Abdullah. Thanks to the digital interconnectivity of this equipment, communication between all the connections is easier and faster because the teams now work with file-based information sharing. There was a lot of emphasis on redundancy and interconnection to the back-up systems to make a flawless switch from the main to the back-up.

“We chose systems that we knew would give us the optimum level of performance and left little room for error. For example, the Calrec system has a master core that links to the console core, which makes it easier for the operator to access audio from other studios. Likewise, with our Sennheiser D9000 series, this system was carefully designed due to the multi-studios scenario. Our Riedel system spans all our channels and broadcast centres,” Gaffoor notes.

Most of these systems only require software upgrades in the future, which makes them very scalable.
The new frames for the audio equipment will facilitate any growth required in future by any studio or production needs. As a result, the workflow is more efficient and time-saving and leaves little room for error, making it easier for engineers and operators to trouble-shoot.

Sennheiser was already being used across the network in the five existing studios before the upgrade, and the sound engineering at Al Jazeera decided to continue with the same brand. In order to cater to the growing need for a technical refresh and remain up to date with the latest in the field of audio technology, the Sennheiser systems were replaced with new ones.

“We found the brand reliable, and what helped us further was the fact that Sennheiser offered a digital system, which was what we wanted at that point in time. Sennheiser met our needs in terms of microphones as well as IEM [in-ear monitoring],” Gaffoor says. “As early as 2013, Sennheiser made us aware of the new D9000 system and EM9046 because we were initially looking at the EM3237 and SK5212 MKII for our microphone solution.”

At that time, the Digital 9000 series hadn’t yet been released, but it was a better fit for the project. It was to be released later that year but Sennheiser decided to get in touch with some of the project team at Al Jazeera and offer them the system anyway.

A working system of the Digital 9000 series was then sent to Al Jazeera’s Doha headquarters for the team to try it out for themselves. The D9000 wireless microphone transmits uncompressed audio, which means it reproduces a quality of audio very close to that of a wired microphone.

“We chose systems that we knew would give us the optimum level of performance and left little room for error. For example, the Calrec system has a master core that links to the console core, which makes it easier for the operator to access audio from other studios. Likewise, with our Sennheiser D9000 series”

Allie Kader Gaffoor, Network Specialist Sound & Audio Acoustics – Network Operations Standards, Al Jazeera Media Network

For audio processing, Al Jazeera decided on Junger units to ensure balanced audio across the channels. After some on-air testing, the team decided to change the specifications from the old Sennheiser system to the Digital 9000 series. Sennheiser worked closely with Sony Professional (Sony PSMEA), the systems integrator for the project, to bring it up to speed with the technology and assist in carrying out site surveys. The culmination of these site surveys was a report detailing both Sony and Sennheiser’s recommendations regarding RF planning for the whole site.

All studios had to be connected to wireless microphones and in-ear monitoring systems, requiring finite radio frequency coordination to ensure that there is no intermodulation or interference between them, even if presenters walk from studio to studio wearing their transmitters.

This meant the antennas had to be placed very carefully so as to not get in each other’s way. Because of the coverage areas in some studios, bespoke multi-antenna systems were designed and deployed with the help of Sennheiser’s Customer Development and Application Engineering team in Germany.

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the largest broadcast project that Sennheiser has worked on from its Middle East office. Gaffoor explains that the file-based system workflow is carried out from a centralised file-based location that interfaces with the baseband system. These two systems work hand in hand to ensure information and material is available instantly. The files can be accessed via the MAM and PAM (pluggable authentication module), the central storage system. SpotOn, a windows-based playout system operated from a PC, plays WAV or mp3 format audio files that are connected to the server, so the material can be shared between studios in the channels locally as well as abroad.

“Our Calrec system uses the Hydra networking. We have a master core that links to console cores to make audio available from the different studios or sections, connected to the MADI. This is available across the network. The Calrec Hydra network is connected to the production router on MADI – all studio audio programmes get embedded from the hybrid production router and these studio transmission lines go to our Centralised Channel Transmission. As for future development capabilities with the Sennheiser system, we can have DANTE protocol as it gives us the infrastructure to have it on the network. For audio post, files transfers are done on the PAM. Editors can send and receive files in Avid Interplay to and from Pro Tools,” adds Gaffoor.

The next step
Commenting on the status of the project, Ali El Husseini, Head of Network Operation Standards, Operators in the new control room.
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Online video streaming and consumption has become a global juggernaut, growing at rates that are consistently underestimated by even the most prescient analysts. It is quite simply the biggest digital traffic expansion in history. And while the technologies for creating and experiencing great streamed content continue to develop impressively, our ability to deliver it remains poor, if not broken. If online video streaming is going to deliver on its promise, consumers have to be confident that their viewing experience will be great. To achieve reliably high Quality of Experience (QoE), we need a delivery environment that supports a flawless experience every time.

The basic problem for effective delivery of over-the-top video – content on demand delivered via the internet – is that the path from the content supplier to the consumer is complex and not under the control of any single body. Professor of Communication Engineering Jonathan Pitts (Queen Mary University of London) offers a useful four-part breakdown of the delivery path: Home, Access (the broadband provider’s local infrastructure), ISP (the provider’s regional and national network) and Upstream (other network and content-provider infrastructure between the ISP and the content itself). In a report published in December 2015 for UK government communications authority Ofcom, Professor Pitts’ company, Actual Experience, found that all four links in the delivery chain can and often do contribute to poor QoE.

“In order to understand the quality experienced by consumers, the entire digital supply chain must be considered,” the report states. “Just to consider the effects from a single part not only distorts the overall evaluation of quality, but risks missing the areas that are making the biggest difference to consumers.”

A huge number of companies are involved in each of these four parts of the delivery path, from manufacturers of the physical fabric to the cable companies whose bills we pay every month. Online video providers are in no better position than anyone else to control the performance and reach of the internet. In fact, one problem they face is as old as the internet itself. The protocol that underpins the web, IP, is designed to ensure simply that all packets of data reach their destination – that you receive the whole text of your email – and not that they be...
delivered in a specific order, never mind within the tightly determined time frame required for online video. Of course, the technical variables affecting QoE are not really of interest to the average consumer, especially when she hits the play button.

Still, to understand what OTT video providers can do to enhance QoE, we need some background. In general, video providers outsource to content delivery networks (CDNs). CDNs aim to maximise QoE by storing video content as close as possible to the consumer, in the form of edge servers. The more edge servers, the better the performance of the CDN. On the other hand, edge servers are very expensive to set up and run, requiring secure hardware, uninterruptible power supplies and cooled server environments. So a CDN has to make a complex commercial decision on how many edge servers to invest in, and where to site them. These decisions are always CAPEX-intensive.

There is now an exciting, innovative way of providing a very large number of edge servers without the associated costs: peer-assisted video delivery. A typical CDN design is one-to-many: content flows from a central hub, to edge servers, to consumers. In a peer-assisted system, end-user devices act as nodes in a vast, webbed network, sharing content with each other. Video content is divided into pieces and distributed across consumer devices. If you are viewing a movie, for instance, it will be assembled in your device as you watch it, and it will come from a large number of individual nodes.

The fine granularity of content servers means performance is consistently excellent. With every member of a service acting as an edge cache, video content bypasses the CDN’s server infrastructure, travelling shorter distances and avoiding peak traffic slow-downs, thus ensuring a bufferless viewing experience. And the more customers a service has, of course, the more robust and resilient the peer network becomes.

Moreover, the management of video delivery itself can be decentralised. Each end-user device can determine which other nodes to fetch content from, using weighted criteria such as location, ISP performance and ping times. So the practicalities of routing individual connections are also peer-assisted, further reducing dependency on the wider internet.

From the video provider’s perspective, peer-assisted delivery does not replace the CDN, but enhances it. When contracting with a CDN, video providers typically commit to a minimum amount of annual usage. Because the peer-to-peer network offloads traffic from the CDN – indeed, up to 96% of it – providers can do much more with their CDN allowance, including serving more customers and offering more content, all the while maintaining excellent QoE.

Not all peering is the same. A traditional peer-to-peer service relies exclusively on the peers to provide content to each other. A hybrid peering service has a more sophisticated architecture; it takes advantage of a provider’s existing CDN servers as a fallback source in case there are no nodes with the requested content. This means that QoE remains reliably high even for newly released and rarely viewed content.

Peer-assisted delivery is also extremely flexible, potentially as effective for set-top boxes and handheld devices as it is for desktops. And nodes in the peer network can deliver data over mobile networks, though we have found it best to limit devices on mobile networks to receiving data. When in a Wi-Fi environment, though, handheld devices add to the network’s resources, raising their peers’ QoE.

Protecting intellectual property is a priority for OTT video providers. Peer-assisted delivery can comply with any existing digital rights management (DRM) scheme. While content is primarily protected by a comprehensive DRM, slicing the data into multiple packages also increases security by ensuring that no individual user holds more than a small fraction of each programme. With the further possibility of encrypting internode traffic, the whole network can be made virtually impossible to intercept. Although global demand for OTT video is growing at a staggering rate, poor delivery infrastructure threatens to undermine its future. No matter what their location or kind of device, viewers expect immediate, smooth playback. Peer-assisted delivery is a simple, powerful and extremely cost-effective solution to the problem of congested and sparse networks. It is the key to consistently excellent Quality of Experience.

Adam Lewis is CEO of Voddler Group.
IT'S A WRAP

CABSAT 2016 brought together broadcast and satellite companies from across the world to converge at the biggest technology show in the Middle East and Africa. We bring you some snapshots from the show.
The 22nd edition of CABSAT concluded on March 10 after three days of broadcast exhibitions, conferences and networking. Known as MEASA region’s definitive broadcast and satellite exhibition, CABSAT this year saw industry peers converging from around the globe. A section of the exhibition was dedicated to West Africa, which had both buyers and sellers and gained significant traction at the show. There were delegations from African countries including Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Nigerian state broadcaster NBC had a pavilion for the first time at CABSAT. They were a part of the Content Marketplace among 30 brands present there. More than 950 brands from 60 countries were present at the show.

CABSAT Show Director Andrew Pert said the Content Congress, hosted for the first time this year, was a big success. The meetings programme had 900 pre-arranged meetings.

“The one-to-one matchmaking programme proved to be a successful platform for global and regional companies to meet with key buyers and forge strategic deals that will shape the region’s content landscape for years to come,” he noted.

The closing day of the Content Congress featured a keynote address by Glenn Gainor, President of Physical Production for Sony Pictures. For the first time, the UAE had three leading film studios sharing insight about the future of filmed content. CABSAT 2016 aired eight hours of exclusive filmed content.

“CABSAT is a strategic convention bringing together technicians, filmmakers and story makers to discuss the importance of technology in our global industry. The show yields phenomenal benefit to the regional industry, as well as the international studios and physical production teams.

“The UAE can be the next major production destination for filmmakers and producers because the country has so many opportunities for crews and scenic locations. With CABSAT serving as a monumental game-changer for the region, it shows that the UAE is serious in attracting filmmakers and show runners in the country,” said Gainor.

A host of influential regional voices also addressed the Content Congress including Jamal Al Sharif, Chairman of Dubai Film & TV Commission and Managing Director, Dubai Studio City, and David Butorac, CEO of OSN.

Other Content Congress speakers included Ashi Seth of Netflix, Eric Ellenbogen of Dreamworks among other C-Level executives from Fox International, NBC Universal, Australia’s FremantleMedia, ITV studios, Talpa, Dailymotion, Qatar’s beIN network, the European Broadcasting Union and a host of other major Hollywood and Bollywood studios.

The final day of CABSAT saw hundreds of media industry officials from Sri Lanka, China, the USA and Nigeria.

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We have introduced a total set-top box platform solution with the ABOX42 Smart SDK, which includes technologies to stream content in HEVC and adaptive bitrate technologies. All of our set-top boxes run on the same software platform.

IPTV is moving from a pure linear product to a complete TV experience with live TV including DVB features, cloud PVR services, HbbTV broadcaster on demand content, video on demand services and third-party content.

Cloud technology has evolved tremendously now and we provide feature sets in our boxes that can be upgraded in the cloud.

The ABOX42 OPX Saas and cloud TV services offer a collection of SaaS services for the installation, deployment and operation of the STB deployment in the field and to upgrade the functionality of the deployed services over time.

Matthias Greve, ABOX42, CEO and Founder

Amira is increasingly being used as a B-camera on productions. It is capable of shooting in high frame rate without the need to crop the sensor. At CABSAT, we introduced the multi-cam feature in the Amira at the UBMS stand. It allows you to use your Amira camera for high image quality and in the same environment as you use other cameras in a studio.

Amira has dedicated audio input control and is excellent for single operator mode. It is extremely well balanced for shoulder operation.

Using the multi-cam feature, through the single Ethernet cable, the Amira can connect to a Sony RCO control panel to remotely change settings and colour display. This is the first time we are showing the multi-camera feature. It was recently used on demo test shoots in Germany for studio shoots and side story shoots of the German version of The Voice.

Philipp Chudalla, Business Development MENA, ARRI

Viewers are hungry for more live content and there is growing demand to cover live events and shows. The budgets, however, are shrinking; broadcasters want more cost-effective and efficient solutions at a lesser price. There is pressure to do things more efficiently and cost-effectively. We have the price advantage against some of our competing solutions. In fact, for one-third the price, we will do 95% of what some of the competing brands do. Our solutions are used in live productions, reality shows, some of our clients collect satellite feeds of various events and use our systems to make highlight packages to show them on air.

The Mira production server is tailored for live television production tasks, with optional features available for specific operational environments. It’s flexible and robust, and is being used by leading broadcasters worldwide. Oman TV has bought three units from us.

Junaid Sheikh, President and CEO, Abekas

StreamMaster is a pure software solution; it can be virtualised. It can be running on your standard IT server on your facility or you can deploy it into your data centre or even in the cloud. There is no hardware required. It is designed to support virtualisation – a channel without a box – but can also be supplied with SDI I/O to support hybrid and transitional environments. This approach allows broadcasters and media companies to get professional playout on air – and particularly online – quickly and at manageable costs, delivering maximum benefits from the transition to IP. StreamMaster also supports SDI and can make the transition to IP when the broadcaster is ready, and we are positioning ourselves to help broadcasters achieve that seamlessly. StreamMaster comes with a lot of flexibility and offers disaster recovery running in the cloud, where clients have the choice to pay for it when they need it.

There is a lot of buzz around IP in the broadcast industry, but be careful what you wish for. IP too comes with a lot of technical issues. Standard IT stuff is not designed for quality service for broadcast, and the standards set in IP are difficult to achieve. It’s still early days to establish a complete IP infrastructure for broadcast, and some of the IP on the production side is more expensive than a baseband deployment.

The much talked-about uncompressed 4K over IP is also not happening anytime soon. IP is still the way forward but needs more work in the field.

James Gilbert, CEO, Pixel Power
The new lightweight dockable camera with three 2/3-inch 4K native CMOS sensors, provides prime quality colour reproduction with uncompressed RGB 4:4:4, 40Gbps baseband video transmission; perfect for chroma keying, HDR capability and 4K/HD simulcast operation.

CCU-430: 3RU sized Camera Control Unit supports easy migration from HD to 4K broadcast productions.
Aspera is doing business in the region directly since two years now. We brought on board a dedicated Middle East team last year that includes a Director of Sales based in Dubai, MEA region and six months ago, we also recruited a sales engineer. Our business in the region is growing well, which is the reason why Aspera has expanded the regional team.

Netflix is our largest customer in the cloud. They wanted to move all of their operations to the cloud, the reason for us to innovate the way to transfer files at maximum speed to cloud storage. We also work with STARZ Play for acquisition of content and help orchestrate their workflow. Not only do we provide transfer technology, we also provide automation tools that talk to each other to achieve a seamless workflow.

We work with more than 100 partner companies, which are now integrated with our technology and offer solutions compatible with our workflow orchestration. We expect more of the OTT platforms to switch to Aspera in 2016.

François Quereuil, Senior Director, Aspera, an IBM company

Regionally, we will see an emergence of new pay TV DTH operators and a lot of movement in that direction in 2016. This segment of the market has not been addressed, there have only been premium offerings in the region but research shows there is a big demand for low ARPU quality content. There is nothing in the range of $6-$12 per month, aside from My-HD. We work with My-HD for their conditional access service. With the launch of My Asia and My Maghreb, My-HD is expanding quite aggressively in the region and we are working closely with them in this expansion. The MENA region is currently under-served. For instance, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria have more than 86m people, and 16m households, but the pay TV penetration rates there are as low as 4-6%. Operators are trying to bundle the right content with the right viewer experience.

More low-cost DTH services will come up in the region in various languages and we are partnering with them. It’s too early to name them, but in the next few months, we expect more players to unfold in the field of pay TV.

Khaled Al Jamal, Sales Director MENA, Irdeto

Last October, Panasonic Marketing Middle East and Africa created a new broadcast strategy with more focus on broadcast. We now have a dedicated broadcast department to look after the broadcast business in the region. CABSAT has been a very important event for us to showcase our renewed broadcast strategy. This is our largest presence at the show thus far.

We showcased cameras and switchers and the focus was on studio and ENG solutions. We are expecting more demand from the MENA market and came to CABSAT to see our customers. A lot of end users have been visiting the booth.

TV stations have shown interest in our products. We have deployments in Sharjah Media Corporation, Saudi TV, Al Jazeera and Sky News Arabia. Saudi TV uses Panasonic solutions extensively. We also used CABSAT to debut our broadcast products, such as the 4K studio camera and VariCam light. The AK-UC3000 Series 4K Studio Handy Camera is a 4K broadcast-use camera equipped with a newly developed MOS sensor.

François Quereuil, Senior Director, Aspera, an IBM company

Khaled Al Jamal, Sales Director, Aspera, an IBM company

The 2016 instalment of CABSAT will go into history as the one that got disturbed by torrential rains, which caused a slight decline in the visitor numbers at the show.

Nevertheless, CABSAT 2016 was a success for Axon Digital Design. We launched our new MasterControl and Cerebrum and were graced by a visit from HRH Sheikh Hasher as well as a steady stream of visitors, old and new. We also showcased a range of 4K products and production tools. There were customers from as far afield as Morocco, the central Asian republics, but also many from India and Pakistan. There was a considerable number of trade visitors from Europe, who came to see their Middle East clients at CABSAT.

We have already booked our stand for 2017 as it is a key event in our calendar. We look forward to welcoming even more diverse audience next year.

Mark Barkey, Regional Sales Director Middle East, Africa and Turkey, Axon Digital Design
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Several companies were a part of the MediaCast stand at CABSAT, including:
Blackmagic Design, FieldCast, CEDAR, Miller, 3D Storm, Sonnet Technologies, NewTek and SNS.
CEDAR exhibited at CABSAT for the first time with MediaCast. On display was Studio 7 plug-ins for both Pro Tools and VST platforms. This suite of plug-ins comprises DNS One (with Learn), Declick, Decrackle, Auto Dehiss, adaptive Limiter, Declip, Debuzz and Retouch 7. The CEDAR DNS 8 Live 8 channel dialogue noise suppressor gathered a lot of attention from visitors. This product has been extremely popular with broadcasters for removing background noise (such as air-conditioning, fans, lights) in many live broadcast situations. The unit is also useful for installation in OB vans.
FieldCast demonstrated a brand new 2Core Hybrid cable system, capable of connecting and powering a camera, a monitor or other device using only one robust cable. The 2Core Hybrid cable comes with a sturdy, small form factor connector, and houses two cores of fibre for data transport, and two cores of copper for power.

The last five years have seen a big change in the radio broadcast industry, with the introduction of a new generation of high-power, liquid-cooled, solid-state transmitters, which are compact and more energy-efficient.
RVR Elettronica manufactures FM transmitters, broadcast transmitters and other FM broadcasting products for radio and television stations.
The industry is now heading towards digital radio and radio on mobile phones. However, FM is still very strong in radio and it is early days for radio going fully digital. There doesn’t seem to be an urgency to do so because FM radio is very high quality, unlike analogue TV. TV is going faster to digital than radio because of the difference in quality.
We have been coming to CABSAT for six years. We have dealers in the UAE, Oman, Iran and Iraq and several deployments in the Middle East. The region is important to us and we have sold many FM transmitters in the last ten years in the region.

Valentino Biavati, President and CEO (r), and Pier Luigi Mandrioli, International Sales Manager, RVR Elettronica

We showcased many new products at the show. The first day was extremely busy and there was a lot of interest around our new launches. The RED Scarlet W, a new member of the RED Dragon family, which was exhibited for the first time, piqued people’s interest. The camera records in REDCODE RAW recording format and offers great flexibility and seamless workflow to the user.

Every year at CABSAT, we see our customers, partners and friends in the industry. Times have changed now. With the internet, everything is available to you at the click of a button, but these shows are a good way to have a closer look at the products. Our camera display and drone area have been attracting a regular stream of visitors over the years and this year too, it was busy.
Sony chose not to have a stand this time round but exhibited with distributors. We showcased Sony’s archiving system at the show for the first time. We also displayed new capabilities of the drone camera range, such as the RAW recording feature.
Pooyan Farnam, Sales and Technical Support, Advanced Media

Our focus at CABSAT was 4K this year. We had key four areas on our stand. The Canon EOS-1D X Mark II is a 20.2 megapixel DSLR camera that records in 4K at 60fps and 8.8MP still grab. Currently the fastest with 14fps shooting and 16fps in live view, it was displayed here for the first time.
There was a lot of equipment around 4K including display and projectors. For 4K image, you need a very large screen, but we have a flat small screen, which displays a pristine image.

The Canon ME20F-SH video camera for special purpose records in complete darkness in colour, and is great for wildlife and nature recording, astronomy or for surveillance and security. It can record full-colour, full HD movies where previously, filmmakers might have had to settle for black and white footage shot using special infrared lighting. It shoots up to 75dB gain, equivalent to an ISO of more than four million.
Hendrik Verbrugghe, Marketing Director MENA, Canon
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ABS has been operating for more than 20 years from the region. We were established in Amman, Jordan but will be moving our headquarters to Dubai soon. We have been expanding aggressively and operate 14 bureaus, growing to 17 this year. We recently launched an office in Washington, DC and will be launching a new office in Kuwait over the next few weeks.

As an Arabic-language 24/7 news agency, we have offices across the world with hubs in Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Bahrain, Gaza, Ramallah, Lebanon and Turkey. We will be establishing a hub in Europe also. Our fleet of ENG crew has been growing to cater to the growing need for news from the region. Apart from ENG services, we also offer studios, live production services, editing and post-production.

Summer Aljouni, VP, ABS

CABSAT started on a very positive note; we had a very busy three days the show.

We used to have a small presence but this year, we had a bigger stand at the show. We are celebrating the 70th anniversary of Ikegami this year.

The Middle East market is the most important market for us, especially for our HD camera systems and our latest 4K studio cameras. We are looking forward to expanding our business in the region.

We launched our new 4K camera at CABSAT – the UHK-430 4K/HD portable camera system, which is aimed at broadcasters and individual studios. The camera control unit supports easy migration from HD to 4K live production.

Masanori Kondo, President at Ikegami Electronics Europe and Abdul Ghani, Regional Manager Ikegami Middle East

The big news is the launch of the first free-to-air 4K channel – Fashion One. It is produced and played out in 4K. Our year-on-year growth has been 70% over 2015. We have been catering to underserved communities in the region. These initiatives include our very successful Farsi offering, which has seen tremendous growth in viewership.

As a satellite operator, we are open to both free-to-air and pay channels. We don’t currently have a pay TV platform but may be working with pay TV operators in the future.

Looking forward, we will continue the same strategy and target more communities. There are plans in place for steady growth in 2016.

Ammar Baranbo, Chief Operating Officer, Yahlive

We are very excited about the launch of Newtek’s protocol – NDI (Network Device Interface) – an open standard for live production IP workflows over Ethernet networks. The Middle East is one of the fastest growing markets for us and we saw tremendous interest at CABSAT over NDI, the NewTek Tricaster and TalkShow and them being NDI enabled.

Most companies are looking at IP as a replacement for SDI to move video from one point to another. We view IP differently. We see it enabling a fundamental change in the way video production is done. One of the things the internet has allowed is to access any other device in the world. We are looking at leveraging IP for video in much the same way.

Our IP workflow vision works on standard Ethernet cable. This allows you to leverage existing infrastructure without making the investment. It’s cost-effective and you don’t need to replace the network. It can be done on a 1GB infrastructure. The NDI protocol is a bi-directional standard that can operate over a GigE local area network. It allows systems and devices to identify and communicate with each other, and to encode, transmit, and receive high quality, low latency, frame-accurate video and audio over IP in real time.

NDI can benefit any network-connected video device, including video mixers, graphics systems, capture cards, and many other production devices. NDI support extends to more than 100,000 compatible systems already deployed worldwide.

We worked closely with a large number of top manufacturers and developers to allow IP connectivity between devices.

NDI’s encoding algorithm is resolution and frame-rate independent, supporting 4K (and beyond). We are collaborating with current and new customers, manufacturers and developers on the NDI standard.

Chuck Silber, COO, NewTek

Chuck Silber, COO, NewTek
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Digital Nirvana records transport stream

Digital Nirvana will introduce a transport stream digital recorder, available as a standalone product.

Called CARTS (for Capture, Analyze, Replay Transport Stream), this new platform records and monitors the transport stream and provides alerts on non-compliance as well as the capability to cut segments and export sections of the transport stream for more detailed analysis. CARTS will also offer time-shifted playout for multiple time zone broadcasts as well as a disaster recovery solution for keeping a broadcaster’s signal on-air with recorded content.

CARTS records transport streams from ASI and stores them within the MonitorIQ platform. Real-time alerts are generated for MPEG stream compliance issues without the need for a dedicated transport stream analyzer.

Booth 5U10410

Ross promises smart production

Ross Video is planning its biggest NAB in the company’s history. Following the theme of Smart Production, Ross will be showing how its technologies, services and expertise can help customers achieve their creative, business and technical goals.

Every Ross product family is bringing significant new product enhancements and major new product introductions to NAB this year. For instance, Carbonite, a mid-size production switcher will show the new Carbonite Black control panels, now available on all models as well as a host of new features with version 12.0 software.

The largest Ross Production Switcher Series Acuity is being shown with integrated IP 10Gb/s I/O capabilities. This solution provides a direct connection into the Evertz IP routing environment without requiring a top-of-the-rack gateway.

Booth N3705

Miller launches Combo Live Pedestal series

Miller will be introducing the new Combo Live Pedestal series at NAB 2016, which offers users a sturdy design for maximum stability, with reliable and simple-to-use features for live studio applications.

With a carry handle for the column and dolly, this compact and portable pedestal range offers an easy setup with column tension control and a safety lock. Its air adjustable column system also allows for quick payload balancing. The Combo Live Pedestal series features precise-smooth low noise in the shot column with a 450mm stroke, an independent dolly wheel axle brake system, multiple wheel positions for linear or radius dolly tracking, 125mm dual ball bearing wheels for quick swivel-turn action and a central hub locking column with adjustable spider arm supports. Finally, the series was built with a steering wheel diameter of 294mm and 400mm, a dolly tracking width of 964mm sturdy adjustable cable guards and a portable hand pump with pressure gauge.

The pedestals will be available as a system paired with several of Millers fluid heads.

Booth C7920

Jünger smartens up audio products

Jünger Audio will focus attention on Smart Audio - an entirely new concept aimed at helping broadcasters embrace automated audio production, particularly in live environments.

Jünger Audio’s D*AP product range can deliver a Smart Audio experience because every device already incorporates a collection of these adaptive processing algorithms. Also, they are using the industry standard Ember+ remote protocol that allows seamless integration of audio processing equipment with both playout automation systems and logging and monitoring processes. This addresses broadcasters’ requirements to cater to more devices.

Booth C2333

Digital Nirvana will introduce a transport stream digital recorder, available as a standalone product.

Ross promises smart production

Miller launches Combo Live Pedestal series

Jünger smartens up audio products
Riedel decentralises MediorNet MicroN

With on-board signal-processing capabilities including frame synchronization, embedding/de-embedding, and delays, a MicroN-based solution can handle SDI signals in a very powerful, tremendously versatile, and highly scalable routing solution. The 2016 NAB Show will see the launch of Riedel’s new Expansion Smartpanel. When directly connected to an RSP-2318 Smartpanel, the expansion keypanel provides four additional displays and 24 keys.

Booth C7233

Rascular launches Mediant 3.0

Rascular has significantly upgraded its Mediant media management tool to provide automated secondary event handling. Mediant 3.0 is now able to read automation schedules for secondary events, find the specific media that’s required for those events and then place that media on the appropriate branding or CiAB device.

Booth SUS802

Introducing the NEW TallyMan Virtual Panel Interface

Simple, Comprehensive System Control

The TallyMan control system sits at the heart of any broadcast operation, coordinating critical broadcast infrastructure components, allowing you to concentrate on creating great television. The NEW TallyMan virtual panel is compatible with every TallyMan installation providing a new level of interaction for your facility.

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Dejero in the cloud at NAB

Dejero’s LIVE+ platform simplifies the adoption of IP and cloud technology for video transport between remote or mobile locations. The Dejero approach bonds all available networks, including 3G/4G/LTE cellular, Wi-Fi, Ethernet, or BGAN or Ka-band satellite.

At the show, Dejero will feature its interoperability with leading video production and content management systems. To simplify the end-to-end news workflow, Dejero and Grass Valley are collaborating to incorporate functionality of Dejero’s LIVE+ Control into Grass Valley’s GV STRATUS platform, giving operators the ability to access, manage, and assign content from Dejero transmitters.

Pronology features location intelligence

Pronology will showcase its Location Intelligence feature for its flagship media asset management (MAM) system at NAB 2016. Location Intelligence enables editors, producers and other users to quickly determine whether needed content is available immediately on-site or needs to be transferred from another site globally.

Many productions acquire and store their high-resolution footage – and even multiple copies of that footage – in locations that are often separate from where producers and editors need to work with it. Instead of wasting time transferring unneeded media, Pronology’s Location Intelligence manages the entire process for maximum efficiency.

EVS reveals the future of connected sport

EVS will turn its booth at NAB 2016 into immersive live demonstration of the live environment.

Introducing new replay solutions and new media production servers, EVS will highlight the power of instant media exchange, the latest storytelling tools and solutions to enable the transition to IP.

Wisycom brings RF power

Wisycom will debut the MTP41S Pocket Wireless Transmitter. Taking all of the features from its ‘big brother’ the MTP40S, the MTP41S is extremely small and lightweight, perfectly designed with professional wireless microphone users in mind.

The most anticipated feature added is the integrated hardware limiter, which acts as a variable attenuator, maintaining a distortion less than 0.3% without losing quality. This added feature sets the performance standard in Wisycom’s bodypack transmitter product line.

Users have a wide range of frequency options with the MTP41S — up to 232 MHz bandwidth in a 470/798 MHz range. The miniature design features PCB for extended reliability and an ultra-light metal alloy body.

Barnfind expands product lines

Barnfind Technologies will be offering broadcasters and production professionals a full range of product introductions at this year’s NAB Show.

Significant additions to the BarnOne family will be introduced such as the BTF1-10, the BarnOne 12G and integrated web server option. New members of the company’s popular BarnMini series will also debut at the show, and a new HiLo SFP system and expanded CAM-CCU solution will be showcased among other offerings.

The new BarnMini-05 is a compact way to combine an RS422/485, 4 x GPI and 4 x GPO.
Imagine Communications focuses on IP

Imagine Communications will showcase Platinum IP3 and VX routers, Selenio MCP processing products and the Magellan SDN Orchestrator.

These solutions and others will showcase capabilities that align with the Alliance for IP Media Solutions (AIMS) roadmap, including compatibility with SMPTE 2022, AES-67, and VSF TR-04/TR-03.

Also showcased will be Versio, an integrated channel playout solution powered by Zenium that is deployable as an appliance or in a fully virtualised environment. This helps broadcasters to virtualise their playout operations.

Booth N2502

Telesstream will unveil major new functionality for its Vantage media processing platform.

Visitors to the Telestream booth will see enhanced workflows for Vantage that enable fast, efficient decision-making and processing within the Vantage file-based workflow engine. Processes can now start generating output before file ingest is completed.

Actions that previously processed files sequentially will execute in parallel along with powerful analysis and logic producing the fastest output available.

For multiscreen OTT workflows, Vantage Transcode will showcase a new method of intelligently constructing adaptive-bitrate (ABR) packages that significantly reduce delivery bandwidth needs and costs within multiscreen distribution applications. This advanced capability can achieve real-world bandwidth reductions of 25-40%.

Booth SL 4525

Cinegy as a service promises more flexibility

Cinegy has announced “Cinegy as a Service”, a hardware-free way of enabling users to deploy software-defined television on cloud-based virtual machines.

All of Cinegy’s software technology, starting with Cinegy’s real-time playout server and broadcast automation software, Cinegy Air, will steadily migrate to cloud-based services such as Amazon Web Services (AWS) enabling prospective users to spin up, test drive, and, if they choose, deploy Cinegy technology in an HD or 4K cloud.

Booth SL1116

Dejero

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IP & 4K from Axon
As the broadcast industry begins its transition to IP-based workflows, Axon will discuss its continued work in video and audio over Ethernet, including SMPTE S2022-6.

With growing customer confusion about the adoption of standards and concern about the cost of investment and ownership, the team will be there to provide guidance, discuss solutions using the latest standards and present hybrid SDI-Ethernet solutions, delivering conversion to and from SDI and cross-conversion, to help broadcasters take a pragmatic upgrade path to IP.

Axon will also showcase the latest Synapse signal processing product line at the show.

Booth N4524

I-MOVIX launches INFINITE
I-MOVIX has launched INFINITE, a new ultra-slow motion camera system that combines extreme scalability with trigger-less operation, and is the first to provide continuous on-board loop recording of more than one hour of high frame rate in HD and frame-accurate ramping of speed without compensation and interpolation.

Based on Vision Research’s Phantom Flex4K camera and the I-MOVIX X10 platform, INFINITE can be operated in a range of modes to meet the most challenging production constraints, either technical or financial. INFINITE helps streamline production logistics when used either in standalone mode without a server, or in conjunction with a server, where it only requires a single channel, saving cost and space in the mobile truck. The system captures more than one hour of continuous action in high speed.

Booth C8626

Signiant brings Cloud-native SaaS
Signiant will present the company’s SaaS solutions at NAB 2016. The Signiant team will be on hand to demonstrate the latest enhancements to both Media Shuttle and Flight.

With built-in capabilities for integration with Flight, Signiant’s flagship Manager+Agents offering completes the company’s cloud-ready portfolio.

Signiant continues to enhance Media Shuttle and Flight to address emerging use cases and provide deployment flexibility. The most recent updates include the addition of a cloud deployment option for Media Shuttle, which allows customers to use Microsoft Azure blob storage or Amazon S3 in addition to (or instead of) on-premises storage. Additional enhancements focused on making the solutions even more secure, and even easier to use and deploy will be demonstrated at NAB.

Signiant’s technology provides fast, secure and reliable movement of content to and from the cloud, with Media Shuttle offering a simple interface for person-to-person transfers and Flight functioning as an embedded utility. As companies across the media supply chain focus on cloud initiatives, they rely on some combination of the two solutions to get their valuable content to the cloud.

Booth SL6605

Primestream’s dynamic media management
Primestream will demonstrate its Dynamic Media Management solution integrating workflow from capture, production, and management through to delivery of all types of assets.

Primestream integrates wide ranging workflows, from traditional broadcast to New Media workflows delivering digital content for OTT or mobile clients. New at NAB are Virtual Reality/360 workflows, enhancements to 4K, MXF workflows, and enhanced integration with Adobe Premiere Pro, Avid Media Composer, and Apple Final Cut Pro X.

Primestream will also showcase FORK v5.5 and Xchange v5.0, highlighting edit-while-capture workflows with XDCAM, ProRes and AVC-Intra, as well as archival workflows with object-based storage solutions to enable more efficient sports, news and entertainment.

Booth SL10261

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Watching television is no longer just a linear experience, as all of us know. Consumers have myriad choices when it comes to what they want to watch – series, movies, sport, live broadcasts and on-demand content.

The market is constantly evolving with the emergence of new players, particularly in the OTT space, and changing business models of existing players – just consider the announcement of the 2016 launch of a streaming service in the US by the BBC. And if industry analysts are to be believed, this is only going to grow. According to Infonetics Research, the global set-top box market is forecast to be worth more than $19 billion by 2018.

Regardless of how content is received by the viewer, via terrestrial, satellite, cable or internet streaming, the fact remains that content providers are looking to find new ways to not only monetise their offerings, but also raise the levels of interaction.

In the living room, the driving force behind this user experience is undoubtedly the remote control. In recent research conducted by Trendbox DB on behalf of Universal Electronics, it was found that of viewers in the UK, Germany and France, there was an average of 3.3 remote controls per household. This is in no way surprising, considering that 75% of respondents also had other devices (like set-top boxes, DVD players, games consoles and computers) connected to their main televisions.

One of the ways around the multiple remote conundrum is the universal remote. In the research, 25% of respondents used a universal remote, with 32% of them finding it easier than using multiple remotes to control multiple devices. Interestingly, the volume control buttons are those most used on the remote, and almost a third of all consumers admitted they only used a few buttons because they didn’t understand what the rest actually did.

The confusion around remote controls doesn’t stop there. One of the main user challenges is the confusion around switching source, or navigating between TV, set-top box, games console and other components like a DVD player or amplifier. In fact, 34% of respondents said that they struggled to get the right picture onto the screen. This inability to properly access content can have detrimental consequences for manufacturers in the financial sense. 10% of these respondents said that they struggled to get the right picture onto the screen. This inability to properly access content can have detrimental consequences for manufacturers in the financial sense.

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It’s not all doom and gloom, however. The remote control can be used to simplify the user experience. If it is easy to use, content providers can take steps towards making sure their content appears where it should.

A key part of the simplification process relates to navigation. For set-top-box operators and OTT content especially, the ability to search is crucial. A number of methods can be used to find content, depending on the type of remote control. This includes voice, hand movement and gesture control, using keys and track pads, or even apps that can turn smartphones into remote controls.

But getting to the point where users can search for and interact with the content they want begins when the remote is actually set up. This process is particularly important when it relates to a universal remote that controls everything including the TV, DVD player, set-top box and console. While many users might get installers to set up the remote control during the installation process, what happens when components are added to the stack, or if remotes get broken or lost?

Consumers, regardless of what they’re controlling, want a remote that is easy to use. This is reflected in the research, with 80% of respondents agreeing. This isn’t always the case, as the more choices viewers have, the more complex their watching journey becomes.

Menno Koopmans is Senior VP Subscription Broadcasting at Universal Electronics.
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