MENA sports production and broadcast specialists discuss the status quo of sports infrastructure in the region.

Aliens come to town
Dubai filmmakers attempt first feature length sci-fi film.

Behind the scenes with Jeffrey Chernov

Forward Play

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Last month, we were travelling again. While one of us went to Singapore to attend BroadcastAsia, the other met with the Discovery team in France during the French Open to find out more about the company’s increasing investment in sports and its increasing foray into the MENA region.

The conferences at BroadcastAsia have always fascinated me, but one particular session is especially worth mentioning. We go on and on about piracy and often follow traditional routes to cut out the pirates. We go through so much red tape to take action against them, and lo and behold, two days later they are back in another avatar to continue with their business. This can be frustrating for legitimate operations. I heard from three international players at BroadcastAsia who had actually used pirated platforms to their benefit by advertising on them and directing viewers back to legitimate sites, and even working with them in ways that helped the content owners to retrieve their investment. Is there an opportunity here that we have not explored? I don’t know how they did it, but I am keen to find out more.

Closer to home, it may look like everything has gone quiet because of Ramadan, but I assure you that this is just the calm before the storm. There’s a great deal brewing in the background. We know for certain that there is going to be greater momentum on the pay TV side come September, with some launches that will put pressure on existing players.

Speaking of pay TV, we will indeed miss the man who took OSN to greater heights since he arrived in Dubai in 2010. David Butorac left OSN last month, and we wish him well. Until next month, Eid Mubarak to all of you!
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Inside this issue

05 NEWS
Rohde & Schwarz to install DVB-T2 network in Oman, Vice Media comes to the Middle East, BeIN to launch 12 new channels, job track and more news from the region

16 SPORTS TALK
Sports production and broadcast specialists discuss how technology can help boost sports in the region

34 HOMEGROWN ALIENS
Charting the journey of the UAE’s very own sci-fi production Aerials

40 NEW KID ON THE BLOCK
New Emirati streaming service TV.AE launches in the UAE, offering SVOD and user-generated content

44 REACHING A GLOBAL AUDIENCE
The role of service providers in helping broadcasters find their audiences

48 BEHIND THE SCENES WITH JEFFREY CHERNOV
Star Trek Beyond’s Executive Producer on filming in Dubai and Star Trek’s universal appeal

51 IBC 2016 PREVIEW
A sneak peek at what will be on offer at the show this year

56 TURNING IP INTO A REALITY
How switching to IP will make managing 4K and beyond easier
BroadcastPro ME Summit & Awards is our annual flagship event to promote and celebrate excellence in the broadcast and satellite industry across the MENA region. Featuring extensive networking opportunities, seminars and awards presentations by key industry and government leaders.

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Rohde & Schwarz to install DVB-T2 network in Oman

Oman TV, the national television broadcaster in the Sultanate of Oman, is switching over to digital. Rohde & Schwarz will be delivering and installing a turnkey countrywide DVB-T2 network, one of the biggest in the Middle East.

The contract, amounting to more than USD 24m, was awarded to Rohde & Schwarz in May. In late 2014, Oman TV, released a tender for a nationwide DVB-T2 digital TV network with 69 sites to be set up on a turnkey basis. Qatar, Bahrain, Sharjah and Jordan are already building DVB-T2 networks.

The project was designed and the technical specifications drawn up by the Public Authority for Radio and Television team, the consultants for this project. The project will be implemented within 28 months.

It comprises the supply and installation of the complete DVB-T2 signal processing and transmitter infrastructure, consisting of headend; transmitters from 50W to 5kW for 56 sites; transposer systems for 13 sites (all units in 1+1 standby configuration); programme feed and monitoring equipment including transport stream analysers, satellite receivers and multiviewers for 56 sites; network management systems for 21 sites; and diverse test and measurement instruments.

Construction and installation will be carried out by several local subcontractors. The new network is due to be put into operation step by step between January 2017 and September 2018. The old analogue network will eventually be switched off.

Vice Media comes to the Middle East

Canada-based Vice Media, a millennial-focused media entity known for its bold reportage, has ramped up its global expansion plans with content and distribution deals across Asia, Africa and the Middle East that will expand its reach to 55 territories. The deals include joint ventures with media groups in India and the Middle East, as well as broadcasting arrangements in Africa, Southeast Asia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In the Middle East, Vice has partnered with Moby Group to bring its programming to 12 countries including Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It also plans to take Viceland, its 24-hour TV channel, to Africa and Asia by the end of next year.

IN FIGURES

HD channels in MENA grew from 195 in March 2015 to 212 in May 2016.

Arab Advisors Group

News Flash: Hans Vestberg has stepped down as President and CEO of Ericsson.
BeIN to launch 12 new channels on August 1

BeIN will launch 12 new channels on August 1, BroadcastPro ME can confirm. While three Discovery Channels – Discovery Kids, DTX and DLife – have already been announced as launching exclusively on the network from August 1, we have now learnt that AMC, which disappeared from the OSN bouquet last month, will reappear exclusively on the beIN platform.

A significant coup for beIN will be the addition of Dreamworks Channel from Hollywood studio Dreamworks Animation. This will be an exclusive addition to the beIN platform. CBS Reality and Jim Jam will also join beIN from August 1. There is confirmation that Bloomberg and Fox News will join the network, although it is not clear at present if both news channels will be exclusive on the beIN platform. Travel Channel and Extreme Sports Channel will be the other new additions.

BeIN launched its entertainment channel bouquet in November 2015 and created a stir in the market by drawing a few FTA channels onto its pay platform and giving OSN significant competition by offering cost-effective pay TV packages. The Qatar-headquartered network already has a significant edge in the market with its sports bouquet, which includes Wimbledon, the European Championship and all the major international football leagues.

Reel launches first panoramic screen

Barco and Reel Cinemas launched Dubai’s first multi-screen, panoramic movie theatre Barco Escape with the release of Star Trek Beyond. Reel Cinemas at The Dubai Mall is one of an exclusive group of theatres worldwide offering fans the opportunity to discover a new kind of Star Trek adventure, with select sequences of the film footage created to dramatically expand the Star Trek universe across three screens.

Commenting on the launch, Adon Quinn, Senior Director, Reel Cinemas, said: “We want to be part of the elite group of theatres to feature this technology, offering our moviegoers something they can’t find everywhere else. We also recently announced the introduction of Barco Flagship Laser Projectors in every one of our 22 screens.”

Gulf News Broadcasting shuts down Radio 1 and 2

Gulf News Broadcasting [GNB], the radio arm of Gulf News, has announced the closure of its Radio 1 and Radio 2 stations. We hear, however, that its two other radio stations, Hayat FM and Josh FM, are still on air. 29 employees at these two stations have been laid off, according to inside sources. Gulf News issued a statement on its website stating that the interruptions on the radio stations were temporary. However, it has now confirmed on its website that “with immediate effect it will no longer be managing the Radio One and Radio Two stations.”

“This is as a result of unforeseen circumstances,” a company statement said.

After a long career with Sony spanning more than 20 years, Karl Hijazi has now joined Avid Middle East as Professional Services Delivery Manager. As part of the Avid Global Services organisation, Hijazi’s role will focus on managing the delivery and performance of Professional Services business to clients across the Middle East. He will support the sales organisation to win services business, and will also manage and develop the delivery team. Hijazi will be based in Avid’s Dubai office.

Hijazi was responsible for developing and securing key solutions and services business including large projects for twofour54, OSN, Dubai TV, Al Jazeera, ADMC and ERTU. He was at the forefront of developing Sony’s Content Creation propositions, focusing on 4K.
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Arabsat launches Mauritania TV bouquet

Mauritania’s national broadcaster has chosen Arabsat to launch its TV bouquet exclusively in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and Europe on its satellite BADR-4.

Arabsat CEO Khalid Balkheyour said: “This move is yet another milestone in our partnership with the Arab broadcasting bodies. We are proud to be the exclusive carrier of the Mauritanian bouquet for several years, and are happy to deliver Mauritanian channels to viewers in Europe and the Arab world, via Arabsat BADR-4.”

Khalid Balkheyour, CEO of Arabsat.

YouTube to launch live streaming service

End users will soon be able to use YouTube to live stream events from their mobile phones. A firm launch date has not been announced for the service but it will be a part of the core YouTube mobile app.

So far, it has been tested by some of YouTube’s partners including online news channel The Young Turks and a Mexican comedy troupe.

MediaCast ties with Cedar Audio

Cedar Audio has appointed MediaCast as its distributor in the Middle East and Turkey for Cedar’s range of products spanning audio restoration and speech enhancement for film, post, TV and radio broadcast, CD and DVD mastering, libraries and archives, and audio forensic investigation.

Peyman Dadpanah, Business Director at MediaCast, said: “We carry products to cater to a number of verticals from broadcast stations and live production to forensic applications.”

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Quest Arabiya partners with regional telcos to offer digital content

Pan-Arab TV channel Quest Arabiya is now working with InVision and Mobily in KSA, Ooredoo and Mozaic in Qatar, du and Etisalat in the UAE, and Batelco (Selevision) in Bahrain, and is also available through Arabsat and Nilesat.

The free-to-air factual entertainment channel, a partnership between Image Nation Abu Dhabi and Discovery Communications, was launched in December 2015 across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It focuses primarily on reality-based programming such as Extreme Outdoor, Turbo,

Al Jazeera to launch US digital streaming service

Almost three months after shutting down its American cable television network, Al Jazeera Media Network is preparing to launch its news channel video content on digital platforms in the US again. Al Jazeera English reaches more than 305m households in 160 countries, but US viewers have not been able to access its live stream coverage.

Al Jazeera English is in talks with cable carriers to make its live video stream available from September, according to the email from Giles Trendle, Acting Managing Director of Al Jazeera English and Director of Programmes.

Panasonic to provide more than 100 projectors for Rio Olympics

Panasonic will be providing at least 110 units of PT-DZ21K2 series projectors and other AV equipment for the Rio Olympic Games. A long-term partner for the Olympic Games, Panasonic has become the ‘Official Ceremony Partner’ for the first time at Rio Olympics. Panasonic will use the high-tech projectors to provide turnkey visual operations during the opening and closing ceremonies.

The PT-DZ21K2 is a 20,000-lumen projector designed to work in broadcast environments alongside LED screen display systems, and professional sound systems.

White Collar Dxb launches Season 2 with new title

Dubai reality television show White Collar Dxb has announced a new-look format, and a new title: Fighting Fit Dubai. Production kicks off this summer, with the show set to be broadcast across the MENA region this October. The eight-part reality TV series will follow a group of men and women as they take on the challenge of becoming champions of the boxing ring and, in turn, their own lives.

Season 1 of White Collar Dxb – broadcast on OSN in 2015 – will now be broadcast in the UK, China and across parts of Asia and Africa, with local versions of the show also in the pipeline.

Khalid Khouri, Deputy General Manager of Quest Arabiya.

Mohammad Abu Jarad has joined FOR-A MEA as Sales Manager. Previously with INC Systems Integration, Jarad brings years of experience in the broadcast and media production industry in the Middle East and Africa. At FOR-A, he will be handling selected accounts around the region ranging from broadcasters and system integrators to resellers in the UAE, Jordan, Qatar and Africa.
**EBS provides EPG data for ITV Choice**

EBS, a major full-service provider of EPG data for platforms and channels worldwide, has been contracted by ITV Choice to supply EPG data listings to platforms in Africa and Asia.

Using its multi-platform, multi-territory, scalable software solution Pawa, EBS takes all the scheduling information for ITV Choice and restructures it to meet the requirements of each of the individual platforms. This fully integrated data workflow provides the channel with write-once-publish-many capability.

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**DIFF to add VR to 13th edition**

The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) will launch DIFFerent REALITY, a brand-new section of the programme presenting an international selection of virtual reality films spanning fiction, documentary and animation.

In addition, the Dubai Film Market (DFM) will present delegates with a packed VR schedule including the chance to hear from leading and emerging virtual reality creators and experience the latest technology from around the world through a range of interactive installations.

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**Right & Rights secures exclusive OSN distribution rights in Lebanon**

OSN has signed an agreement with Right & Rights for the exclusive distribution of its premier channels in Lebanon. With the deal, Right & Rights becomes the exclusive distributor for all of OSN’s channels through cable, wireless networks and other distribution systems in the country.

Right & Rights will distribute OSN content in Lebanon in collaboration with its sister company ECOnet, marking the collaboration of the three entities to strengthen the linear and digital television industry in the country.

Commenting on the deal, Elie Kawkabani, VP, Emerging Markets & Business Development at OSN, said: “Lebanon is one of the most entertainment-savvy nations. Through our partnership with Right & Rights, subscribers in Lebanon can enjoy unparalleled access to top-notch programming that is first and exclusive to OSN.”

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New Malayalam radio station launches in UAE

Club FM, the radio division of Kerala-based Mathrubhumi Group, has launched a new Malayalam radio station, Club 99.6, in the UAE. This is Mathrubhumi’s fifth radio station and its first outside India.

Club 99.6 will be aired on the frequency 99.6 FM and will offer news and round-the-clock entertainment and music programmes to the Malayalee diaspora. The station sports the tagline ‘Ton Kannakkinu fun’, meaning ‘tonnes of fun’, and offers a variety of programmes covering old and contemporary Malayalee music as well as current affairs.

UAE set for launch of nanosatellite

The UAE’s first nanosatellite is gearing up for launch into space aboard SpaceX’s Falcon 9 Rocket. Completed by Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) and Emirati engineering students at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), communication nanosatellite Nayif-1 has successfully passed all stages and tests. The Emirati students were engaged in the design and completion of the satellite as part of a partnership between the two entities to give students satellite manufacturing experience.

Arab comedies lead audience engagement

The holy month of Ramadan is an important time for television viewership in the Middle East, with a huge surge in TV viewership, particularly of Arabic dramas. However, according to Meltwater, a global media intelligence firm, analysis of social media reactions around popular MBC TV channel’s Ramadan programmes shows that people in Arab countries were more engaged with Arab entertainment and reality shows during Ramadan 2016.

Analysis of comments on Twitter and Facebook reveals that the most talked-about MBC show this Ramadan was *Selfie*.

Abu Dhabi Court books pirate website operator

Abu Dhabi Court has convicted the administrator of a pirate website for illegally uploading torrents and facilitating illegal streaming of copyrighted television series and movies, and misusing the intellectual property rights of pay TV network OSN. The offender has been fined $13,500 and will serve a six-month jail sentence, following which he will be deported from the country.

In addition, as per the court order, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will block the pirate website.

Algerian regulator ARPT announces new head

Algerian telecoms and post regulator ARPT has a new President. Mohamed Ahmed Nacer, who has been a member of the ARPT council since April 2012, has taken over as President of ARPT from Mohamed Toufik Bessai. Houda-Imane Faraoun, Minister of Post, Information Technology & Communication, announced the change last month.

Mohamed Toufik Bessai was instrumental in regulating Algeria’s 3G market during his three-year tenure at ARPT from 2013 until 2016. He has left the regulator to pursue an academic career.

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Discover more all-round innovation, visit: www.s-a-m.com
BroadcastPro ME and Avid brought together some key sports production and broadcast specialists from the GCC to discuss the challenges of broadcasting sports events in the region and how to provide a more enriching experience to viewers. Vijaya Cherian brings you details from the roundtable.

In early summer, BroadcastPro Middle East worked with Avid to bring together key behind-the-scenes sports production and broadcast specialists to find out more about the state of the region’s industry, identify the missing elements that could give sports a bigger boost in the region, and discuss how technology can help enhance existing services.

Joining us for the day were Ammar Hina, Senior Broadcast Services Manager, Pro League Committee; Duncan Walkinshaw, A/Director of Programmes, beIN Sports; Mario Bayarri, CEO, Mediapro Middle East; Karim Saade, Senior Director for Sports Products, Dawri Plus, Intigral; Tony Jabbour, Head of Engineering and Operation, 7 Production; Saad Jizawi, Managing Partner, Afkart.com; Hamad Abdelrazaq, Head of Broadcast Engineering, LIVE HD; AbdulKhaleq Al Khamis, Head of Sports Operations, DMI; Meshal Al Khahtani, TV presenter for Dubai Sports Channel; Samuel Westberg, Director of Sales, LiveLike; and Paul Thompson, Director Strategic Solutions and Guillaume Godet, Director of Sports Sales EMEA from Avid.

The team at the roundtable represented different parts of the sports broadcast chain. While some – like Hina from PLC, which stands for the UAE Pro League Committee and represents all professional football competitions on the UAE national level – are responsible for the production and content broadcast from PLC competitions as well as stadiums, others such as Mario Bayarri from Mediapro, Tony Jabbour from 7 Production and Hamad Abdelrazaq from LIVE represent entities responsible for producing content as per the demands of broadcasters such as DMI and beIN, also represented at the roundtable.

Then there are the likes of Afkart.com, which supply sports promo material while also undertaking the production and distribution of sports content for all of the major broadcasters in the region; and, of course, a special addition to the mix was Karim Saade from Intigral, who heads Dawri Plus, which has around 600,000 active users every month, and brought the much-needed OTT element to the roundtable. Rounding this off was Samuel Westberg from LiveLike, a VR platform company, who explained the magic that VR could bring to sports, and the team from Avid including Guillaume Godet, who leads sports development in Avid EMEA, and Paul Thompson, who moderated the discussion.

Thompson set the scene by raising two significant questions. One, are stadiums in the region geared for modern production needs; and two, are they capable of bringing fans to the venue to watch a game?

A number of attendees pointed out that most existing stadiums are in dire need of renovation to make them ready for future sports production; no other sporting event in the GCC is able to attract as many fans to the stadium as horse racing does.

On the first point, Hina explained that each season, the UAE has fourteen stadiums that can be used “and the main challenge for me and Abdelrazaq [LIVE] is to make them ready for production, because more than half of the stadiums need to be renovated so they are ready for good high-quality broadcast quality filming”.

Abdelrazaq seconded that, explaining that the main problems are the TV compounds and the lack of connectivity within stadiums.

“We have to run the cables from the OB van to inside the stadium. At the moment, most people build a studio on the pitch, but it would be ideal to know the perfect location for the studio to acquire the best picture.”

However, they were also quick to add that they strive to have as many cameras and technology as required to cover a game adequately by international standards.

On being asked by Avid who dictated production
requirements, both said that a mix of people and partner broadcasters influence the decision, but they also agreed that the unified plan had a predominantly editorial approach.

Hina, previously a sports TV producer with Endemol and Abu Dhabi Sports Channels, gave a recent example of how the entities involved in production and broadcast of a competition pitch in and work together.

“Recently, we had the celebration match, which was the last match of the season. We had 19 cameras inside the stadium for the multilateral feed and 14 additional cameras for the unilateral coverage. Of this, six were for Dubai Sports Channel and eight from Abu Dhabi Sport. We also had a camera placed close to Burj Khalifa for Dubai Sports Channel, while Abu Dhabi Sports also got some good aerial shots. Essentially, we have mixed productions and different people but one objective, which is to get the best out of that event. We often change the camera plan without changing the running order.”

Bayarri from Mediapro, however, interjected that the most important requirement for a good production is not necessarily the number of cameras and the technologies involved, but the creative element in the coverage and the ability of the director to tell a story well.

“Most of the discussions centre around the number of cameras and the technology used, but the truth is people are interested in the story to be told, not missing anything important and having someone showing the best of what is going on. How well you can tell the story around a match is what is relevant.”

Duncan Walkinshaw, who was at Sky Sports for several years before joining beIN, stated that one of the best ways to ensure good coverage was to maintain a certain standard across all parts of the chain – stadium coverage, infrastructural support at the venue or even how broadcasters cover tournaments.

“How can we ensure a certain standardisation of coverage that is uniformly recognised globally so then people can follow that? It makes it easier for people who are setting up stadiums and for the broadcaster as well, because all of them then have the same expectations in terms of coverage and also how the stadiums are connected. It makes sense for the people who are in the league, and for the facilities companies working within the stadium, and for the rights holders who are going to broadcast it. These are driven by the dominant voice of the director or someone in a similar position, and this ensures standardisation in the general coverage.”

Asked to clarify, Walkinshaw elaborated that there are certain expectations for the technology used to cover these events as well as the coverage itself. While some tournaments require a minimum of 13 cameras, others require 18 and a certain connectivity benchmark.

“There are standards we expect with regards to the number of cameras, the type of cameras used, the technology and how we bring the events at the stadiums to the world. If that standard is not met, we will have concerns.”

Ammar Hina, Senior Broadcast Services Manager, Pro League Committee
concerns with a new stadium in the region, stating that it took two years to resolve some of the issues that had cropped up, including the rebuilding of cabling and patching to ensure the infrastructure met international standards for coverage. Another significant concern was power, which was not taken into consideration when building the stadium.

Thompson then moved the discussion to the fan experience, asking if it was as big in the region as in the US and other countries. Typically, stadiums in the GCC have not been able to attract fans. Fans either watch games at a coffee shop or at their homes, with most users also checking a second device for additional match input.

Hina commented at this point that they did do a couple of tests with the EVS C-Cast, which allows broadcasters to stream live content, such as clips or alternative angles, from their XT3 video servers to the audience’s second screen or smart TV while watching the event on TV.

Abdelrazaq added that they conducted a demo twist with VIPs at two matches and received “amazing feedback”. The process of making it available to the masses, however, was riddled with complications – connectivity was poor and there was a lot of scepticism about the ability to monetise the service.

Saade interjected at this stage: “Stadiums in the US are light years ahead of us in terms of technology and fan experience. We need to have the league, the telecom operator, as well as the broadcaster and the club work together to build an ecosystem to attract the entire family to an event at the stadium. The men, women and children will go to the stadium if you create an experience that attracts them from the time they leave the house to the time they return home.”

He cited the example of San Francisco’s Levi’s Stadium, completed two years ago at a cost of $1.6bn.

“The experience you get from the moment you enter the parking, where an app guides you to an empty slot, to ordering your food and merchandise from the comfort of your seat, makes the stadium experience very appealing to fans. Of course, there is high-density Wi-Fi across the whole stadium plus there is integration with C-Cast, which brings together all of the broadcasting elements into a single user interface. You are treated to multi-camera angles and instant replays. In addition to this, you have integration with fantasy games and you can play as you are watching the match. It is a whole ecosystem where the league, the telco operator and the broadcasters have to take the decision to elevate the level of the fan experience in general. Revenue streams will follow suit.”

Thompson queried if this was ideally something that one of the three above entities should begin to take the initiative to push. Hina responded that the Pro League Committee, responsible for all professional football competitions in the UAE, was already working actively to at least kick start some of these elements.

“PLC is now working towards improving the fan zones and signage boards, which is better than what we used to do before. It is, however, imperative that we also change the culture of the people to encourage them to go and see the match in the stadium rather than watching it at houses, the majlis or at cafés. This is the main challenge for us.

“From our side, we are already making greater efforts. We are working on developing the grass roots teams [11 years and below], plus the under-14s, under-15s, under-19s and under-21s. We have leagues for each category. Also, the UAE Olympics national team for the last six years has been doing very well and is one of the best teams we have in the region. This is proof of the work that the PLC does. But in the end, it takes time to change the mindset of our people.”

Bayarri pointed out at this stage that the main driver to make the shift for people to come to the stadium will be the quality of the match and how it is shared with the audience.

“It is very similar to going to the cinema. You go to the cinema to watch the movie. If the movie is not good, you will not go. Of course, if the cinema has easy access, and

“LaLiga is distributing five different feeds to five different regions with customised advertising on the perimeter for each one of the regions. This allows the commercial inventory to be multiplied, but it also opens the door for specific categories of brands that are not global to be exposed during the matches”

Mario Bayarri, CEO, Mediapro Middle East
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provides additional services like good food and beverages, it will make me feel comfortable and I am likely to spend my money while I am there. It’s also likely that I will come back to watch another movie at the same cinema. Having a good facility and viewing experience is good for the property, be it a cinema producer or a football league or club, but if the football match is not of interest, if there isn’t an interesting story around that match, people will not come to the stadium. To increase attendance, the broadcaster is very important but also the quality of the teams, the quality of the stories and social media play an active role in bringing in the audiences.”

He cautioned, therefore, that no extra element will make up for the content itself.

“I agree that VR and C-Cast can add value to a match, but they are primarily good for people outside the stadium. The only interest I would have to be in the stadium is to watch the match and see the goals as such in person. Being able to see the replay of the goal in my mobile device at the stadium would be great, and seeing it from a 360 immersive VR perspective is, for sure, an amazing experience. But when you have 60,000 people in a stadium and all of them want to see the replay at the same time, Wi-Fi access and connectivity must be really good. That kind of connectivity would cost a minimum of $1m. And that’s then difficult to recoup from monetisation on its own. At the end, people go to watch the match; mobile technology and smart stadiums will enrich their visit, but will not be the reason for them to go to a stadium.”

Westberg agreed that VR will not solve all problems and would mainly work as an experience outside the stadium.

“All of the discussions that we have been talking about are the marketing activations that we need to do for the whole process to be successful. A lot of the big broadcasters in Europe have had the exact same problem of cost control. They have started to think outside the traditional box to have the content adapted to the need of the viewers with investing less money but covering it the right way. That is the key to the success of it all.

“I had the chance to speak to the head of Fox Sports in the Netherlands, who I see as thinking outside the box. They only have around 17 million viewers there, so the means are much lower than other countries. Instead of having a lot of cameras and productions that might cost 100,000 euros for one production, they placed one camera between two coaches that actually enhances the experience at a low price instead of an extra Spidercam at $40,000 for one game that they can’t really afford. So they keep thinking of how to lower the costs but improve the experience, and this has been key to their success. 18 to 20 cameras will not be important. How we can possibly provide the best experience to the viewer while keeping our costs down will be key.”

Hina said this is what the PLC is attempting to achieve with a camera located at Burj Khalifa and an aerial camera, as well as providing
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additional coverage of the main multilateral feed and the teams’ dressing rooms, as well as more engagement with the viewers. He justified the use of more cameras, stating that it helps to cover up half-empty stadiums and provide more reaction shots and so on, to create the feeling of a fuller stadium and keep the viewers with the small stories inside the pitch.

Saade interjected to say that viewers today are looking to control their viewing experience.

“Giving audience control is becoming an important aspect of the OTT experience. So even if you have 24 cameras, you want to give users the option to switch to the angle they want to watch and select whether to integrate social interfaces into their viewing experience.”

Thompson questioned if it would be a good idea to let the audience play the role of director for themselves. While Abdelrazaq felt it would be okay to have the audience choose their angle, he was quick to agree that giving the viewer too much control could create unnecessary disputes between fans about a goal, for example.

Even from a technology point of view, it would be “tricky for the fan to do his own production”, Westberg chimed in, touting VR as offering the best of both worlds.

“The kind of quality that you get from the director and head of productions, who do an amazing job at shooting sport events, will not be possible if you didn’t give them control. What’s good about VR though is that you get a mix of the traditional TV signal as well as the quality of the real experience, and you can let the

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fan choose his content but in a controlled way that ensures a good quality experience. If you start giving all the tools to the fan, he is going to get lost in it.”

Bayarri agreed: “It should be controlled. The story needs to be told by the director and the experience should be guided by the director. The director has to make sure he gets the most out of what is happening on the pitch with the means he has to do this. What you can give to the fan is the option to replay a goal on a second screen after it has been scored, but fans on their own will never be able to tell the story better than a broadcasting director.”

However, they also argued that different sports events require different strategies. For F1, Saade argued that a viewer might only want to follow a driver of his choice.

Walkinshaw countered: “Most people want the story told. You may be interested in a driver, but you are also interested in the bigger picture. Otherwise, you may miss an important crash. You don’t want to specifically watch only one player throughout a game. You want to get as close to that experience as you would be in the arena.

“In most cases, people will watch the story if it’s being told in the best way. You can have Top Gun and watch Tom Cruise all the way through, and there might be specific rushes of Tom Cruise you can watch later, but people will come mainly to watch the movie and hear the complete story. I am convinced that 25 to 30 cameras is totally unnecessary. You could get good coverage with 12 cameras and some reverse angles. I worked for Sky Sports for 19 years, and the quality of the director and the editorial telling for the story is what is key. The number of cameras is not important.”

Tony Jabbour of 7 Production concurred: “Good operations and a good creative director can even do the job with six cameras. One good cameraman is better than three.”

Thompson then moved on to graphics, asking if this perhaps would improve the sports experience. This brought the panel to a discussion on augmented graphics and the importance of statistics, on-screen graphics and so on.

Jabbour pointed out that augmented reality is very attractive, while Bayarri reiterated that graphics complement the story but cannot replace the story per se.

Godet asked if the statistics of the team and players were not important to viewers as they watched the game, and if graphics could not perhaps be used extensively to display extra information on screen. He also pointed out that football offers the opportunity to have more interstitials, extensively used in the US. Bayarri agreed that graphics could be used to reinforce the story.

Jabbour stated that when a match is going on, people prefer to watch the match and the players in action. He suggested that statistics should come later on.

Hina pointed out that although they don’t show statistics during the match action, as a new addition they work with commentators to fill the new FIFA cooling breaks to provide some stories from the playout server. These are mostly one-minute, well edited clips with graphic statistics about a player.
reactions to and from him, etc. The director controls this because he has both the English- and Arabic-speaking commentators beside him, he argued.

Saade pointed out that the need for statistics again depends on the nature of a sport, adding that an important driver for statistics and the education of the audience towards statistics was fantasy games.

“Fantasy gaming drives the user to accept statistics as part of the homework that he needs to do, and has become an intricate part of sport. Today, North America has around 60 million fantasy gamers and it is a $6bn industry. When people begin to invest money in players, they want to have access to advanced statistics so they can make informed choices.”

Khahtani, who works as a TV presenter with Dubai Sports Channel, pointed out that statistics are important, as his viewers often ask for numbers on social media. Godet also argued that statistics could be displayed without being too invasive, to which Bayarri responded that when and how one uses graphics is crucial.

“During the match, all of the attention should be on the match. Statistics should come later and can be part of the second screen,” he pointed out.

The team then returned from a short break to explore the second screen experience and how graphics could enhance it, and if it makes a difference whether a production is centralised or undertaken remotely.

Bayarri commented that audiences want to see a match uninterrupted; providing additional information or features only makes sense as part of reinforcing the live broadcast.

“There is a difference between helping the audience to understand better what is going on at the pitch and creating additional content to be used or shared after the 90 minutes are over. Special stats, different viewing angles and enhanced graphics complement and enrich live broadcasting. Once the focus on the match is over, you want to create this additional content that allows people to know more about the players, the match and the surroundings of that match.

“Fantasy gaming is popular because it allows people to sense they are part of the game. After the final whistle of the match and the kick-off of the next one, there are seven days which need to be filled in with content as the audience wants to remain
connected. We call this the ‘second life’ experience, as we should be able to allow them to get inside and behind the scenes of football.”

Godet took this opportunity to share some of his experience gained over the last 35 years in the business. He explained that at a broadcast level, one can provide three or four levels of information. On the one hand, on-screen graphics provide additional dates, scores, faults or other editorial information. There are also broadcast studios that display considerable information in the background.

Then there is the story on the pitch, which is told through augmented reality. It is used by broadcasters perhaps to add distance to the goal or some kind of route map, a representation of where the team is or the players are, and so on.

“A third level now that is added on top of all this is virtual reality, where you are shooting whatever you have and then, instead of displaying this directly on the screen, you are encoding this in a certain way so it is displayed into an immersive device. The gear is actually transforming this for your eyes and would this be totally virtual or a mix between virtual and real? It’s all kinds of things.”

Godet pointed out that some broadcasters are now presenting 360-degree views while others are focusing on 2D shots with an augmented VIP event.

“This is all about virtual reality, which is an immersive experience.”

Godet added that this concept was used 15 years ago, when he worked at a company that was into car design solutions.

“You could enter the room and all the walls had stereoscopic screens. In essence, we entered the car virtually and navigated inside to see if everything was well placed. It’s the same concept, but it has been extended into broadcast. The next generation may no longer require glass or other devices. When that becomes possible, virtual reality will be brought faster to the audience. Stereoscopic 3D was a disaster because people had to wear glasses.”

He did, however, express scepticism about any of the present generation being willing to watch a match in this format for 90 minutes. “But maybe the new generation will,” he declared optimistically, touting Avid’s capability to be part of any one of these domains with ease.

“Anything that we are doing here can be tied to advanced data like statistics from any vendor, and can be tied to any tracking system, like a GPS for camel racing or horse racing. All kinds of data can be added virtually or on screen and any of the social media content can also be displayed on any of these modes. The ad director of the programme can work with the editorial team to see how they can enhance the shows and monetise them,” he explained.

Thompson then queried if there was any meaning to the second screen experience and whether broadcasters will be able to benefit from the data they have. Saade defended the digital medium, stating that this is the only medium that can at present accurately profile viewers, follow their consumption patterns and how long they stay watching a game, and understand their likes and dislikes.
Ammarnthine
The kind of quality that you get from the director and head of productions, who do an amazing job at shooting sport events, will not be possible if you didn’t give them control. What’s good about VR though is that you get a mix of the traditional TV signal as well as the quality of the real experience, and you can let the fan choose his content but in a controlled way that ensures a good quality experience. If you start giving all the tools to the fan, he is going to get lost in it.”

Samuel Westberg, Director of Sales, LiveLike

“One of the most important elements in broadcasting and delivery today is digital. Some networks in the region are available only through pay-TV or DTH and do not have an OTT platform. The first step is to ensure you have an OTT stream that is available on any device that the user uses. The second is to take advantage of the analytics you can gather from an OTT platform. This is what can prompt you to make better business decisions and track whether the user likes what you are giving him on the second screen. You have the opportunity to test whether your investment in a particular piece of content is worth it. If you’ve invested in a specific game or a feature like augmented reality, you can check how many users are actually watching that piece of video content or the augmented reality feature that you are providing and make an ROI calculation. This will influence your future decision on whether to continue such an investment. Traditional TV does not give you that level of visibility,” he explained.

“The ability to do a user-revenue calculation, where you can check what kind of content he is consuming and how much that item costs you versus how much revenue you get out of that customer, is significant. In fact, you are able to better target your viewers in terms of the segments that you can target and in terms of the rate card you can charge advertisers for reaching those segments. This is very important and will lead the transition to OTT,” he added.

Walkinshaw said that beIN chooses whether to introduce an app for a game based on whether it is likely to enhance the experience for the viewer and whether it truly merits that investment.

“We have to run the cables from the OB van to inside the stadium. At the moment, most people build a studio on the pitch, but it would be ideal to know the perfect location for the studio to acquire the best picture.”

Hamad Abdelrazaq, Head of Broadcast Engineering, LIVE HD

Hamarri said that for the big matches, people use their tabs for social media apps.

“The potential of digital is that it throws open the opportunity to interact and profile each customer, and this in turn enables you to provide customised advertising. The ability to know what your customer can buy, what kind of sports he likes and what features he uses the most are major drivers to the decision-making process.”

This led to a question. Do broadcasters see OTT as a major marketing tool for linear or as a revenue generator in itself?

Saade commented that it is both.

“Linear is still king at home. Linear will still be the preferred way of consuming live sporting events at home. OTT will complement the
linear offering by providing the analytics, engagement interfaces and tools necessary to complement your viewing experience.”

Godet questioned if this would drive changes in MENA ad spending as it has in Europe, where the split between linear and OTT is now 50:50. Bayarri commented that pay-TV is still growing in the region and that he expects the linear numbers to rise in the coming years.

“There is, however, a transfer between linear and digital.” With regards to ad spend, he added that this is concentrated heavily on the FTA market still. Others, such as Abdelrazaq, commented that this is likely to move to a 50-50 ratio in the near future.

Walkinshaw maintained that beIN has always kept its product quality clean and maintained the integrity of the event, not filling it with pop-up ads.

Saade mentioned that this cannot be ruled out, given the recent trend among social platforms to secure broadcast rights, as Twitter recently did with the NFL. Walkinshaw agreed that this would indeed be the game-changer, when platforms like Google and Facebook vie for broadcast rights with traditional channels.

On being asked by Godet if that is a concern, Walkinshaw said that it is. He cautioned that traditional players are not adapting or changing in parallel to changing consumer habits. He expressed concern that it was impossible for someone who had the rights for an event for only three years to put a lot of investment into a product with such a short shelf life. “The way we sleeve it and cover it hasn’t changed from the way we consume it. This has to change. It is not sustainable to have an army of people go from event to event.”

Saade pointed out that Facebook has a significant advantage, being able to sell all kinds of analytics about viewers and advertisers to broadcasters – their favourite players, their favourite games, the books they read, etc.

Sam from Livelike said the paradigm is similar to news, where news broadcasters break a story based on content shot on someone’s mobile phone. In the meantime, they also break it on all the social media platforms, and get their journalists to go on-site and bring more meat to the story.

“This is how production value increases,” he said.

Thompson queried if perhaps, in the brave new world where videos were taken by consumers and delivered by the Facebooks of this world, remote production is
Indeed a solution and a possibility. He asked if remote production drives greater efficiency, and perhaps more revenue as well.

Bayarri commented that Mediapro already undertakes remote productions, because Mediapro itself is the end user and it needs to test the feasibility of remote production. He commented that it can be complicated, because while remote offers greater efficiencies, one has to be careful to provide the same quality, whether it is 4K or now 8K in some cases. It’s not all about cost saving. The story must be told well, and it must provide good quality as well.

Abdelrazaq commented that when you reduce one element, you need to increase another. “You may be able to reduce the technical elements required, but you would need to have more engineers and creative crew.”

Bayarri asked that it be looked at in a positive light, where the cost saving from the technology was invested in creative human resources. “This way, I can be assured I’m paying for quality.”

Jabbour commented that his team at 7 Production successfully undertook remote coverage of a camel racing event in Qatar.

“We ran a direct fibre for 40km. It wasn’t 100% remote because I had a cameraman to operate on-site, but everything was through fibre and a gallery far away was connected through GPS. It worked well and we didn’t have any issues. We were using the LDX cameras, which were sending the feeds through direct fibre. It was a very successful project. People here are cagey about this and insist that the director needs to be there. I know of a company that accomplished a beautiful production for a ski event on the Alps with no one from the production team being there. It is feasible and can be done, but the end user in this region is not ready for this yet.”

Hina, however, expressed concern that a director who does not understand a specific sport may not be able to approach the game with the same passion.

Walkinshaw said that we need to look at producing content for a new generation: “How we sleeve, how we change the traditional way of a sports event in terms of an anchor talking to two or three ex-players, etc., will change. Do we just keep adding more and more content? Do we remove studio discussions? These are just anecdotal discussions. They need to be backed up with research from different regions. It is not sustainable to make programmes as we have traditionally made them.”

Thompson went on to the big question of how networks actually try to make the most of their rights. Walkinshaw pointed out that
one strategy beIN adopted during the Champions League was to simultaneously broadcast in English globally, with different sponsorships running from MENA to Australia to Asia and Canada.

“The studios were simultaneously broadcasting to the different regions. We had an American sponsorship for the American market, which was very different from what we had for the MENA or for Australia.”

On a parallel note, Thompson questioned how stadium advertising worked. Bayarri gave an example of the Spanish league.

“In the Spanish league, the stadium pitch perimeter advertising is being overlaid by a different and customised advertising directly on the feed. In the most important matches, LaLiga is distributing five different feeds to five different regions with customised advertising on the perimeter for each one of the regions. This allows the commercial inventory to be multiplied, but it also opens the door for specific categories of brands that are not global to be exposed during the matches. Teclos are usually very local to each region, so this new technology allows them to contract their advertising to the real reach they want to achieve.”

He also added that second screen content creation was not typically offered to linear producers. This is typically given to a new generation of production specialists who cover this specifically for OTT, he said.

In the UAE, Abdelrazaq pointed out that Etisalat provided a basic streaming of the sports, though no special production was involved. Jabbour commented that in Saudi Arabia feeds were taken from MBC, who does the production along with Al Alamaiya, and their role was limited to downlinking the signal and decoding it.

Saad of Afkaart.com, well-known for its production and distribution of sports content – documentaries as well as promos – commented that his company has always aimed to do something conceptually different.

“In the Middle East, they say we have all the tools but not conceptual and creative elements. We have all the quality and equipment, but you do need some creative people to bring some interesting things out for OTT.”

With time running out, Thompson brought us to the final question of the day on what the world of tomorrow will look like for the people sitting around the table.

Saade envisions a world with a lot of interactivity and a user with the power to build his own experience, he said. “More engagement, more interactivity, more content, more social... the whole shebang.”

Bayarri’s parting comment was that professionals need to pitch production differently for sports to keep pace with increasingly changing consumer behaviour.

Walkinshaw commented that he sees the viewer having more ownership of the products within broadcasting.

The Dubai TV team commented that change is fast coming and the team needs to be ready for a quick transition.

Jabbour pointed out that the future will be good because everything “will move to IP through internet or fibre”, while Abdelrazaq sees “YouTube as the future”.

Hina commented that his challenge is a lot more basic.

“Most of the people in this region are using 4:3 TV sets, while we are producing high-quality HD content with Dolby that many of them are unable to experience. The challenge is to migrate people to better quality sets while at the same time convincing people on the top that this investment is for the future.”

Westberg commented that the future is all about optimisation and VR.

“The next big step is VR, where a lot of investments are being made, because VR is where you will have the most information about your clients’ way of consuming and the possibility of inputting all of the third-party content you receive, allowing new sources of revenue. This and augmented reality is where we are headed,” he concluded.
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A spaceship is seen hovering over Downtown Dubai throughout the film.
The UAE’s very own sci-fi production Aerials hit screens last month. Produced entirely in Dubai, the film is a visual treat and employs some of the latest tools and technology to create a futuristic experience for the audience. BroadcastPro ME speaks to director S.A. Zaidi about the journey of Aerials from conception to post

HomEgrown Aliens

Produced and shot in Dubai, recently released film Aerials is being called the UAE’s first sci-fi feature. Directed by Dubai-raised S.A. Zaidi and produced by Emirati producer Ghanem Ghubash, the film hit theatres after almost three years in the making. The delay, the director-producer duo confirms, was mainly due to budget constraints. The two independently funded the film and produced it under their company, Fat Brothers Films.

When Zaidi and Ghubash decided to make a feature-length film, the die-hard sci-fi fans naturally chose to centre it on aliens. A massive alien spaceship is seen hovering over the Dubai skyline in the film, but it’s not an alien invasion story. A spaceship hovering over an American city is often seen in Hollywood films, but a spaceship over Burj Khalifa is a first.

The aliens don’t attack or destroy the city; their presence just brings about changes in the lives of the residents. An alien impact is created using a play of light and colour, without the use of violence or excessive action.

It is an experimental film, explains Zaidi, who sees it as part of his learning process. The producer-director duo worked on a short previously, Titled The Sons of Two Suns, it is a post apocalyptic science fiction film.

“I have been doing a lot of music videos previously and slowly moved on to make films. This film is a joint venture with my childhood friend Ghanem Ghubash. Our choice of movies and even music is influenced by science fiction. We bring a lot of surrealism to our work.”

He adds that he draws inspiration from director Roland Emmerich for his work. Slick cinematography and production design are the hallmarks of this film. It was shot in a house for most parts and a rich colour palette of the backdrop enhances the visual impact. The film’s script, however, left a lot to be desired.

The film was shot using four different cameras – the RED Dragon, the RED Epic, the Canon Mark III and the Blackmagic 2.5K Cinema Camera.

“We tried to do low-light shots using the RED Dragon. Its sensor catches the minimum amount of light in the room. The Mark III was used as a back-up camera and was also used on some night scenes. The Blackmagic 2.5K Cinema Camera was also used extensively for its sensor’s ability to shoot in low-light conditions,” Zaidi points out.

At any given time during the filming, two to three cameras were placed in specific positions on the set. In cinema, because of the wider screen, there are not too many options for camera placement.

“As far as the camera angles are concerned, usually, while framing a shot for cinema from top and bottom, there will be a cut. In TV, however, because of the constant ratio 16:9, you don’t worry about the cut. Keeping the cinemascope in mind, we are left with a very tight space from top to bottom to place the shot and can’t afford to go wrong with that if the movie has to go on the big cinema screen. Where you will go wrong is manual judgment, which
90% of the film Aerials was shot in natural light. While most of the scenes are indoors some shots were done outdoors as well.

“Our film needed a lot of electric colours, which were honed using DaVinci Resolve. If you are a colour grader, you won’t be able to realise the full potential of DaVinci unless you have spent at least five to six years using the software. In order to use DaVinci optimally, you need excellent lighting too”

S.A. Zaidi, Director, Aerials

Sargayan has colour grading knowledge, Ghubash is a lighting expert and Zaidi has a good understanding of processing, he claims. The film does not use any artificial light, with 90% of it shot in natural light.

The use of cameras that ranged from 2K to 4K to 6K posed a challenge that needed to be fixed in post-production to stop the footage looking patchy. The final product, however, does not show any patches or obvious gradation, because of the way the film was processed.

Zaidi explains: “There is no noise in the film, because of the high-tech machines used to process the
footage, such as the HP Z640 and the Z820 computers which have dual Intel Xeon processors, 44 cores and 512GB RAM. We used to use Macs before, but soon realised that Macs don’t have the power to support heavy graphics or grading.

“The highest processor a Mac offers is the Intel Core i7, which falls short in doing high production work. Most Macs don’t have an Intel Xeon and the only Mac that does have one has a single Intel Xeon; they don’t come with dual Intel Xeon processors. We worked with two Xeons in one computer, which turned it into a powerhouse and made the processing many times faster than an ordinary machine. This process is so power intensive that HP machines come equipped with liquid cooling to keep the temperature down,” adds Zaidi.

The key was to create a special equipment inventory that took care of all the technical needs of the film.

“If we didn’t have something, we had it custom-built for us. HP supplied us with the two Intel Xeons and 512GB RAM.”

The spaceship seen throughout the film was created using the Cinema 4D R15.

“It’s one of the best 3D software solutions out there. To achieve the best results, we used HP Dream Colour monitors, which show over a billion colours, whereas other cinema monitors are not capable of showing more than 20 million colours. There’s no point shooting your film with the best camera or colour grading it on the DaVinci Resolve unless you can visually or practically see what colours can be achieved from a footage. Dream Colour does just that. A lot of visual effects nominated at the Academy Awards had the advantage of a Dream Colour monitor,” Zaidi comments.

According to him, the Dream Colour monitor delivers eight million pixels and is the only global industry standard requirement out there. The 12GB graphics card used in the film is a NVIDIA Quadro K6000. At the time of procuring the equipment from HP, Fat Brothers Films was the only company in the Gulf Region with such a heavy graphics card requirement.

To make the editing flow easier, an HP Z Turbo Drive G2 was used. It is not provided in the commercial market and not many people are aware of it yet, but it made handling of the 4K files much smoother for the team. Zaidi says it would have taken at least
three days to process the footage had it not been for the high-end machines and graphics cards.

To make the work more flexible, the team used HP ZBook mobile workstations, the same workstations used by NASA, since they are military and radiation tested and have become an essential part of space technology.

“We invested in mobile workstations because we work from different locations, but our office is at Creative City, Media Free Zone Fujairah. Using mobile workstations gave us the option to work from any location, even while we were on set,” explains Zaidi.

While DaVinci Resolve was used in the entire film’s colour grading, the spaceship scenes used Adobe After Effects CC to colour grade.

Zaidi explains that this is because “the scene required a bleach bypass colour processing to achieve a silver look, which Adobe After Effects CC handles better than DaVinci Resolve. If you are looking for a silver retention for your image, Adobe After Effects CC will give you a stronger bleach bypass process to achieve it, in comparison to DaVinci Resolve.

“We know how Hollywood is achieving their effects so much easier than people here. If we have the right encoder and the right processing power, we can achieve results in a fraction of the time that is spent otherwise on that particular project.”

The sound of the film was designed by Atif Ali at Playback Lounge Studios in JLT, Dubai. Audio was hard, comments Zaidi, and the filmmakers were not quite satisfied with the final sound effects. The main challenge was that the film was shot in a house.

“We had to use the right Sennheiser boom mics and Neumann studio mics, and control the studio environment for specific sound effects. We had limitations. We had the right technical equipment and needed to take our recordings to a facility that used Pro Tools. Playback Lounge Studios provided us with all of that. We used both recorded and dubbed sound as well as Sennheiser’s lapel mics for some scenes,” he says.

Dubai Film and TV Commission fast-tracked the permissions and PR support for the film and also gave social media and advertising support.

What next? The filmmakers are already working on their next sci-fi project.

“We are trying to achieve a more character-based narrative, diverse storyline and strong character display. Aerials was a learning experience and we have taken some of the reviews and feedback from viewers to make our next film better. We will focus on the narrative more the next time around,” concludes the director.

“We know how Hollywood is achieving their effects so much easier than people here. If we have the right encoder and the right processing power, we can achieve results in a fraction of the time that is spent otherwise on that particular project”

S.A. Zaidi, Director, Aerials
ADVERT
CEO of TV.AE Ali Al Shaiba says that the service differentiates itself from others by offering original programming and user-generated content in addition to subscription-based content.

“It is a marriage between a subscription-based VOD offering and a user-generated content [UGC] platform. We will enrich our platform with a lot of Arabic content, some available immediately after TV broadcast, some available before TV broadcast and some exclusive to our platform”

Ali Al Shaiba, CEO, TV.AE
As demand for OTT in the MENA continues to surge, several new players are making a foray into the digital video arena for a share of the VOD pie. Experts say it’s too early to predict the profitability of these ventures in the longer term, but for now, new services are launching to win over a larger share of the viewership by offering exclusive content. An Emirati VOD service, TV.AE debuted this June, just in time for Ramadan. The service claims to differentiate itself from other OTT players by offering both VOD and user-generated content.

In a first for Abu Dhabi TV, TV.AE signed an agreement with the state broadcaster to stream its talk shows, entertainment, sports, Arab and Gulf series, documentaries and dramas in both English and Arabic. All shows aired on Abu Dhabi TV and Al Emarat during Ramadan were also available on TV.AE.

“Abu Dhabi Media [ADM] is our first content partner and we will be offering their content exclusively on our platform,” comments Ali Al Shaiba, CEO of TV.AE.

The privately funded Emirati company is based in Abu Dhabi and has a 25-member team headed by CEO Ali Al Shaiba. Launched primarily for the MENA audience, the service will, in time, reach out to audiences around the world with tailored content for different regions based on analytics. In fact, since its launch on June 6, 2016, TV.AE has streamed more than 500TB of content and has reached the US, France and the UK in addition to all of the MENA countries. Fifty eight percent of its subscribers are based in the UAE, followed by Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

“We didn’t want to follow traditional OTT or VOD services, as TV.AE will be a totally new experience for Arabic-speaking users. It is a marriage between a subscription-based VOD offering and a user-generated content [UGC] platform. We will enrich our platform with a lot of Arabic content, some available immediately after TV broadcast, some available before TV broadcast and some exclusive to our platform,” says Al Shaiba.

With both free content powered by advertising (AVOD) and premium content ad-free by subscription (SVOD), the service provides access to a variety of entertainment content and films with Arabic subtitles.

The service allows its subscribers to watch the latest shows, movies and dramas for roughly $7.90 each month. The package does not require a long-term contract for either on-demand or live streaming, and is intended to become the new home of Arabic content online. Speaking about how the service will pan out in the coming months, Al Shaiba says that in addition to iOS and Android, TV.AE will be rolled out on other platforms including Chromecast, Samsung and LG Smart TVs, Amazon Fire TV, Xbox, PS4 and Roku.

The service has also introduced a dual-screen function that allows users to cast their chosen entertainment from their mobile or tablet onto a TV screen. Additionally, the viewer can use this feature to watch two pieces of content simultaneously on different devices. This feature, Al Shaiba claims, is not available on any other VOD service.

“Other OTT services stream on multiple devices, but that
is usually just the same content displayed multiple times. We have a distinct offering that distributes assets across screens, so while you are watching a film on your TV, you can see the cast list, read a review or scroll through behind-the-scenes photos on your mobile device. We also offer a mix of VOD content, live channels and coverage of live events relevant to our region,” Al Shaiba notes.

Forging partnerships
Regional internet usage has increased to more than 128 million users in 2016. More than 80% of these users are under 35 years, which makes the spread of online television very important and means online platforms are more lucrative provided they offer relevant content, according to Al Shaiba.

Partnering with both local and international production houses, the service plans to set up in-house production with young and upcoming Arab talent.

The service will initially rely on acquired content, with plans to grow the amount of original and exclusive content to exceed 50% of the overall offering. Al Shaiba adds that TV.AE is funding short-form animated and live content produced by local filmmakers, which will be exclusively showcased on it in due course.

“One of our key objectives is to also support and provide Arab talent with a platform to showcase their content. We are seeking entries from budding filmmakers to showcase their content on TV.AE,” says Al Shaiba.

TV.AE is working alongside du and has selected Akamai Technologies’ Adaptive Media Delivery solution to provide streaming services and media analytics to deliver broadcast-quality video content, as well as to get a deeper understanding of TV.AE’s audience engagement metrics, quality metrics and individual viewer experiences. “Our aim is to provide the best content and the highest quality experience for our viewers in the region, which is why we’ve partnered with du and Akamai technologies, whose solution is amongst the best in the world. This will ensure that all of our viewers can enjoy quicker load times and a better resolution where and whenever they watch our content,” he claims.

“We stream adaptive video in seven different profiles ranging all the way to 1080p HD. We made a conscious decision to use HD from the start, knowing it will take a while for regional infrastructure to catch up, but we wanted our viewers to have the best possible viewing experience from day one,” explains Al Shaiba.

TV.AE aims to provide content with less buffering, less pixelation and maximum performance, even during peak hours. Mezzanine files are ingested directly into a CMS platform and encoded in the cloud to six different TV.AE profiles. Video files are stored on the AWS origin server and are subsequently played out via Akamai CDN.

With several local and international OTT players already operating in the region, does a new service stand a chance? “There is room for everyone, as long as your content is relevant and the service is technically robust.

“Of course, the vision is to be the only choice for Arabic-speaking users around the world, however we will have different content for different regions based on our analytics,” Al Shaiba claims.

The VOD service is focusing on producing original content to be exclusively available for its subscribers by partnering up with production houses, but will continue to acquire high-quality content from both local and international studios as well. However, only time will tell whether the service will live up to its vision of becoming a cross between YouTube and Netflix and offer the best of both worlds to its users.

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**In figures**

- **Total Video Impressions:** 1.3M
- **Content library:** 6000 plus hours of content
- **Mobile vs Browser:** 70%-30% split
- **Age demographics:** Majority being 18-24, followed by 25-34
- **Gender demographics:** 50F/50M
In the current highly competitive and complex media landscape, media service providers can help broadcasters find their audience by providing them with technical, marketing and communication tools. Samir Zehani sheds light on the role of service providers effective for channels that need to find their audience to maximise ROI. No, is the short answer. So what’s the role of a media service provider in helping broadcasters reach their audiences?

While the new world of content consumption is exciting – more of which shortly – and garners headlines, it’s far too easy to dismiss the huge linear television marketplace. But as mentioned, there are both technical and marketing challenges. In some ways those challenges are the same, whichever way you distribute.

It may surprise some that linear channel distribution and the packaging of those channels to reach diasporas spread across distant continents is a huge part of a media service provider’s business and
one that’s grown in recent years. Nowhere is this more the case than for Middle Eastern and North African channels wanting to reach Arabic-speaking audiences overseas.

This trend emerged as far back as 2008. There was an increasing number of requests from broadcasters who wanted more than distribution, particularly for their news channels. They didn’t just want capacity, they wanted new audiences and to monetise that reach. This was seen as a business opportunity, both for the channels as well as for service providers.

What we recognised was that bundling channels – mainly premium – into marketable packages for disparate audiences is a far more powerful proposition than presenting a single channel on its own. The subscription-based Bouquet Arabia is one such example of a bundled offering. Other examples include Muslim TV channels and a Bollywood package.

In general terms, there are three clear aspects to this. There’s identifying relevant channels – this is based on existing audience reach, content, marketing resources and the overall business aims – combined with data and market knowledge to see what the realistic distribution options are. Once identified, the channel can be added to the relevant bouquet. Following this, the service provider needs to develop a dedicated communication strategy for each channel or package to reach end users. Lastly, there’s the provision of end-to-end technical services.

Just getting a channel to audiences is not enough on its own. It’s crucial that any service provider combines technical and sales knowledge into a coherent approach. What must be kept in mind is that these are often quite small channel operations that don’t have the human resources or technical knowledge to push them into new markets.

“Linear channel distribution and the packaging of those channels to reach diaspas spread across distant continents is a huge part of a service provider’s business. Nowhere is this more the case than for Middle Eastern and North African channels wanting to reach Arabic-speaking audiences overseas”

Samir Zehani, Content Distribution Manager, Globecast

Let’s look in more detail at how bundled offerings or channel packages work. Bouquet Arabia is an eight-twelve-channel package. The bouquet is adapted to each country where the Arab diaspora may be different, such as more Egyptian channels than Emirati or fewer Algerian than Moroccan, so the total number of channels varies. In other words, the bouquet is tailored to the requirement of each country. The majority of popular channels, such as MBC or the North African channel Nessma TV, are included in all packages.

This bouquet is most popular in France, for obvious reasons. In France, pay-TV is dominated by IPTV services (Orange, SFR, Bouygues Telecom, Freebox and so on), which is not the European norm. But there’s no overall technical standard for these platforms. This is a common global theme: ensuring content is in the right format for its onward distribution. In terms of the Arabic and North African channels, these feeds are taken from different satellites. Services are downlinked and then sent via fibre to Paris, where there’s a global headend. Some IPTV platforms require the channels in MPEG-2, while others may call for MPEG-4. Precise HD requirements may vary too. Then there are the additional OTT delivery options with their varying format requirements and additional transcoding required.

Additionally, there are new services being launched all the time across Europe, with OTT growing rapidly. Mobile operators are also pushing into the video delivery space, resulting in more market fracturing.

This is what a modern media service provider should allow broadcasters and content owners to achieve: to reach audiences where that content can be monetised. Offering linear feeds is only one way that a service provider can work with a customer and its content; another might be VOD content prep and delivery via VOD logistics capabilities. We continue to move into a world where solutions are often a complex blend of many different factors with a variety of output required in order to reach across this fractured market. In the current environment, it’s much harder to predict demand and the longevity of opportunities and then scale technology and operational teams accordingly. Channels need partners that can work with them to create new opportunities while helping to minimise CAPEX.
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BEHIND THE SCENES WITH JEFFREY CHERNOV

In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Star Trek Beyond’s Executive Producer Jeffrey Chernov speaks about filming in Dubai and how he plans to make Star Trek a truly universal franchise.

You chose to film outside North America; have your expectations been fulfilled by filming in Dubai?
There’s something about filming outside North America. When the cast are in LA, they go back to their homes, but here they spend a lot more time together, and I actually think that they have become closer, and that has a big affect on this movie. You don’t have all the responsibilities you would normally have at home, so you end up being more focused; that’s where the bonding comes in. So taking that on the road did a lot of different things for the franchise.

Going from Vancouver to Dubai was another step of the process; what we’re doing is very big here. It’s even bigger than what we were doing in Vancouver. As I tell my kids, the closer you get to the finish line, the tougher it gets. The cast and crew, however, really came together in Dubai and we’ve got amazing stuff done here, so hopefully the distance will translate into something really exciting on the screen.

Has the filming location helped rejuvenate the franchise?
It’s about the desire to step it up and wanting to deliver something bigger and better to the audience. Certainly having the responsibility of the 50th anniversary hasn’t made it any easier. Everyone really got behind it and knew the importance of the anniversary, but here, there’s a responsibility towards a franchise that’s been out there for five decades. We definitely have the technology and professional know-how to support that, so let’s hope that we have done a good job.

Is it important to you to take this film to more nationalities?
Now we’re into the third instalment of the Star Trek franchise, and what we’re doing is extremely difficult because we have to stay true to the fan base and build on the success of the previous two movies. And I think on this one, we’re going to kind of stretch it towards the new fan base and, at the same time, not disappoint the older 40 to 50-year-old fans. It’s hard because they are a tough audience, but hopefully we have the right formula and I think we’ve got the right movie to do it.

In terms of using local extras, grips, cameramen and so on, is there a legacy aspect to the production?
As part of their efforts to try and build an international film community here, Dubai has done a great job in terms...
of building great state-of-the-art stages. They clearly need more movies; that’s the next step in making sure this place becomes an international film hub.

What does a producer look for? They look for the incentive, that’s a big thing, and then they look for the stages: big square feet in terms of building space, crew and equipment, which is called infrastructure. Dubai is almost there, it just needs more films to have more and more crews.

What cameras did you mainly use on this film?
We shot with the Alexa, which is one of the top three digital cameras. The interesting thing about movies these days is that you sit down and talk to the director, and you talk about where you want to go to shoot the movie, but now it becomes about format. Format has become a very big conversation for directors, as has film versus digital. So there’s these conversations about large-format 65mm. The problem that they are facing is about the exhibition and how you want your film to be viewed.

When we shot Mission: Impossible, we shot film and we also shot 65mm film, and we were able to project that on IMAX in the biggest format possible. Now digital is really taking over, but in the digital world there’s no room for films shot by 75mm, so that’s the biggest challenge for directors who still want their films to be projected onto the bigger screen. There’s a lot of work that has to be done for laser projectors, and it’s going to happen. Unfortunately, exhibitors are behind filmmakers and they have to catch up, so once that happens, we’ll have a whole explosion of how you will view your movies.

“Visual effects have evolved hugely, and they continue to amaze me as a filmmaker. But we have to be careful; it can be too easy, and we don’t want to lose the side of the storyteller that attracts people to the movies. It actually should be driven by emotion”
Jeffrey Chernov, Producer, Star Trek Beyond

How does a director strike the right balance between technology and human emotions?
You always want to shoot as much as you can on camera. That’s key because it just looks better, and we always try to include set pieces and make things more interactive. That’s what makes you feel that you are indeed there in the midst of the action. No doubt, visual effects have evolved hugely, and they continue to amaze me as a filmmaker. But we have to be careful; it can be too easy, and we don’t want to lose the side of the storyteller that attracts people to the movies. It actually should be driven by emotion. And why I say this is because there are some films out there that pound you with VFX until you’re deaf or dizzy, and after that they lose their audience. So I think studios, directors and producers have to be smart about how they create sequences that allow audiences to take a breath and be excited by the next one coming.

What will set this new instalment apart from the Star Trek we know?
I think part of it is in the direction given by the new director. It’s interesting that in Mission: Impossible, it was an intentional decision that each one will be directed by a new director. That’s because a new person brings a new vision. Peter Jackson’s The Lord of the Rings or The Hobbit are really entertaining movies, but they have the same director. It’s about having a fresh set of eyes and fresh ideas.
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#IBCShow
Dejero strengthens IP connectivity

At IBC 2016, Dejero will be showcasing the latest enhancements to its LIVE+ Control management system that simplifies the task of broadcasting live from remote locations and transporting recorded content to broadcast facilities over bonded IP networks including cellular, Wi-Fi, Ethernet and satellite. The latest updates enhance monitoring, station administration, and reporting capabilities, displaying real-time analytics of network connection performance, and overall transmission quality for each Dejero transmitter.

These updates to the Dejero LIVE+ Control management system go hand in hand with the recent release of version 4.0 of the company’s LIVE+ Core software that powers its mobile transmitters, servers, and smartphone and notebook apps. This major new software release is making its IBC debut.

Stand 12.C56

TV everywhere by Viaccess Orca

At IBC2016, Viaccess-Orca will demonstrate advanced analytics and monetisation capabilities for its cloud-based Voyage – TV Everywhere as a Service (TVaaS).

It will highlight the integration of a new HTML5 web player into the scope of the solution, enabling service providers to benefit from new monetisation opportunities through pre-roll multiscreen advertising.

As a cloud service, Voyage – TVaaS offers quick and easy monetisation of the multiscreen environment, enables service providers to respond to dynamic market conditions. Voyage – TVaaS also offers security capabilities through Viaccess-Orca’s Connected Sentinel Player: a multiplatform media player SDK.

Stand 1.A51

Shotoku brings VR tracking system

Shotoku Broadcast Systems will be showcasing its TP-200VR/300 VR system to the European broadcast market at this year’s IBC.

The company’s combined TP-200VR pedestal and SX-300 VR head, which Shotoku will be demonstrating, produce a VR tracking system without compromise in accuracy or ease of operation. The company will also highlight its TP500, SmartPed, SmartTrack and Free-d2 systems.

The TP-200VR pedestal and SX-300 VR head combination offer Shotoku’s light-touch control and stability to match even the most demanding applications. Highly accurate pan, tilt, zoom, focus, X, Y and height data output keeps the VR graphics system precisely synchronised to the camera’s floor position, orientation and height. The system boasts lightweight two-stage pneumatic TP-200 VR pedestal and high-resolution EFP SX-300VR head.

Stand 12.E42

ADB launches graphyne2 platform

ADB will debut its next-generation, end-to-end personal TV software platform, graphyne2. The launch extends ADB’s portfolio of connected solutions with a next-generation TV software platform that drives fast, easy and risk-free deployment of value-added services with no up-front investment.

The IBC debut of ADB’s new platform will show how graphyne2 enables both pay-TV and OTT operators to deliver personalised user interfaces and second-screen applications, allowing consumers to quickly and easily browse and select content and services.

This new platform is a client device and backend software suite, which provides a fully personalised, intuitive and user-friendly UX, enabling quick and easy access to the content viewers desire. The next-generation suite is a standards-based platform which is both open and modular, providing the components required to achieve a one-stop-solution that allows customers to go to market extremely quickly. Additionally, through well-defined interfaces, operators can deploy graphyne2 alongside components from existing pay-TV ecosystems.

Stand 5.B60

PROIBC

August 2016 | www.broadcastprome.com | 51
**Cobalt Digital introduces new tools**

Cobalt Digital launches new services at IBC 2016. It is launching new services including content aggregation, real-time analytics and connected smart homes.

**PlayBox unleashes the EXEcutor**

PlayBox Technology EU (PBT EU) will present its EXEcutor line of broadcast servers at IBC 2016. They provide customisable backbone for all areas of broadcast and production installations, including television stations, production studios and post-production companies. By providing facilities for ingest and media management, titling and graphics, as well as playout and scheduling, the EXEcutor broadcast servers can provide a complete TV channel-in-a-box solution, or be configured to provide any combination of component services using PlayBox software. These incorporate traditional, streaming and hybrid workflow models, even the cloud and private cloud. Content can achieve output into a multitude of IP-streaming formats or via traditional SDI connections. Resolutions from SD to 4K are all supported, including the ability to stream multiple channels simultaneously. The EXEcutor broadcast servers can interface seamlessly with many types of routers, and can be activated with LTC timecodes and GPI triggers.

**Argosy steps beyond cable**

Argosy will be joining this year’s IBC show with a broad portfolio that solidifies its transformation from a passive technology infrastructure vendor to a fully-fledged infrastructure provider to both manufacturers and broadcasters.

**tv2u launches new services at IBC**

tv2u is launching new services including content aggregation, real-time analytics and connected smart homes.

**SmartBox**

SmartBox is a cloud-based service for TV and video content distribution. It enables content monetisation on multiple consumption devices.

**Stand 9.LP6**
Adder showcases IP-based KVM

Adder Technology will be demonstrating the power and performance of IP-based KVM and its benefits for the broadcast market at IBC 2016.

Included in the line-up are a number of recent product releases specifically developed for use throughout the broadcast workflow, from studio and gallery control to post-production and the outside broadcast.

The new AdderLink XDIP extender is one such product, offering USB and audio over a single CatX cable and enabling remote access to critical computing while flexibly extending the desktop experience. Another featured product is the Adder C-USB LAN network extender.

Able to be integrated into the AdderLink Infinity Manager or sit alone, it delivers high-speed USB2.0 extension at 480MB per second, and can be used for file ingest from cameras or other USB devices.

The Adder C-USB LAN will form part of a larger demonstration on stand to demonstrate the value that IP-based KVM can bring to the broadcast ecosystem.

Stand 7.C30

LiveU goes Solo

LiveU will showcase LiveU Solo, its plug-and-play live streaming bonded solution for the online media market.

LiveU Solo allows users to livestream seamlessly into any web streaming workflow by connecting automatically to popular OVPs and content delivery networks such as Facebook, YouTube Live and Wowza Streaming Cloud. Solo is simple to manage and controlled remotely via a web interface or smart device.

Its next-generation LU710 4K/p60 HEVC rack-mountable 1U encoder will also be showcased. Combined with the Xtender transmission device and LiveU’s server with 4K output, the LU710 encoder transforms any SNG truck into a cellular/satellite solution for transmitting 4K/HD.

Stand 3.B62

Suitcase TV packs well for IBC 2016

At IBC 2016, Suitcase TV will feature MediaStor Archive, a flexible, secure and scalable software-defined storage platform designed specifically for broadcast media operations.

With 128TB of storage available in a single 1RU chassis, the low-cost MediaStor Archive resolves the long-term media asset storage problem faced by so many.

Suitcase TV Technical Director David Atkins said: “We’re not your traditional broadcast manufacturer. We’re proud to be a major proponent of what some consider the disruptive advent of IP. Our firm belief is that IP is a more exciting and cost-effective approach and is already displacing traditional broadcast hardware, which suits us just fine, but we also recognise that SDI still has its place.”

To address both IP and SDI worlds, Suitcase will also feature iphrame Vision.

Stand 2.C10

Domo Broadcast extends concept of SDR

Domo Broadcast will demonstrate the latest advances for its new concept in electronic newsgathering and live production at IBC 2016.

After recently launching the SOLO7 OBTX modular camera back transmitter, Domo is now developing a module to interface directly within it, which will transform radio into an ENG transmitter based on the company’s SOLO8 Software Defined Radio platform.

This radio will boast full SD and HD, including 1080p50/60 formats, IP encoding and streaming capabilities, traditional ASI COFDM, bi-directional IP over RF (Mesh), return IFB, and 3G and 4G dongle support. The new module in development on Domo’s proprietary IP software platform will provide full bi-directional communication and control from camera to studio, enabling production teams to move far more of the command, control and creative functions back to the studio or OB truck.

Domo will also feature SOLO7 OBTX, which boasts 1080p60 and 4:2:2 compression with integrated camera control. It includes swappable RF modules and H.264/MPEG-4 AVC video encoding. Its latency ranges from 1s to 10ms.

Stand 1.F41
TMD makes a point

TMD will feature OnPoint, a simple and intuitive PAM solution for creative services and post houses at IBC.

Post houses and creative services departments need to be able create large volumes of content, whether this is re-versioning of long form material or short form promos, often quickly and with sensitive content, which presents a significant challenge in scheduling and managing the work while providing controlled access to those assets. To make the process easier, TMD’s scalable, cloud-native OnPoint production management solution provides workflows for the creation and fulfilment of wish and make lists. It supports browsing and selecting clips, restoring for edit, integration with craft editors such as Avid and Adobe Premiere Pro.

Stand 8.B35

Enensys launches DTTCaster

Enensys is launching a new product DTTCaster at IBC 2016. This is designed to provide retransmission of DTT networks at regional/local transmitter sites where IP (microwave, fibre and so on) or satellite connectivity isn’t possible or is cost-prohibitive.

In terms of the former, this is usually down to geography, cost or a combination of the two. C-band satellite reception at local transmitter sites isn’t always possible either, as the dishes are very large and surrounding infrastructure is required too. Of course, with satellite there are also capacity costs to consider.

DTTCaster allows reception of the network content using a simple antenna, then re-generates that content on another frequency. The content remains exactly the same and is SFN-compliant. This provides low-cost, high-quality retransmission of a network. DTTCaster units are housed in ENENSYS’s HDc chassis, with a maximum of six DTTCaster units in 1U enabling the reception of 24 RF signals.

Also presented will be AdsEdge that addresses cost-effective regional content insertion in DTT/cable networks.

Stand 2.B30

Telestream focuses on live streaming

Telestream will use IBC 2016 to showcase scalable broadcast quality live streaming solutions, strategic advances in video encoding and transcoding systems, and the latest developments in cloud-based enterprise services.

Telestream will introduce to the European market Lightspeed Live Stream, which succeeds in bringing broadcasts and OTT together in the live space. Lightspeed Live Stream is the company’s enterprise-scale live streaming platform, developed to provide fully produced, high-value, premium content OTT to end users watching on their device of choice.

The company will also provide European debuts for major new functionality within its flagship enterprise-class software product, Vantage, through an adaptive bitrate (ABR) optimisation feature.

Telestream’s focus on the live streaming space dates back to 2004, and centres on three core competencies: encoding and transcoding; partner integrations that enables optimal workflows; and commercial live streaming expertise.

Stand 7.G30

Quality control with Interra Systems

At IBC2016, Interra Systems will provide live demos of its quality control and monitoring solutions for checking and assuring the integrity of 4K UHD, HEVC, HDR, DPX, and IMF content. Interra Systems’ R&D team has carefully crafted 4K resolution support for all its products so that broadcast operations can truly benefit from the quality improvements enabled by higher resolution.

Interra Systems will showcase BATON 7.0, the latest version of its QC solution for file-based SD, HD, and cloud-based workflows. BATON 7.0 expands upon the system’s pre-existing support for language verification of subtitles and closed-caption files with new multi-language checks of audio tracks. The system currently offers auto detection support for a variety of languages, including English, Spanish, German, French, and Dutch.

Detection of Arabic, Italian, German, French, and Dutch, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Swedish will be available later in 2016.

Using BATON, operators can automatically match the language in each audio track with associated metadata as well as simultaneously check multiple audio tracks in each media asset. It can also be used to measure and correct audio programme loudness.

Stand 7.B13
Retail, Healthcare, Government, Banking, Education and Energy leaders: here’s an agenda that speaks to your needs. Dedicated days at GITEX Tech Week for you to source solutions, network with industry peers, attend dedicated conferences, breakfast briefings and awards. Make sure you diarise the day most relevant for you.

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James Barrese, CTO, PayPal USA

INTELLIGENT CITY TUESDAY
Phyllis Schneck, CCSO, US Department - Homeland Security

RETAIL WEDNESDAY
Paul Clarke, CTO, Ocado

EDUCATION WEDNESDAY
Assine George, CEO, University of Western Australia

ENERGY THURSDAY
Pascal Dauboin, R&D and Innovation Director, Total Russia

Greg Cannon, VP of Marketing & All Things Digital, Caesars Entertainment

Dr. Timothy Low, CEO, Farrer Park, Singapore

Nicolas Cary, Co-founder, Blockchain

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Innovators in the MENA region: GITEX is on the cusp of a global re-imagining of the digital future.
Having attended various industry gatherings this year, including CABSAT and the 2016 NAB Show as well as an EBU demonstration about its Sandbox Live IP project, I’ve a growing confidence that IP within a broadcast infrastructure will soon be a widespread reality. In fact, since IBC last year, considerable progress has been made by the industry. We’re still some way off agreeing to a single set of standards, but manufacturers do now appear to be moving in a more consistent direction.

There are definite similarities between the move to IP for baseband signals, not just baseband video, and the digital workflows that emerged a decade or so ago. Simply switching from tapes to files was not enough. Those companies that did well around that transition recognised the potential benefits of a file-based workflow and adapted their production workflows accordingly.

Today is no different – IP calls for the same clear thinking, and from what I’ve seen, this appears to now be happening across the industry.

From a systems integrator point of view, and also from what our customers are telling us, interoperability between different systems is critical. Although considerable R&D and investment has been made by companies looking at how best to approach IP, it doesn’t need to go to waste if some fine tuning is required. An interface can easily be developed to link into other technologies and standards. This is why groups such as the Alliance for IP Media Solutions (AIMS), established to bring manufacturers together and promote common standards, are emerging.

For successful adoption across the industry, it’s vital that these bodies ensure that what is delivered is not just what vendors want to sell, but what the customers actually want.

2016 is proving to be a crucial year, but it’s important that this momentum is not wasted and that a coherent set of standards is agreed.

UHD has been a buzzword at every event I’ve attended recently, but more and more I’m seeing a convergence with that and talk about IP. The general consensus is that switching to IP will make managing 4K and beyond easier. There aren’t many broadcasters that can afford to invest in the huge routers and vision mixers that 4K demands when their current HD workflows only need a quarter of a system’s capacity. Therefore, getting 4K delivery down to a single interface instead of quad HD infrastructure is critical to its adoption.

It’s crucial to build the right system infrastructure to meet these needs both now and in the future. A customer recently asked us about 8K, as they want to future-proof their investment. IP is realistically the only way of delivering media of that size. Some even see 8K as the natural progression, with 4K being a temporary format, because once the standards are in place to make 4K over IP work, it will be easy to move beyond that. You could argue that moving to IP is like the switch from analogue to digital, and the move from 4K to 8K is the equivalent of going SD to HD. Of course, complications will arise and there will be interoperability issues, but the transition will be much easier as IP will be at the heart of it.

An optimistic outlook
There’s still a lot of work to do in preparing for the arrival of a full IP infrastructure and UHD, but with the building blocks being put in place, the market mood is far more optimistic than ever before. 

Defining standards through the formation of industry alliances is a big step forward. As systems integrators, we need to know that the infrastructures we design and build are future-proofed, so that they can benefit from new production workflows that an IP infrastructure brings.

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