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I thought it was going to be a quiet year, judging by the slowdown in December 2016, but every morning of 2017 thus far, no sweet call to prayer has awakened me.

Rather, a rude cacophony, created by cranes, drilling machines and the other construction machinery surrounding us on every side in every street, wakes us up each morning. I have always seen this as a sign of good times. If there’s noise, hustle and bustle and never-ending traffic on the streets, it must mean we are in the middle of that rat race again, with everyone elbowing each other on their way to the new horizon whose margin fades forever and ever as we move towards it.

This probably also explains the musical chairs in the market, with several high-profile entries and exits within the broadcast space. Incidentally, we have seen some restructuring at several organisations, with management shuffling people around in the hope that this will lead to better bottom lines.

The number of management changes just within Dubai this month, the number of new office launches, the new projects in the market that everybody is eyeing – these are definitely a reflection that business is slowly on the rise. Everything may centre around Expo 2020 in the UAE, but don’t forget there is also Vision 2030 in KSA and something similar in Qatar.

In the meantime, the inaugural edition of DIRROCK in Dubai was an eye-opener to how much demand there is for good quality Arabic content. Did you know that China is one of the biggest suppliers of dubbed Arabic content, while Bulgaria serves as a big centre for its production?

Content is always an interesting topic, but most of the money in broadcast lies in equipment, services and systems integration, and action has begun on this front. I’m sure we will see more of it as we head towards March with CABSAT drawing close. But let’s wait and watch. Things are still unfolding.
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A BROADCAST MASTERPIECE

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Voddler opens Dubai office, announces key appointments

Cloud-streaming service provider Voddler Group has opened a new office in Jumeirah Lake Towers, Dubai and announced a couple of key appointments to strengthen its Middle East & Africa (MEA) operations. Marwan Shehab, who previously advised on video strategy at du, will head Voddler’s MEA operations.

Shehab will be based in Dubai and is tasked with driving the company’s expansion in the region, where several significant deals are already in the pipeline. Joining Shehab at the Dubai office is Khalid Mualla, who has taken on the role of Director of Technology. Mualla was previously with Intigral and responsible for Quality Assurance for Intigral’s operations.

“Marwan is a highly respected and connected individual, which makes him a fantastic addition to Voddler’s team as we expand our reach in the MEA region,” said Adam Lewis, CEO of Voddler Group. “He brings with him extensive knowledge of the region stemming from a broad range of experience across the telecommunications, pay TV and OTT spaces, which will directly benefit our customers. Likewise, Khalid brings a wealth of experience on the OTT side and we have worked with him extensively in the past so we believe he is a fantastic addition to our team. The growth potential in the MENA is huge and we now have two great professionals to take that forward for us in this region.”

Lewis added: “Viewer experience is the number one priority for Voddler in the MEA region, where OTT services are faced with an extremely high demand for mobile content consumption. VoddlerNet, our flagship product, not only provides service quality improvements across all networks, but it also offers specific functionalities that allow additional support on mobile devices without impairing performance. We look forward to seeing VoddlerNet used by more OTT service providers in the region to guarantee the best quality viewing experience to all their subscribers, and in particular those who are using mobile devices to access content.”

VoddlerNet is a hybrid peer-assisted video streaming solution that expands the reach of streaming video services, while claiming to maintain the highest bitrate and quality of service possible.

“Providing the best possible viewing experience for the end user is vital to us, regardless of which of our entertainment services they are using and wherever they may be watching from,” said Dr. Raed Khusheim, CEO of Selevision.

“To maintain our position, we are continually innovating behind the scenes. Voddler’s ability to offer broadcast quality content tirelessly offers real advantages in driving up the quality of experience.”

One of the challenges for OTT services in the Gulf region is the high demand for mobile consumption, with mobile penetration rates in KSA exceeding 168%. VoddlerNet provides service quality improvements across all networks but has specific functionality which allows greater support on mobile devices without impairing performance.

“As a pre-eminent OTT provider in the MENA region, Selevision already reaches millions of viewers. We want to help them continue their growth,” said Adam Lewis, CEO of Voddler Group.

Selevision opts for VoddlerNet to optimise streaming experience

Selevision has chosen Voddler’s hybrid peer-assisted and secure delivery to its global technology platform to optimise the subscriber’s streaming experience. Selevision provides broadcast and online channels direct to consumers under several brands from its bases in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

VoddlerNet combines centralised and secure peer-assisted delivery with direct streaming from the source provider. This hybrid peer-assisted video streaming solution expands the reach of streaming video services, while claiming to maintain the highest bitrate and quality of service possible.

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Intigral appoints new CEO

Intigral has appointed Hamoud Al Rumayan as CEO. Al Rumayan will lead Intigral’s future growth plans in the Saudi market, in line with the Saudi Vision for 2030 and the 2020 National Transformation Plan. The announcement follows the recent move by Sarah Telecom Company (STC) to purchase a 100% shareholding in Intigral, and is aligned with the company’s vision to expand operations across the Middle East.

Al Rumayan has more than 25 years of leadership experience in banking, investment, media and consultancy. Prior to joining Intigral, he was an advisor to the minister and also served as finance director and transformation team leader for Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 at the Ministry of Culture and Information. He has also held various leadership positions at Banque Saudi Fransi, National Commercial Bank, SRMG and Gulf Investment Company.

OSN to showcase UFC content

OSN has entered an exclusive long-term agreement with UFC, a mixed martial arts organisation to deliver UFC shows for its subscribers. The new partnership ensures all UFC content including live events, pre- and post-event shows, and The Ultimate Fighter reality series, is available exclusively for OSN subscribers.

Andy Waterman, SVP, Sport & Sports Production, OSN, said: “We are very excited about bringing UFC back to OSN viewers and entering into this long-term partnership. We are listening to our customers, and delivering exclusive content and great value to our new sports channel packages. UFC has seen massive growth and we look forward to working with them to build on that growth in our region. UFC will be one of the first to go on-air along with the new sports line-up for 2017. ‘UFC on OSN’ will be industry-defining, as for the first time, we will produce localised Arabic content ‘for the region, from the region’; a rare feat with the unprecedented viewing experience,” continued Waterman.

James Elliott, UFC Vice President, MENA, added: “We are pleased to be partnering with OSN once again to bring even more exciting new and localised content to viewers across the Middle East and Africa. UFC has previously held successful events in the UAE and witnessed first-hand the passion of the fans across the region. Together we will bring vehicle to the region and events fans like never before, ensuring they don’t miss a minute of the action.” Also in partnership with UFC, OSN is launching UFC Fight Pass, a digital subscription service enabling the subscription to the largest combat sports library.

BBC Worldwide announces Middle East deals

BBC Worldwide has announced the completion of several high-profile deals across the Middle East and Mediterranean region. The announcement was made at DISCOP Dubai. A significant multi-year factual output deal has been agreed with Turkish free-to-air broadcaster NTV for landmark documentaries including Planet Earth II, The Great British Bake Off and Life in the Big Smoke, The Hustle and Wild New Zealand.

In Drama, Sherlock has been sold across the region and was simulcast alongside the UK premiere on BBC One in February, режиссером со стартовым сезона Series One, War and Peace, Doctor Foster (series one), Life In The Big Smoke, the Cosmote channel in Greece. Other programme deals have seen the Doctor Who, Sherlock, Supergirl, Blindspot and all DC’s Legends of Tomorrow, shows such as The Flash, Supergirl, Legends of Tomorrow and the rest of the DC Extended Universe, will be available in the MENA region.

BBC Worldwide’s global channel brands has a multi-year deal for BBC Entertainment, BBC Earth and BBC World News. Andy Warkman, SVP, Sport & Sports Production, OSN, said: “We are delighted in working with the Stars Group to build on that growth in our region. UFC will be one of the first to go on-air along with the new sports line-up for 2017. ‘UFC on OSN’ will be industry-defining, as for the first time, we will produce localised Arabic content ‘for the region, from the region’; a rare feat with the unprecedented viewing experience,” continued Waterman.

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News flash: Mohammad Othman has joined Videlio; Awad Mousa is now MD of BSS.
Turkish news channel TRT World expands to 190 countries

Turkish broadcaster TRT World has signed a new agreement to launch its international news platform TRT World on 19 additional satellites and expand its reach and viewership. This multi-year agreement was signed with Globecast, a global solutions provider for media.

TRT World can now be viewed all over the world in new territories (190 countries in total) via Turksat and 10 additional major broadcast satellites operating across Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific, Africa, Australia and North America. This expanded reach has already begun and will be completed in the coming months.

As a strategic partner to TRT World, Turksat has been working extensively with Globecast to provide the technical broadcast solutions needed to achieve this expanded global delivery. Globecast is providing worldwide connectivity and uplink distribution services using its unique reach to access the 10 satellites.

Director General of TRT Senol Goka said that this is an important project for the broadcaster: “As TRT World, we keep growing and making new international broadcast agreements. With this deal, TRT World’s reporting-from-the-field approach to creating news that focuses on the humanitarian aspect of the stories will be available in 190 countries. TRT World will continue to bring a new perspective to international news broadcasting to an expanded global audience,” Goka said.

Discovery Communications deploys Signiant Flight

Discovery Communications is using Signiant’s Flight solution for accelerated delivery of programme content to the cloud via Discovery’s global media asset submission platform, the Producer’s Portal. The new system allows content creators to ingest media assets directly into cloud object storage rather than physically shipping data tapes, which reduces delivery time from several days to just a few hours.

BroadbandTV expands in Asia, Middle East

Canadian multi-platform network BroadbandTV (BBTV) is expanding into the Middle East and Asia and is now available in Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt. In addition to reaching 22bn monthly impressions across its own and operated library and brands as well as its network of 85,000 content creators, BBTV is also the third largest video property worldwide, following only Google and Facebook.

Founder and CEO Shervin Rafati commented: “These regions have huge potential. The Middle East can add 150bn annually to its GDP through digital by 2020.”

al Jazeera and Avid tie to build cloud-based newsroom

Avid and Al Jazeera are collaborating to develop and test cloud-based technology capabilities of the end-to-end Avid newsroom solution, with the aim of building the world’s first-ever hybrid cloud deployment of the MediaCentral Platform across the Qatari network’s large, global newsroom operation. The collaboration has also led the two companies to sign a major multi-million-dollar framework agreement.

Avid’s team has been working closely with Al Jazeera on a long-term Avid Everywhere strategy to implement an open, integrated and efficient news workflow based on MediaCentral across its global news network. The final and most complex phase of the implementation was at Al Jazeera’s Doha headquarters and went live at the end of 2016.

Avid is presently working with Al Jazeera on the next phase of its technology strategy, which will see the broadcaster introduce cloud-based capabilities into its workflows and new hybrid cloud deployment models for its global news production infrastructure, to help drive even greater global collaboration and operational efficiency across the enterprise.

“Our industry is increasingly competitive, complex and is changing rapidly. Despite our success, we knew we had to overhaul our global news gathering and delivery platforms to remain an industry leader,” said Mohammed Alguwari, CEO of Al Jazeera Media Network (SaM).

He previously worked at CVP Group, Pinnacle Systems and Sony and co-founded BBTV in 1997. BBTV is also a “world leader in cloud-based content delivery solutions, enabling organizations all over the world to leverage cloud for reliable video delivery in any environment,” according to Myers.

Al Jazeera is a global news and current affairs news channel headquartered in Doha, Qatar. The channel was launched in 1996 and broadcasts content in Arabic, English, Urdu, Persian, Pashto, French, and Basque.

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ma.tv provides broadcasters platform to monetise content

ma.tv, an initiative from Dubai-based broadcast consultancy and services provider ChannelScupltor has launched a content hub to give regional broadcasters a common platform to showcase their programming libraries and attract both regional and international buyers.

The ma.tv hub at DISCOP Dubai hosted content from top-tier broadcasters such as LBC International, Spacecote, Al Hayat, Al Aan TV, Roya, Al Khabar Wal Nas, Ajman TV, CNBC Arabia and Botana Group. DISCOP was held from January 20 to 21.

Content such as LBCI’s Akelina, Al Hayat’s ”Rummez Around the World”, CNBC Arabia’s Between Numbers and classic kids shows such as Mushin & the River were amongst the hundreds of titles showcased at the ma.tv hub.

Speaking about LBC’s participation in this initiative, Pierre El Daber, Chairman of LBC International commented “We are delighted to be working with ma.tv to develop new opportunities for our content. LBC has amassed an exceptional library, and DISCOP provides the perfect stage to showcase it to the global content industry.”

The content featured at the ma.tv hub will also be available for programme buyers around the world to browse online at ma.tv. Rights owners from the Arab world will now be able to market their programming to the global content industry through this new B2B content trading portal.

“There is a wealth of great content in the region, and the potential for business is considerable, especially when you consider the number of new content platforms launching around the world,” commented Nick Grande, MD of ChannelScupltor and founder of ma.tv. “But the regional TV industry spans over 20 countries, so coordination and cooperation is a big challenge.”

He added “ma.tv will help broadcasters and content owners to have a clearer message and louder voice.”

BFE and Brightcove enter strategic partnership

BFE and Brightcove have entered into a strategic partnership to provide broadcasters and operators with converged video workflow technology for both traditional and online broadcast formats.

Broadcast services companies are increasingly entering the digital and OTT space, and this convergence between traditional broadcast and digital media was the key factor in Brightcove’s decision to add a modular technology strategy. Through this, the company is able to offer specific capabilities and players, encoding in parallel with end-to-end publishing workflows in the shape of video cloud. This dual strategy has resonated in the market and given Brightcove the opportunity to partner in support of converged workflows for the broadcast vertical which led to the decision to partner with German SI BFE.

Ikegami inaugurates Dubai office

Ikegami announced the opening of its Dubai office last month. The new office is located in JLT in Dubai and will be headed by Abdul Ghani, General Manager, Ikegami Middle East.

Ikegami Dubai will offer demonstration stands, sales as well as technical support for its Middle East customers. The Dubai office will be a hub for the company’s Middle East operations.

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Es’hail-1 adds Iraqi channel

Al Rafidain TV channel is now available on the Es’hail-1 satellite located at the 25.5 East hotspot covering the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Al Rafidain is an Iraqi satellite TV channel, which showcases Iraqi political, economic, cultural and social identity. With the goal of advocating unity among Iraqis, the channel broadcasts programmes that reject intolerance and fight sectarianism and racism, while highlighting the history and tradition of Iraqi civilisation. Es’hailSat President & CEO Ali Ahmed Al Kuwari said: “We are delighted that Al Rafidain TV Channel has chosen Es’hail-1 satellite to reach customers across MENA. This is a testament to our commitment in promoting Arabic content across the region. With one satellite in operation and a second satellite scheduled for launch in 2017 and a new teleport, we believe that we have the optimum solution for broadcasters and viewers in the MENA region.”

Adder announces new senior appointments

Adder Technology has announced the appointment of Calik Hooper as Vice President of Business Development and Product Marketing. Hooper has 15 years of experience in the control room industry, with a proven track record in business development and product marketing across industrial, broadcast and government environments.

The company has also announced the promotion of Jamie Adkin to Vice President Sales EMEA. Adkin has worked in the industry for almost 10 years. His expanded remit includes developing company strategy that directly contributes to the growth and expansion of Adder across EMEA. Working closely with Adder’s sales and marketing team, Adkin will be responsible for implementing a channel strategy which focuses on partner development and sales enablement.

BBC iPlayer to be reinvented to rival Netflix and Amazon by 2020

BBC Director General Tony Hall has said that the BBC iPlayer will be reinvented in a bid to make it the UK’s top online TV service by 2020. He described iPlayer as “the biggest revolution of the last charter” and said it now had to increase its reach. The BBC’s centenary will be in 2022, by which point Hall says, he wants the BBC to be “irresistible to all audiences.”

“The online portal plans to take on rival Netflix and Amazon to claim top spot in the UK VoD space. In an attempt to do so, the broadcaster will consider adding more relevant content and entire series to the service before they are screened on TV. Tom Williams, Chief Executive at Ostmodern, reacted to Hall’s statement to say there is no single formula for success in the VoD world, considering the growing competition. "BBC iPlayer is a great example of the success broadcasters can find in VoD. Between traditional broadcasters, streaming services and other players that are jumping on the bandwagon, it’s become a very complicated and competitive market. Giving viewers more control over what they want to watch and putting out an entire series in one go is sometimes effective, but isn’t always necessarily helpful without the right approach to manage this.”
A huge majority of these films are produced by independent filmmakers and with very little financial support. A large number of these films premiere in prestigious festivals every year. The Festival of Iranian Films is organised by Media Nest, a production company based in Prague with direct connections to the film industries of the Czech Republic, Iran and the UAE. The festival is managed by an international team of film professionals while at the helm is Torang Daneshmand, President, followed by Kaveh Daneshmand, Artistic Director, and Andrea Rebrodova, Executive Director. The majority of the festival team are Czech film professionals and it is supported by the Czech Ministry of Culture as well as Prague Municipality.

Daneshmand says the festival is not limited to a few venues in Prague but takes place in various parts of the city to make it accessible to more audiences. Throughout the year, the festival hosts several events focused on Iranian art. What began as a vehicle to present some of the best cinema from Iran has now evolved into a well-rounded event to showcase Iranian art. The festival now includes music, theatre, painting and graphic design as well.

Last year, the first Iranian-Czech feature film co-production, *A Very Ordinary Citizen*, premiered in Kino Lucerna. "This co-production was initiated in the fourth edition of the festival and within its industry programme. The film was supported by the Czech State Fund for Cinematography and marked the beginning of the collaborations between the Czech and Iranian film professionals. It has quickly opened the doors to more feature film co-productions," explains Daneshmand. The festival has hosted notable figures of Czech, Iranian and Arab cinema such as Eva Zazalova, Petr Koudla, Rashidian Banetemad, Ali Moufarji, Katelina Bessoreva, Rekhsareh Ghaemmaghami, Alaa Karkourt, Ronald Bergan, Nidîq Barmak and Nojoom Alghanem since its launch in 2012.

"I must add here that the festival has received very positive support for its programme and structure from organisations such as Czech TV, People in Need and FAMU, as well as tremendous support from many reputable media partners such as Respekt, A2, Aktualne and National Geographic among others," concludes Daneshmand.

The Festival of Iranian Films took place in Prague from January 10-15, 2017. The festival was first launched in January 2012, with 610 seats in two screening halls in Kino Světozor, a Prague arthouse dedicated to films.

In its six consecutive editions, the festival has attracted more than 26,000 visitors, including 80 international guests. Countries represented at the festival include Iran, the Czech Republic, Afghanistan, Egypt, the UK, France, Germany, South Africa and the US. More than 100 Iranian films have been presented at the festival in more than 300 screenings.

Kaveh Farnam, CEO of Advanced Media, a long-term partner of the festival, said every year the festival represents a diverse collection of films. "The festival represents a cross-section of Iranian filmmakers from Iran as well as the Iranian diaspora. In fact, this year I noticed a number of entries from Iranian filmmakers based out of Iran. Many of the films focused on immigrant issues and dealt with life during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war. "The festival attracts filmmakers from different parts of the world and offers a window into Iranian sensibility. Hadi Mohaghegh’s *Immortal (Mebsoos)* was particularly memorable for me. It’s a low-budget film but very impactful and leaves an indelible mark on the viewer. This film has also won many awards at various film festivals around the world," says Farnam. Over the years, the festival has expanded to other venues in Prague, such as Kino Lucerna, Bio Olo and Gallery Langhans, and to other Czech cities such as Brno and Olomouc as well as to Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

Artistic Director, Kaveh Daneshmand, says the festival has generated a lot of interest among audiences, as is evident from the way it has grown in the last few years. "Iranian cinematography is indeed one of the most dynamic film industries of the world with over 200 fiction features, 3,000 shorts and 100 feature documentaries produced annually.

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"I must add here that the festival has received very positive support for its programme and structure from organisations such as Czech TV, People in Need and FAMU, as well as tremendous support from many reputable media partners such as Respekt, A2, Aktualne and National Geographic among others," concludes Daneshmand.

The Festival of Iranian Films took place in Prague from January 10-15, 2017. The festival was first launched in January 2012, with 610 seats in two screening halls in Kino Světozor, a Prague arthouse dedicated to films.

In its six consecutive editions, the festival has attracted more than 26,000 visitors, including 80 international guests. Countries represented at the festival include Iran, the Czech Republic, Afghanistan, Egypt, the UK, France, Germany, South Africa and the US. More than 100 Iranian films have been presented at the festival in more than 300 screenings.

Kaveh Farnam, CEO of Advanced Media, a long-term partner of the festival, said every year the festival represents a diverse collection of films. "The festival represents a cross-section of Iranian filmmakers from Iran as well as the Iranian diaspora. In fact, this year I noticed a number of entries from Iranian filmmakers based out of Iran. Many of the films focused on immigrant issues and dealt with life during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war. "The festival attracts filmmakers from different parts of the world and offers a window into Iranian sensibility. Hadi Mohaghegh’s *Immortal (Mebsoos)* was particularly memorable for me. It’s a low-budget film but very impactful and leaves an indelible mark on the viewer. This film has also won many awards at various film festivals around the world," says Farnam. Over the years, the festival has expanded to other venues in Prague, such as Kino Lucerna, Bio Olo and Gallery Langhans, and to other Czech cities such as Brno and Olomouc as well as to Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

Artistic Director, Kaveh Daneshmand, says the festival has generated a lot of interest among audiences, as is evident from the way it has grown in the last few years. "Iranian cinematography is indeed one of the most dynamic film industries of the world with over 200 fiction features, 3,000 shorts and 100 feature documentaries produced annually..."
Dubai unveiled yet another man-made wonder in the heart of the city with the opening of Dubai Canal on November 9, 2016. The opening ceremony of the iconic site was a fittingly grand event with a stunning display of sound and light complete with breathtaking fireworks and live performances. Italian events company Prodea was in charge of the event and Dubai-based 7 Production filmed the opening. 7 Production was also responsible for covering the opening of the Dubai Opera, in October last year. That production was undertaken in 4K as it was not intended for live broadcast. The opening of the Dubai Canal, however, was a complete end-to-end HD production. In this scenario, perhaps one of the biggest concerns was being able to undertake a production in the midst of a large gathering while also ensuring that the security of dignitaries was not compromised.

The production covered the entire ceremony including aerial performances, laser displays, fireworks and a VIP tour of the canal on both water and land. The event was, therefore, divided into two segments to cover the performances and the VIPs, as well as the inauguration ceremony of the canal conducted by His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. 7 Production put together the production of the entire ceremony in a 50-minute programme broadcast on Dubai TV and its partner broadcasters worldwide. Pierre Tabet, Managing Director of 7 Production, says the event was very demanding because of its stature and importance. There was absolutely no room for error because it represented Dubai to the world outside and was potentially a springboard of success for future projects for the production company. “The 2.7 billion dirham ($735m) Dubai Canal was inaugurated on the evening of November 9, amidst much fanfare and had several dignitaries and VVIPs in attendance. There was a live show and lots of grandeur around it, which had to be recreated for TV. So we treated it as two events rather than one in order to capture the essence of the ceremony. We had to make sure that not a single moment was missed. We had to deliver more than 100% and make this a success,” he says.

40 cameras, both wired and wireless, were controlled by two OB vans and more than 140 crew were on-site to manage the show. The two OB vans were placed strategically along the length of the water canal at a distance of 3.5km, with one van acting as the hub that delivered the final feed to the broadcaster. Planning was key, according to Commercial and Production Director Nabil Abou Samra, the in-house director. He covered the VIPs gathered for His Highness to announce the opening of Dubai Water Canal by lighting up the canal. Another director, Paul Van Koelen, was roped in from the Netherlands to handle the performances. Both were posted in different OB vans. “We filmed the VVIPs during the opening ceremony and as they toured the canal. The cameras placed on the boat also filmed the performances held in the canal, as well as the views from the launch of the waterfall and fireworks on the other end of the canal. A Steadicam was constantly following the VVIPs to capture their expressions and
Pierre Tabet, Managing Director, 7 Production

“The 2.7 billion dirham ($735m) Dubai Canal was inaugurated on the evening of November 9, amidst much fanfare and had several dignitaries and VIPs in attendance. There was a live show and lots of grandeur around it, which had to be recreated for TV. So we treated it as two events rather than one in order to capture the essence of the ceremony. We had to make sure that not a single moment was missed. We had to deliver more than 100% and make this a success.”

reliable main and backup link between the two vans, explains Tony Jabbour, Head of Engineering and Operations at 7 Production.

“The two signals were being received and delivered between OB 1 to 2 and OB 2 to 1. The vans also had intercom – both the vans could see each other and interact with each other as one single OB. While the fibre cable was the main transport mechanism between the two vans, there were two backups for this setup, one via SNG and the other through RF. We had three plans to secure our transmission and live feed.”

Tabet further adds that multiple backups were required to make the production glitch-free and 100% reliable.

“We couldn’t risk it, so a number of backups were established.”

It was not an easy job for 7 Production when the team started preparing for it four days before the actual ceremony. The reactions during the show. I handled these camera feeds from one of the OB vans, while the other one had Paul, who took care of camera feeds that captured the laser and light shows, fireworks and live performances,” says Abou Samra.

A large screen was also installed at the venue to showcase footage from the Dubai Creek opening from the 1960s and 70s. This was also an important part of the event and was covered as part of the inauguration by Abou Samra. It presented a mix of the old and the new with some shots from the live performances as well. Host broadcaster Dubai TV posted two reporters in the VIP area for interviews and commentary, and on one of the bridges over the canal, which were also filmed. Five SNG vans for main and backup feeds transmitted the signals to satellite for live broadcast.

With no line of sight between the two vans, the fibre optic cable installed provided the most

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“We were prepared for different scenarios because in live events, things rarely go as planned. We had covered the entire walkway where the sheikhs would walk and also provisioned to cover the area in case they decided to take a detour. As it happened, they did take a detour from the main path, but we had that covered too and did not miss any crucial moments.”

Nabil Abou Samra, Commercial and Production Director, 7 Production.

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Nabil Abou Samra, Commercial and Production Director, 7 Production.
Two helicopters were deployed with one Cineflex each for aerial footage. These were also equipped with two powerful Vislink wireless systems of five Watt each and covered a circular area of three kilometres around the canal.

Another vantage point that captured panoramic views of the canal and the ceremony was a camera from the top of the JW Marquis Hotel, one of the highest buildings in the vicinity. This RF Relay system captured all the signals transmitted from the wireless camera systems, decoded them and multiplexed them into one signal. These were then sent back to the OB vans, where they were re-multiplexed and distributed to receivers to decode the RF signals.

Having 12 wireless cameras on the premises that stretched less than 5 km was a big challenge, says Jabbour.

“There were far too many frequencies so we had to use filters with permission from TRA. Special RF spectrum analyser tools were used to scan the frequencies in this area and we were able to choose the best and the ‘cleanest’ frequencies to avoid any disruption on our signals. As each wireless camera had to have a different frequency, we used 12 to 13 frequencies,” he says.

One of the OBs acted as the hub that delivered the final feed to the broadcaster. The footage from all 40 cameras was available to both OBs, where the directors created a single final feed for the broadcaster. “Initially we were asked to provide different signals to different parties who would be present on the premises, but this didn’t work out to be a viable option as the venue would have been too crowded in...

Tony Jabbour, Head of Engineering and Operations, 7 Production
that case. So we decided against it and provided a single feed to the broadcaster, who then distributed the international feed from their end. The feed was in," adds Jabbour.

The production house had all the equipment required to cover the opening ceremony. A traditional OB setup was used in the production, although Jabbour points out that 7 Production is now readying for IP productions as well.

“We have not used IP in our productions so far because the ecosystem is not yet ready for it. An IP setup in such scenarios is ideal but the infrastructure should support it. Also, the client should be ready to handle IP productions. There are several issues with IP, such as bandwidth, compression, cost and engineering, which require cross-functional skills and knowledge,” he points out.

Jabbour believes that broadcast technology will eventually change the approach for many types of productions, creating new workflows, but “the migration from SDI baseband to IP video routing/networking is imperative”.

“This coming NAB, I am expecting a lot of development in IP to make it a mainstream technology,” he adds.

The production house is in the final stages of acquiring a 4K OB van, claimed to be the first-of-its-kind in the region, which will be capable of an end-to-end 4K production. Once ready, the OB van will be used for HD as well as 4K productions as the company gears up for 2020 and 2022 events.

“We are equipped to handle seven big productions simultaneously, thanks to our vast inventory of equipment and our robust OB fleet comprising seven large and medium trucks as well as flyaway kits. We bought a few lenses for the canal opening for optimally capturing bird’s eye footage,” says Tabet.

A key highlight of the Dubai Canal opening ceremony was the play of light and sound, which had to be captured in pristine quality for TV viewers to feel they were attending the event live.

“Lighting can be a major challenge in filming. The lights have to be camera friendly, otherwise the footage, despite the best cameras and lenses, will not be up to the mark. We worked with the events company to use lights that were suitable for filming. The role of the camera operator is critical in doing this right. They should understand how the camera sensor and the lens will react when exposed to a certain type of light and adjust the cameras accordingly, to capture the right amount of light to produce quality imagery. Several mood lights were installed on-site especially for the event. We didn’t change any of those and recreated the same effect on TV screens,” Tabet says.

“It’s passion that drives us. With every new event, we learn something new. We were prepared for different scenarios because in live events rarely do things go as planned. We had covered the entire walkway where the sheikhs would walk and also provisioned to cover the area in case they decided to take a detour. As it happened, they did take a detour from the main path, but we had that covered too and did not miss any crucial moments.

“The Dubai Water Canal opening led to many more opportunities for us. Our client RTA was extremely happy with the coverage. You can achieve anything with proper planning, and for this production we drew up a map of our entire camera network and the execution just fell in place. At the end of it, we produced a memorable event. In fact, we bagged another high-profile project as soon as this one was completed. 7 Production was contracted to cover the opening of the Etihad Museum with all the seven rulers of the seven emirates of the UAE,” says Abou Samra.

The two OB vans feature:

- 34 x Sony camera HDC 1700
- 4 x Sony SuperSlomo camera HDC-3300R
- 2 x helicopter
- 2 x Cineflex
- 12 x Visiling wireless system
- 40 x Canon lenses: X1100 / X95 / X86 / X712 / X660 / HJ40 / HJ22 / HJ17 / HJ11
- Vinten & Cartoni tripod
- 10 x Stanton Jimmy Jib
- Kayak HD 3.5ME vision mixer
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US-based virtual reality expert, Lewis Smithingham, was in Dubai for DIFF recently, to explore the use of VR technology in the region. In an interview with BroadcastPro ME, Smithingham discusses VR and where it is headed.
For those who didn’t attend DIFF, was there a particular highlight of the event for you?

One of the highlights for me at DIFF was the Embodied Media Project from Japan. In talking with UAE filmmakers during the event, they were just as enthusiastic because they could see the potential for them and the consumer/viewer of tomorrow. Embodied Media’s goal is to create future media technologies that record, share, enhance and create experiences that entertain, enchant and empower us.

Is there really a VR scene in Dubai?

Before I visited Dubai, I thought it might have been in the gestation stage – between conception and birth – and for that, I apologise. Dubai is one of the fastest growing and most progressive cities in...
the world, and from my brief visit I saw some very progressive studios and marketers who are seriously looking at how they can use the technology to entertain people and promote products.

I know you were in Amsterdam for IBC and am not certain if you had an opportunity to visit the Virtual Reality Cinema, but I would guess that there are probably creative groups working right now to open facilities soon in Dubai. Knowing how progressive IMAX is and how quickly they are moving to open the next-generation theatres, I'm certain the city is on their roadmap.

Why cinemas, you might ask? It is because of the richness of the content you participate in. Every time you put on an HMD and enter an immersive story, it is never the same viewing twice.

As I alluded to before, you can go to the centre of the earth, interact with non-existent characters, run 100kph, fly unassisted and vanquish monsters or your enemy. It's not just a cartoon; the viewer is right in the middle of everything and it feels and sounds remarkably realistic.

There are other firms I heard of that are using VR to design and sell building projects. Once the person puts on the HMD, he or she can look inside, outside of a building – for example – from the top down, inside and out, walking through rooms that your mind says are real. So you know before the ground is broken that you're going to really like the completed work.

Are there applications and opportunities for VR in the broadcast industry? Talking with IBC attendees and the people at Giga Works, it is already in the experimental usage phase in Dubai. Broadcast opportunities have been in the testing trial phase through most of last year for us, and we are being done in 180. It's part of the 360/VR creative process. The most frustrating part of the 360/VR creative process is stitching [the process by which multiple camera angles are fused together into a spherical video panorama].

We've been working with Nokia Ozo on projects for Ozo Live. I feel full 360 coverage and streaming is necessary to give the viewer the honest feeling of being at the event, viewing the play and shot from every angle. The same is true of streaming a concert or play, because well planned and executed VR capture, production and streaming gives the viewer a rich, satisfying experience that is hard to explain until you see it and feel it.

Networks, studios and specific shows have also been doing 360-degree specials that have been enthusiastically reviewed by the specials’ producers and the audience.

Last year, our firm produced the Conan O'Brien 360 special. We shot the entire show in 360 with multiple camera rigs, with post-production being done behind the scenes to finalize the entire special in record time for delayed broadcast streaming. It is a tremendous effort on the part of the production/post-production team, but the show owners couldn’t believe the outstanding response they received from the audience.

All of this right now is still in the experience development phase at the present time, but I am completely confident that you'll see more and more of it over the next two years, and soon it will be standard viewing fare. There have already been sporting events and TV show specials produced here in Dubai, and the volume is only going to increase.

By 2018, I am confident that every network and studio will have regular 360 specials, including dramas, documentaries, regularly scheduled shows, concerts, plays and sporting events that people throughout the UAE will be putting on their HMDs.
to enjoy. Once you experience it, it is just too compelling!

What other uses for VR do you see here in Dubai and elsewhere around the globe? They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but VR lets you experience a product, a service and a location. The technology, properly executed, I believe, will be a major marketing tool in the coming years.

You can experience a travel location. In fact, in a couple of hours, you could visit a dozen exotic places and almost feel as though you had been there. You can do breathtaking, risky adventures like climbing the Himalayas, skydiving, scuba diving in spectacular locations... almost anything you can think of in the privacy of your HMD. You could take off your HMD and be as exhausted as though you did everything in the location in five action-packed days.

Want to test drive multiple cars but don’t want to waste weeks and months doing it? You can go to a kiosk or stream the content to your home and put them through their paces, so you know exactly which you want before you buy. You can try new furnishings in your home, test out new tools, try new layouts to your house before you remodel and know you'll be completely satisfied.

Will VR be mainstream production and viewing this year? Let me first be a little cautionary, because too many people have oversold and overhyped VR, saying it is the complete solution for tomorrow’s media and entertainment industry. The cameras are very good today; the HMDs are good and getting better, and the prices are now very reasonable for consumers. The prices will continue to drop and the gear will get better. As I mentioned earlier, I feel by 2018 everything will be feature-rich and ready for everyone to experience and use without even thinking twice about it.

Over the past four years that I’ve been doing VR, we have tested and used almost every piece of shooting and production gear that has been introduced. The professional cameras available today are very good. People are amazed at how much content we capture when we’re doing a 360 or VR project, and you can easily use 25-50 terabytes of storage a day. It’s an important part of the VR equation and as we shoot in 4K and HDR, it’s only going to increase. High-performance computers and high-throughput, expandable storage are mandatory!

We are still learning a lot about what works and what doesn’t for the viewer. When we produced Invisible, we shot and reshoot hours of content, reviewed it – and some worked and delivered the viewer experience everyone wanted, while some didn’t.

Production and editing is a labour-intensive process that requires a different approach for the director and the filmmaker. The most frustrating part of the 360/VR creative process is stitching the process by which multiple camera angles are fused together into a spherical video panorama. While the software is steadily improving, it is still very laborious and expensive – often $10,000-plus per finished minute.

But once you put on an HMD and immerse yourself in really good content... you’re sold.

Why am I sure it will succeed? This is one of the few technologies in history that all of the major players – Intel, Qualcomm, Nvidia, AMD, Samsung, HTC, Adobe, Avid, Google, Facebook, Sony... have weighed in and invested in early. That has had a profound effect on how quickly solid and economical products have become available.

“By 2018, I am confident that every network and studio will have regular 360 specials, including dramas, documentaries, regularly scheduled shows, concerts, plays and sporting events that people throughout the UAE will be putting on their HMDs to enjoy. Once you experience it, it is just too compelling!”

Lewis Smithingham, CTO, 30ninjas

for every filmmaker, and the key to a great 360/VR film is that we constantly think about the audience. This is completely new and unique,
With growing content, there is a growing need to store these assets safely. Sony’s Nabil El Madbak says optical discs are a cost-effective and safe storage option.

We all know content is king, but just as important is the need to prepare, protect and preserve the content through viable and long-lasting solutions. Within the video production industry alone, data-heavy content such as HD, 4K and high frame rate videos is exponentially growing by the day. These newly created assets need to be managed effectively, stored safely and used along with the old assets.

Broadcasters, production companies and other content holders are not only handling large and growing quantities of daily content, but are also much concerned with digitising the massive VTR assets currently sitting on shelves. As it becomes increasingly possible to effectively manage and rapidly search these materials via shared networks, new potential is discovered for the reuse of such assets.

As data volumes rise, so do storage costs, making it essential to implement storage systems that distinguish between hot (frequently accessed), warm (occasionally accessed) and cold (infrequently accessed) data, and select the best storage media for each. The main obstacle for the content owners is to ensure the ability to preserve, access and reuse their valuable assets without incurring repeated investment and huge running costs.
The requirements of long-term reliability, the ability to maintain large quantities of data at relatively low cost and the ability to maintain data integrity in green environments with limited environmental controls are essential.

Optical disc storage fills all of these requirements, and is therefore ideal for both warm and cold storage. The new technology, with an open and non-proprietary format, involves the use of multiple bare discs contained within a robust cartridge and a dedicated disc drive unit with an associated software driver able to manipulate the discs individually, providing a seamless read/write capability.

The non-contact read/write technology offers the ability to access data with remarkable speed compared to tape data that necessitates the physical fast-forwarding and rewinding of a tape 800 metres or more in length until the location of the required data is reached. Also, it’s never going to jam, tangle or snap.

than hard disc storage systems or discs are considerably more durable going to jam, tangle or snap. Data is reached. Also, it’s never until the location of the required tape 800 metres or more in length forwarding and rewinding of a necessitates the physical fast-speed compared to tape data that

magnetic tape-based media, with a 100-year shelf life. The system is highly reliable and optimised for long-term archiving. It also succeeds in keeping down total archiving costs and has a low environmental footprint. It offers accessibility and high speed, and can be scalable to fit the users’ needs, which can begin with a small archive stored on a few shelves and expand into a large library as data accumulates. While the professional AV media industry has moved steadily from its tape-based origins toward file-based workflows for acquisition, post-production and distribution, the archive domain continues to remain largely tape-based. An alternative modern-day solution, the Optical Disc Archive (ODA), has been created to help organisations achieve safe long-term storage of video, photos, text and other important digital assets.

Both LTO magnetic tape and ODA are viable storage options. The most common complaint from the user community is the constant need to migrate valuable assets from one form of tape media to the next version upgrade, simply to maintain a viable archive. This requirement for copy migration every two generations (approximately five to six years) incurs substantial media and labour costs.

By leveraging optical technologies and inter-generational compatibility of optical discs, ODA technology can store important data safely, eliminating the need for migration every few years. This eliminates the need for media, hardware and software reinvestment”

Nabil El Madbak, Technology Marketing Manager at Sony Professional Solutions MEA

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ODA technology can serve as the core storage architecture, serving as the deep archive, whereas data tape technology, where you have to migrate your content or you can’t access it at your technology moves on, the ODA media written today will be readable by the drives of tomorrow. The bottom line is with the region predominantly being tape-based, it is now time to transition towards the future.

The first generation of Optical Disc Archive System was unveiled, which doubles the capacity of a single cartridge and doubles read/write speeds over the previous generation, accommodating 4K video in real time, and maintains backwards read compatibility with first-generation optical disc drives. ODA can serve as the core of highly productive archive systems capable of managing and storing valuable, high-volume data – including 4K video, future-generation video, older video assets and multimedia video content.

The technology is future-proof and achieves a revolutionary jump in the world of data storage ideal for any circumstance. Now and in future, this system delivers an efficient, secure and reliable archive solution. Unlike data tape technology, where you have to migrate your content or you can’t access it as your technology moves on, the ODA media written today will be readable by the drives of tomorrow.

The Optical Disc Archive System is ideal for both warm and cold storage. The new technology, with an open and non-proprietary format, involves the use of multiple bare discs contained within a robust cartridge and a dedicated disc drive unit with an associated software driver able to manipulate the discs individually, providing a seamless read/write capability.

By leveraging optical technologies and inter-generational compatibility of optical discs, ODA technology can store important data safely, eliminating the need for migration every few years. This eliminates the need for media, hardware and software reinvestment.

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Nabil El Madbak, Technology Marketing Manager at Sony Professional Solutions MEA

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In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Abdul Hadi Al Sheikh, Executive Director of Abu Dhabi TV, speaks about how the broadcaster is reinventing itself to brace for competition.

The launch of Majid Kids TV, YAS TV, EDDIE TV further demonstrates how Abu Dhabi Media is ensuring that bespoke and engaging programming is combined with the latest technological advances to provide pioneering digital entertainment in the region.

What are some of Abu Dhabi Media’s future projects when it comes to digitising content? Will it be easier for audiences to access? Abu Dhabi Media is forging ahead in its strategic objective to advance its digital content. This progress will allow us to meet growing demands for high-quality video content online. Through securing easy accessibility to our content for audiences throughout the region, we have been able to reinforce our position as one of the fastest growing and most successful multimedia and entertainment organisations in the Middle East.

How is ADM preparing for competition? Abu Dhabi Media has already adopted a five-year strategy, which includes a two-year goal to transform and modernise the company across its digital and TV platforms. The launch of TV.ae was an important shift for digital media in the UAE as well as the region. The service provides access to more than 6,000 hours of content which can be viewed on multiple mobile devices simultaneously. This is just one example of how Abu Dhabi Media is constantly innovating and seeking strategic partnerships to further develop our media platforms. Going forward, Abu Dhabi Media will continue to embrace digital media as a fundamental factor to building upon the 27 brands across multiple platforms. Producing powerful and intelligent content remains our key objective. A number of locally produced documentaries, such as the Megastructures episode on the Abu Dhabi Super Tunnel, demonstrate the company’s commitment to creating high-quality programmes which highlight the region’s accomplishments.

The board of directors has also made impressive structural changes, such as hiring a number of talented Emiratis. This further demonstrates ADM’s commitment to creating high-quality programmes which highlight the region’s accomplishments.

What kind of content is your key differentiator? What’s your strategy to retain your viewership? Abu Dhabi Media has made significant investments in content production, which includes large-scale, high-quality productions that are designed to engage and entertain audiences. Our content is differentiated by the emphasis on exclusive content delivery to a vast range of audiences. Our brands are ideally positioned to cater to our Emirati audience, our Arabic-speaking audience, our younger viewers through Majid and our English-speaking audience following our adoption of EDGE HD.

Abu Dhabi Drama TV’s recent conversion to HD represents another milestone as we continue to utilise the most innovative technology to further enhance our content and the quality of our programming. By boosting its weekend segments through the introduction of Hollywood movies and top US television series to air alongside pan Arab, Turkish, Mexican and Spanish programmes, we have further widened our reach to ensure Abu Dhabi Drama TV becomes the entertainment destination of choice. Abu Dhabi TV network already has a community of 65 million viewers and is constantly evolving its content to find new ways to further improve its reach.

Any stats to share with us about viewing, ratings and so on? Abu Dhabi Channel witnessed an increase of 11% in its viewership figures in 2015 compared to 2014. The channel has retained these figures throughout 2016. The UAE is one of the most engaged countries in the world in terms of social media. To this end, Abu Dhabi Media adopted a clear strategy to utilise its digital media platforms to showcase tailored programming to reach new audiences. As a result, ADM has increased its social media community by 34% during two years to more than 60 million followers, which is the highest for any media organisation in the region. As social media and digital platforms and trends evolve, ADM will continue to evolve its content.

Have you increased investment in content? If yes, by what percentage? Our sports and entertainment channels have flourished as a result of large investments over the past six years. Our capacity for sports coverage reached a new and exciting phase when Abu Dhabi Sports received exclusive rights to broadcast the European qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup. The 2017 Copa Del Rey, and Spanish and Italian Super Cups will also be aired as part of the channels’ football coverage, while Abu Dhabi Sports also features the fan channels of Manchester City, Bayern Munich, Roma and Juventus. Viewers can also enjoy live matches, and pre- and post-match analysis from the Arabian Gulf League (AGL). In terms of serial content, one of our new series introduced over Ramadan was Ritaj, which has since gained widespread acclaim from our audience and won a number of prestigious industry awards. The hard-hitting drama series, the first episode of which aired on the first evening of Ramadan 2016, was viewed by 72% of Emiratis and since been watched by more than 48 million people across the Arab world. The official hashtag of the series picked up more than 250 million impressions throughout the month of Ramadan. Ritaj demonstrates our ongoing commitment to producing compelling content that deals with extremely important contemporary issues that reflect the interests and opinions of the wider community. Viewers can look forward to new and exclusive content throughout 2017. The channel is constantly evolving its content to find new ways to further improve its reach.

There is growing interest in digital media these days. How is Abu Dhabi Media gearing up to be more digitally equipped? Reflecting the UAE Vision 2021 and Abu Dhabi Vision 2030, we aim to strengthen national identity across all our digital operations and utilise our platforms to share the region’s stories and accomplishments with the world. Abu Dhabi Media is dedicated to producing dynamic multimedia and entertainment organisations in the Middle East.

The launch of Majid Kids TV, YAS TV, EDDIE TV further demonstrates how Abu Dhabi Media is ensuring that bespoke and engaging programming is combined with the latest technological advances to provide pioneering digital entertainment in the region.

2030, we aim to strengthen national identity across all our digital operations and utilise our platforms to share the region’s stories and accomplishments with the world.

by the emphasis on exclusive content delivery to a vast range of audiences. Our brands are ideally positioned to cater to our Emirati audience, our Arabic-speaking audience, our younger viewers through Majid and our English-speaking audience following our adoption of EDGE HD.

Abu Dhabi Drama TV’s recent conversion to HD represents another milestone as we continue to utilise the most innovative technology to further enhance our content and the quality of our programming. By boosting its weekend segments through the introduction of Hollywood movies and top US television series to air alongside pan Arab, Turkish, Mexican and Spanish programmes, we have further widened our reach to ensure Abu Dhabi Drama TV becomes the entertainment destination of choice. Abu Dhabi TV network already has a community of 65 million viewers and is constantly evolving its content to find new ways to further improve its reach.

Any stats to share with us about viewing, ratings and so on? Abu Dhabi Channel witnessed an increase of 11% in its viewership figures in 2015 compared to 2014. The channel has retained these figures throughout 2016. The UAE is one of the most engaged countries in the world in terms of social media. To this end, Abu Dhabi Media adopted a clear strategy to utilise its digital media platforms to showcase tailored programming to reach new audiences. As a result, ADM has increased its social media community by 34% during two years to more than 60 million followers, which is the highest for any media organisation in the region. As social media and digital platforms and trends evolve, ADM will continue to evolve its content.

Have you increased investment in content? If yes, by what percentage? Our sports and entertainment channels have flourished as a result of large investments over the past six years. Our capacity for sports coverage reached a new and exciting phase when Abu Dhabi Sports received exclusive rights to broadcast the European qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup. The 2017 Copa Del Rey, and Spanish and Italian Super Cups will also be aired as part of the channels’ football coverage, while Abu Dhabi Sports also features the fan channels of Manchester City, Bayern Munich, Roma and Juventus. Viewers can also enjoy live matches, and pre- and post-match analysis from the Arabian Gulf League (AGL). In terms of serial content, one of our new series introduced over Ramadan was Ritaj, which has since gained widespread acclaim from our audience and won a number of prestigious industry awards. The hard-hitting drama series, the first episode of which aired on the first evening of Ramadan 2016, was viewed by 72% of Emiratis and since been watched by more than 48 million people across the Arab world. The official hashtag of the series picked up more than 250 million impressions throughout the month of Ramadan. Ritaj demonstrates our ongoing commitment to producing compelling content that deals with extremely important contemporary issues that reflect the interests and opinions of the wider community. Viewers can look forward to new and exclusive content throughout 2017. The channel is constantly evolving its content to find new ways to further improve its reach.
The internet has dramatically changed the way we consume media, and this has had a major impact on how we watch television. Much of today’s content is now accessible through services delivered over IP and can be accessed through internet-connected smart TVs, web platforms and browsers, and channel- or broadcaster-oriented mobile apps.

With that comes varied viewing options – audiences can watch TV whenever and wherever they want. This has provided audiences with the power to start, stop, pause and rewind what they’re watching, giving them more control than ever before. But it’s also empowered them with greater freedom to look elsewhere, should the quality of the content, or how it plays, not be up to standard.

Delivering larger TV formats whenever and wherever

The challenge now faced by broadcasters, content owners, telcos and OTT operators is how to deliver higher quality programming in increasingly large formats via the internet to multiple destinations on many devices. Traditional broadcast meant anyone who received the signal could tune in to a channel, and the number of people watching had no impact on the strength of that signal. IP-delivered TV services, however, deliver content via unicast, with every viewer receiving an individual IP stream. This can place a huge strain on a service, where more bandwidth required as it increases in popularity and new formats such as 4K emerge.

To put this into perspective, one million people watching an HD programme online increases the streaming capacity from a broadcast requirement of about three Mbit/s to more than three million Mbit/s of simultaneous capacity. When it comes to 4K, that figure quadruples. While broadband speeds in homes are fast enough to watch more than one programme at once, this doesn’t mean the bandwidth is the same all the way from the TV show’s source. Unforeseen blockages in the delivery network can dramatically affect performance.

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Having the ability to scale a TV CDN up and down depending on demand is particularly advantageous. As the use of IP-delivered TV continues to increase, OTT operators and broadcasters need to be able to cope with more viewers accessing their service, potentially at the same time. Netflix’s management of its surge in users over the last few years is a great example of how implementing a dedicated delivery network can allow huge growth in demand while maintaining high quality and consistent performance when it comes to content delivery.

In the same vein, a dedicated TV CDN is also much more cost-effective for a broadcaster or OTT operator. When using a generic CDN, scaling services and adopting more bandwidth to cope with higher demand can become costly. The implementation and management of a bespoke delivery network, however, lets users use the network in whatever way they need, keeping maintenance costs to a minimum. To give this same context, a recent business case shows that implementing your own TV CDN infrastructure becomes worth it when you have an average of 250,000 users watching content on your service for a minimum of an hour a day.

“Running a TV CDN has many advantages over using CDN as a service, particularly when operating in a region where there will be a high demand for particular programming, such as Arabic content owners operating within the Middle East. CDN as a service is better suited when demand will be less concentrated in one particular area and users are evenly spread far and wide”. Göran Appelquist, CTO, Edgeware

Does a dedicated TV CDN deliver the best value when serving regional TV markets like the Middle East, or is using CDN as a service a better proposition? Göran Appelquist, CTO of Edgeware, explores.
One of the main reasons we're finding more broadcasters choosing to implement their own dedicated CDN for TV delivery is the control it gives them over their network. By using a TV CDN, operators can offer a personalised viewing experience with digital ad insertion. The ability to insert or replace in-content adverts when content is requested by users can be used with live, catch-up and VOD programming for both IPTV and OTT services. Because they control their own network, users can monitor and analyse all aspects of their TV services. Detailed TV analytics provide user data which includes network behaviour in real time, using data sources like devices used, network applications and integrated third-party CDNs.

Being able to analyse user details gives broadcasters a better understanding of the relationship between network performance and customer satisfaction. This ultimately lets operators design and deliver an enhanced viewing experience for its users.

The beauty of owning a dedicated TV CDN is that it can also generate income when it’s not being used by its owner. While an OTT provider or broadcaster can use its TV CDN for the delivery of its TV services, the network can simultaneously be rented out to other content owners or distributors to leverage additional revenue streams. This level of ownership wouldn’t be possible when renting space from someone else. The owner has complete control of its network and the traffic being delivered on it. Using a generic CDN means users don’t have that kind of visibility, increasing the likelihood of buffering, delays or glitches in output.

Getting closer to more viewers
Network operators, cable companies, broadcasters and OTT providers can all scale their TV delivery to huge volumes of viewers with a TV CDN. With this unique and scalable three-layer architecture designed specifically for TV, they can distribute much of their content nearer to the viewers with no buffering, delays or glitches, guaranteeing performance and saving on network and third-party CDN costs, as well as learning more about how the content is consumed.

“One million people watching an HD programme online increases the streaming capacity from a broadcast requirement of about three Mbit/s to more like three million Mbit/s of simultaneous capacity. When it comes to 4K, that figure quadruples”

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WHAT’S ON SHOW

The MENA region’s broadcast and satellite industries will converge for three days of product exhibition and conferences at CABSAT 2017. We bring you a preview.

CABSAT, which will be held March 21-23, will host 911 exhibitors from 113 countries and is expected to be attended by more than 13,000 media and entertainment professionals.

The show will have a dedicated section for augmented and virtual reality this year. According to market research from CCS Insight, the total sales of virtual and augmented reality devices will soar from 2.5m in 2015 to 24m by 2018, becoming a business worth more than $4bn. The number of active VR users is forecast to reach 71m by 2018, with a portion of these growing figures expected to be from the Middle East, as the region is believed to be one of the fastest growing regions expected to reach 171m by 2018, with a portion of these growing figures expected to be from the Middle East, as the region is believed to be one of the fastest growing regions.

Another area of interest is 4K or Ultra-HD, which is becoming a reality as more broadcast networks move towards it. The forecast mentions that the number of active 4K users is forecast to reach 2.5m in 2015 to 24m by 2018, becoming a business worth more than $4bn. The number of active 4K users is forecast to reach 71m by 2018, with a portion of these growing figures expected to be from the Middle East, as the region is believed to be one of the fastest growing regions.

Experts will discuss how content creation and distribution can be adapted to the changes taking place due to TV everywhere. The changing landscape of filmed entertainment will be discussed at length as part of the youth debate.

Case studies on transition to digital broadcasting and monetising multi-platform services will also be presented at the conferences. Other highlights of the show include the Content Marketplace, SatExpo, GVP Satellite Hub Summit and NABShow. CABSAT TV will be back for the third time in a row, with interviews and news from the show floor during the three days of CABSAT.

The expanded Content Delivery Hub will focus on OTT technologies that facilitate the delivery of video and digital content on various platforms for anywhere, anytime consumption.

Turkish S1 brings 4K on wheels

SRTEK Sound and Video Technologies will introduce its Mini OB 4K van at CABSAT. The van boasts a Mercedes Sprinter long frame with a generator powered by the vehicle’s engine. It houses separate audio and video production areas that cover a full six metres of the 7.3m vehicle length. This dual space design accommodates up to seven operators inside the vehicle while providing 138RU rack space for various equipment. "Our 4K Mads Mabo concept allows us to fit this compact vehicle with up to eight 4K cameras and two ME 4K vision mixers, 48x8 4K router, four-channel 4K event highlights (live) playback system and full surround audio mixing capabilities," said Deniz Gürses, GM at SRTEK Sound and Video Technologies Ltd.

Pixel Power focuses on playout and graphics

Pixel Power will focus on playout and graphics automation at CABSAT 2017. The presentations will feature on-premise, virtualised and cloud solutions.

"Media businesses today faced with the many challenges of delivering rich content to multiple platforms need to implement new approaches to delivering content," said James Gilbert, CEO of Pixel Power. "Working in cooperation with Amazon Web Services, Pixel Power has delivered broadcast playout solutions with sophisticated 3D graphics, DVE moves, live feeds and manual control, all in the cloud. "Software-defined solutions are redefining the way we work today," he added. "Besides the advanced automation proposition, Pixel Power is also demonstrating new ways to use its core graphics products at CABSAT 2017. Used for automated content creation for broadcast around the world, Factory adds a layer of intelligence to Pixel Power’s Cloudy graphics and media management to generate large quantities of sophisticated clips such as promos, trailers and other marketing content. Creative editors design templates to set the brand values of the channel and Factory automatically populates them, saving 50% in post."

Infomir to showcase Stalker

Infomir will be exhibiting at CABSAT for the second year in a row. The company will showcase its Stalker Middleware, which is tailored to organise IPTV and OTT projects of different scales around the world.

"Features like PIP, multi-language, parental control, CAS and DRM system support, and customisation of the user interface ensure this solution meets the latest requirements of the market," said Maliarov Egor, Business Development Director, Pay TV Solutions at Infomir.

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V-Nova features PERSEUS

A Marketing, V-Nova Ltd, commented: “We have just announced a partnership with Turkish distributor Arttek, who will act as an official reseller of V-Nova PERSEUS in Turkey. This helps us extend our footprint in Turkey and expand our distribution network.”

Adder creates the link

Adder Technology will once again showcase its IP-based KVM solutions at this year’s CABSAT. The company’s stand will feature an interactive technical demonstration of its flagship solution, Adder Link Infinity.

The team will also be showcasing some of the company’s latest innovations, such as the CCS-PRO8 command and control extender with USB extender. The Adder CCS-PRO8 allows operators to control up to eight machines across eight displays using just one mouse and keyboard. It is suitable for improving ergonomics in a control setting where space is at a premium or management of multiple computers from one station is required. Featuring FreeFlow technology, the Adder CCS-PRO8 enables users to move from one display to the next simply by moving the mouse across screen borders. Both the Adder CCS-PRO8 and AdderLink XDFP will be available later this year in Q3.

Stand E2-52

AVT brings more MAGIC

AVT will present new features to the MAGIC Telephone Hybrids TED at CABSAT.

The MAGIC TH2plus, MAGIC TH4 and MAGIC TH3Pro now support the Ember+ protocol, which can be used to easily exchange control and signalling commands over IP with mixing consoles from manufacturers such as Lawo and other consoles supporting Ember+. Calls to the telephone hybrids can be accepted via a button on the mixer and switched to Pretalk or ON AIR. The user can also establish a call from the mixer. Complicated cabling via TTL contacts is no longer necessary. For DHD mixing consoles, the AVT hybrids offer additional to the Ember+ protocol, the DHD SetLogic feature. DHD SetLogic can be used to transmit commands over IP from the AVT hybrids to the mixer and vice versa. If the mixing console also supports Ember+, both variants can be mixed.

For the MAGIC TH3Pro VoIP telephone hybrids, a Dante module which supports the AES3 standard is now available.

Stand E2-92

Expanding our Reach to New Horizons:

SATEXPO featuring CONTENT MARKETPLACE and CABSAT is an exhibition for all satellite-led communications, technologies and business solutions for the MEASA region.

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**SIA Industry Report 2016**
Exterity to feature new digital signage

Exterity will bring the newly updated ArtioSign digital signage application to CABSAT. ArtioSign is designed for organisations that want to install multiple displays to enhance employee, visitor and guest experiences by offering feature-rich, fully configurable digital signage that integrates seamlessly with Exterity’s IP video system. The CABSAT stand will showcase ArtioSign’s new, intuitive scheduling and management capabilities, enabling users to schedule complete signage campaigns to the exact minute, and target messages to the right audiences at the right time. Signage can also be updated on the move using ArtioSign on an iPad or Android tablet, as well as from the desktop, which can be particularly useful in a large or expansive venue, such as a stadium or airport. ArtioSign combines live news updates, tailored messaging, branding and graphics with TV and video in a single screen, together serving to strengthen communications.

Stand A5-30

Telestream highlights product integration

This is the first CABSAT show since Telestream acquired file-based quality control specialist Vidchecker. The company will showcase the integration between Vidchecker and Vantage, highlighting the latest updates in Vidchecker and the operational efficiencies these two platforms bring to their users. A particular focus for Telestream at CABSAT will be low video streaming. Telestream has been developing streaming solutions since 2009 and has more than 50,000 active licence holders of its Wirecast live streaming production platform, which last year became one of the first streaming platforms to support Facebook Live. Telestream will also highlight its Lightspeed Live Stream enterprise-class live multiscreen encoding, packaging and distribution system. It can be deployed as a standalone solution for low multiscreen streaming services or combined with the Vantage Media Processing Platform via the optional Lightspeed Live Capture product.

Hall 2, Stand 208

Aspera speeds up file transfer

At CABSAT, Aspera will showcase its complete portfolio of high-speed file transfer software and automation solutions for the broadcast and media industries. The stand will focus on the core Aspera platform, Aspera FASP. Built on Aspera’s FASP transport technology, Aspera FASP enables any organisation, small or large, to establish a branded web-based presence for the fast, easy and secure exchange and delivery of any size file-based media or data between end users across separate organisations, combining multiple storage platforms. Francois Guerrel, Senior Director of Worldwide Marketing at Aspera, said: “At CABSAT, Aspera will showcase multiple breakthrough capabilities and advanced features powered by the next generation of our patented FASP transport technology.” He added that Aspera has invested in local resources to cater for the expected growth in the region, both technically and commercially. “Growth, as forecast, will lead to additional resources being implemented. With IBM’s public global strategy, the addition of solutions focused on media will inevitably drive the investment in the region further over time.”

Stand D2-41
At CABSAT, Interra Systems will demonstrate integrated and intuitive QC monitoring solutions available in the market. A key highlight will be HEVC and 4K support across all of the company’s products, including ORION-OTT, a software-based monitoring solution for adaptive bitrate (ABR) content; ORION real-time content monitoring and video analysis systems; BATON automated, file-based QC; and VEGA media analysers.

Verimatrix secures content

Verimatrix will highlight its role in revenue enablement and protection across major industry trends, including premium UHD deployments, multi-DRM options for over-the-top (OTT) video and high-integrity video analytics. Booth demonstrations will showcase how Verimatrix can enhance revenue security by taking more proactive approaches to combat revenue threats and identify emerging opportunities that can further monetise its business. Watermarking is becoming increasingly critical in the MENA region because UHD content offers greater scope for pirates to copy, even just by camcording, and then redistributing over the internet. This threat is amplified by the parallel rise of over-the-top (OTT) video, turning redistribution into the biggest threat to premium content revenues, taking over from control word sharing.

At CABSAT, Sennheiser will spotlight the AMBEO VR, a compact handheld mic for professional VR production. The audio specialist also aims to educate the market in the emerging field of VR/AR audio capture through its AMBEO Music Blueprints platform. This dedicated website helps users explore how to record, mix and deliver live music as a truly 3D audio experience.

Sennheiser introduces AMBEO VR Mic

At CABSAT, Sennheiser, the largest sport content rights holder in the region, is requiring watermarking in order to broadcast its content, and other major operators in the region that want to deliver UHD content are also focused on creating more robust security requirements. Commenting on the company’s participation in CABSAT, Geir Bjorndal, VP International Strategy, Middle East and Africa, Verimatrix, said: ‘The MENA region is a very important market for Verimatrix, especially as the prevalence of premium content delivery – as well as threats of illicit redistribution – continues to rise. ‘Having worked with several of the large telcos in the region, we have noticed a trend of new services being introduced to the market, as well as a shift in its infrastructure. ‘We have developed new solutions targeting the Middle East region. These solutions can eventually be applied on a global scale. ‘Several requirements for new security enhancements are coming out of this region, which we are addressing very closely in order to provide optimum solutions.’

Geir Bjorndal, VP International Strategy, Middle East and Africa, Verimatrix.
Nautel to showcase regional projects

At this year’s CABSAT, Nautel will highlight several turnkey MW and FM projects in the MENA region. The company will showcase FM transmitters featuring IP audio UIO, Livewire, AIS, Urban Inside and MPX over AES, and power levels of 300W to 80kW.

Also displayed will be web-compatible interfaces on all AM and FM products and a 17” touchscreen advanced user interface (AUI) on NX and GV series transmitters, for unmatched monitoring and control. There will be a live demo of Nautel’s AUI. Advanced digital radio solutions including DRM of Nautel’s AUI. Advanced digital radio solutions including DRM

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Canara Lighting Industries is participating in CABSAT 2017 under the theme Global Illumination through Green Technology. The company is presently looking for distributors in the MENA.

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CANARA ILLUMINATES CABSAT

Canara Lighting Industries is participating in CABSAT 2017 under the theme Global Illumination through Green Technology. We exhibit at CABSAT because our customers and prospective customers from the MENA region visit this show on regular basis. Also, this is the best broadcasting show in the MENA region. The region has many emerging economies and broadcasting business is growing at a faster rate than other areas,” said Ajeet Khare, MD of Canara Lighting.

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Stand F3-30

Custom Consoles to introduce Module-R Lite

Custom Consoles’ Module-R Lite studio control desks will make their Middle East exhibition debut at CABSAT 2017. Also on display will be the latest version of the EditOne post-production suite desk, a MediaPost free-standing monitor mount and an example of the scalable MediaWall monitor display.

“Our standard Module-R desk has a 1,200 millimetre front-to-back depth and allows control surfaces such as vision switches or audio mixers to be embedded into the main horizontal work surface,” said Sales Manager Gary Fuller. “Module-R Lite is identical in structure to the standard Module-R range but based on 930mm front-to-back desk dimensions. This is ideal for production staff working in support services such as graphics and editing. The option of fitting monitor display screens above the rear edge of Module-R and Module-R Lite desks makes even more efficient use of space.”

Stand C2-42

Stand A1-42

Announcement
User experience is critical for VOD services. To ensure a smooth video experience for our subscribers, we use a load balancer that directs traffic to the best-performing CDN, based on selected key metrics. We are continually learning about route optimisation and investigating where our traffic is routed before arriving on our subscribers’ screens. Part of this learning is focused on CDN performance, and specifically on which CDN achieves the best results in a given territory. This allows us to optimise the route towards the path of least resistance and ultimately, create a better user experience.

Our experience of a public CDN service has generally been good, and in line with our go-to-market strategy. However, there can be a number of challenges. The biggest issue with using public CDNs lies in coverage and the number of PoPs your CDN provider holds in the territory your members are streaming in. Performances vary from country to country and among ISPs (internet service providers), simply because the network infrastructure is less mature than in Europe or the US; however, we are seeing steady improvements.

No single CDN provider is 100% capable of serving the MENA region without impacting delivery performance. If a CDN doesn’t have good coverage then content delivery will be delayed and users will experience buffering – a far from optimal experience. A load balancer deployed to sniff out the best routes ahead will help, but if capacity isn’t there to begin with, the difference is minimal. The topic of build versus buy is currently heating up as larger VOD services enter the region and deploy their CDNs; it certainly makes sense in regions where experience expectations are high.

Local VOD services are investigating this approach now to understand the benefits of building a CDN – and the associated costs – versus using a public CDN. Controlling the traffic routing through peering with ISPs and operators is in an essential complementary activity. Otherwise, delivery is just through a private CDN as opposed to a public CDN – and both face similar disadvantages. Congested networks result in inconsistent playback as achieving HD through bitrate adaptation takes longer, further affecting the user experience.

The optimal way to boost content delivery is to build a CDN cache and peer with local networks to have the best possible traffic routing that keeps your content within the region at least. Negotiate peering arrangements with operators and ISPs that prioritise your content delivery, and build additional caches inside the operator’s network to enhance the uplift at the last mile. Digital giants such as Facebook and Netflix take this approach in dense markets where public CDNs don’t have enough coverage. There will be a considerable initial outlay in capital expenditure to create the infrastructure to manage the storage of content; network peering arrangements take time and patience to set up. Building your own CDN is a long-term commitment, not to be tackled unless you are comfortable with your growth trajectory to make it worth the while.

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Conclusion

If you face a time-to-market constraint, then choosing a public CDN is the best option. Once you are in the market and your service is live, you will be able to gauge the responsiveness of your CDN against the user experience. If the economics still work on a public CDN against your service’s operational efficiency, then there is no need to build your own CDN. However, if you are experiencing restricted business growth due to average results from your public CDN, then it might be time to start looking at controlling your delivery supply chain.  

Saleem Bhatti is CTO at Starz Play.
LED SOFT PANEL 100
Capacity: 100W
Voltage: 95-265v AC | 22-36V DC
Color Temp.: Adjustable 2700K-5600K

LED SOFT PANEL 200
Capacity: 200W
Voltage: 95-265v AC | 22-36V DC
Color Temp.: Adjustable 2700K-5600K