Cutting-edge production in Dubai and online strategy gives squash new prominence on world stage
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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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VOD in MENA

Martin Stewart joins OSN as CEO
15 November 2016
HABTOOR GRAND / DUBAI / UAE

1 day / 4 panels
25 speakers / 16 awards
1 gala awards dinner

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.
OSN appoints new CEO

OSN has announced the appointment of Martin Stewart as its new CEO. Stewart takes charge from David Butorac, who headed the pay-TV network since 2010. Stewart will assume office at OSN in Dubai on 1 August.

Widely acknowledged for his contribution to the European pay TV industry, Stewart has served as Director General of ONO, a Spanish broadband communication and entertainment company, and as Chief Financial Officer for European entertainment company Sky, during which time Sky launched its digital platform and doubled its subscriber base to seven million. He was also the CFO of EMI, a British multinational music recording and publishing company. Stewart is currently Chief Financial Officer of The Football Association (The FA) in the UK.

Faisal Hamad Al Ayyar, Chairman of OSN, said: “I am delighted to welcome Martin Stewart, an experienced professional with exceptional leadership experience in driving the transformational growth of businesses. He is not new to OSN, having been its non-executive director since 2015. His expertise in leading from the forefront of change will be a significant value-add for OSN as we mark a new chapter in our growth story.”

He added: “I thank David Butorac for driving the growth of OSN over the past six years. His strategic initiatives enabled OSN to take firm industry leadership and consolidate its market presence through compelling content and innovative tech platforms.”

Stewart commented: “I am delighted to take charge as the Chief Executive Officer of OSN. The business is well positioned to take advantage of new opportunities and I am confident that we have the team, network and resources to gain a stronger foothold across the region. The rise in digital content, smart TVs and smartphone penetration together with a youthful population affords an exciting opportunity for growth in the future.”

TV.ae acquires rights to stream Abu Dhabi TV content

Abu Dhabi Media has signed an agreement with online TV streaming service TV.AE for the right to broadcast Abu Dhabi Television network content through its site. This will include live streaming, talk shows, entertainment, sports, Arab and Gulf series, documentaries and dramas in both English and Arabic.

The signing of the agreement coincides with the launch of subscription streaming services in the UAE, and seeks to meet the growing demand among a number of demographics throughout the MENA region for online Arabic entertainment content. The service allows its subscribers to watch the latest shows, movies and dramas at a cost of roughly USD 2.15 per month. The package does not require a long-term contract for either on-demand or live streaming, but is intended to become the new home of Arabic content online.

Next month: Look out for our special sports roundtable discussion.
Blink Studios launches animated children’s series

Blink Studios has launched an original animated children’s series produced in the UAE. Named Karim & Noor, the series debuted during Ramadan with additional seasons in the pipeline scheduled for release.

A series of two-minute episodes explores the special relationship between Karim – an energetic, kind-hearted and creative seven-year-old boy – and a ‘Lanbot’ – a glowing lantern and robot all in one. The non-dialogue show reinforces social and emotional values through the special relationship shared between the two characters.

Karim & Noor is an original Blink Studios creation which focuses on delivering content through a transmedia approach including both broadcast and online elements. Though inspired by the region’s cultural nuances, the show is creatively developed and produced for a global audience.

JOB TRACK

Michael Hallen has been appointed as the new CEO of Vizrt, effective August 1. Hallen will be based in Vizrt’s global headquarters in Bergen, Norway. Hallen most recently comes from Qmatic Group, a Swedish software and hardware company in the Customer Experience Management space where he was the CEO. Prior to this, he was CEO at Boss Media (Gaming Entertainment Software) and before that, CEO at IFS (ERP software).

Furthermore, Michael has held several non-executive directorships in various tech companies and currently holds two board positions with Fingerprint Cards and Paxport. Hallen replaces Martin Burkhalter, who retired after heading the company for six years. Dr. Francois Laborie remains as Acting CEO until 1 August, 2016.

My-HD adds FilmBox, Art House to channel offer

Dubai-based pay-TV operator My-HD has added two movie channels from SPI International to its satellite bouquet. The platform already carries three other SPI International channels: combat sports channel FightBox HD, adrenaline and extreme sports channel Fast&FunBox HD and documentary channel DocuBox HD.

English-language channels FilmBox and FilmBox Art House will soon also feature Arabic subtitles on the MENA direct-to-home (DTH) satellite service.

Film Box Art House provides international classics from directors such as Hitchcock, Kurosawa and Fellini, along with movies from film festivals.

Al Araby TV Network launches new channel

Al Araby Television Network, an Arabic-language television channel, is planning to launch a new channel named Al Araby +2, which will be dedicated to the MENA region. The announcement was made by the CEO of Al Araby TV Network, Islam Lofti, who added that the regional office will be based in Tunisia.

Broadcasting from its headquarters in London, Al Araby Television Network has a broad range of programme content, from news to entertainment. Fadaat Media, the Qatari company that owns the pan-Arab daily Al-Araby al-Jadeed (The New Arab) and its online editions, is behind Al Araby TV.

Ericsson to play out three FOX channels from Abu Dhabi hub

FOX Networks Group (FNG) Middle East has engaged Ericsson to provide playout services for its new channels – FOX Action Movies, FOX Family Movies and FX.

The new FOX HD channels join an existing portfolio of TV channels managed by Ericsson from its hub, which includes four FOX channels. The new channels are designed to provide entertainment programming, ‘subbed and dubbed’ family oriented programming, drama and comedy programming tailored to a Middle East audience. They will be broadcast from Ericsson’s broadcast and media services hub in Abu Dhabi and will be available 24 hours a day.

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Now you can turn URSA Mini into a professional live production camera by adding the URSA Studio Viewfinder! Featuring a large 7" screen with variable tension mounting points, tally and external controls, the URSA Studio Viewfinder integrates perfectly with URSA Mini. You get live production features and true digital film quality images with incredible texture, detail and color that are far superior to standard broadcast cameras!

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Operating a camera at live concerts, sports, and long events can be back breaking if you have to look through a tiny eyepiece all day! The URSA Studio Viewfinder has a large display with handles and external controls that let you comfortably stand behind the camera and follow the action for hours on end! The rugged external controls let you adjust settings without taking your eyes off the action, plus tally lights make it easy to identify which camera is live!

**Designed for Live Production**
The all metal design of the URSA Studio Viewfinder features the highest quality variable tension mounting points and an articulated arm that lets you adjust the position and angle of the viewfinder. You can set the perfect amount of resistance, allowing you to move the viewfinder independent of the camera! This lets you keep the viewfinder still and your eyes on the screen, while quickly panning the camera to follow things like fast action sports!

Control at Your Fingertips
The URSA Studio Viewfinder features extremely high quality buttons and dials that are perfectly positioned so you can quickly display frame guides, focus overlays and change settings! The menu dial lets you fly through options as well as magnify the image to check detail and focus. You also get dedicated brightness, contrast and focus peaking knobs, along with three customizable function buttons for zebra displays, custom LUTs, edge focus detection and more!

Advanced SDI Control Protocol
The combination of URSA Mini and URSA Studio Viewfinder give you a complete studio camera that can be controlled remotely using Blackmagic Design’s advanced SDI control protocol! This protocol uses available space in the SDI stream for talkback and to send data, commands as well as video back to the camera on its program input. You can turn on the viewfinder tally light, balance camera color, adjust focus and more, right from your ATEM switcher without having to run any additional control cables!

The Blackmagic URSA Studio Viewfinder turns your URSA Mini into the ultimate live studio camera!

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Broadcast Solutions delivers live production units to Turkmenistan Television

Broadcast Solutions GmbH has delivered two sets of live production units to Turkmenistan. Ordered by Turkish company Polimeks, which is responsible for the construction and delivery of all infrastructure for Turkmenistan Ashgabat Olympic Complex, the two sets consist of four vehicles each.

Comprising an OB van with 15/11 cameras, a support truck, a generator truck and an SNG, the units will be used at the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Ashgabat.

All vehicles were tailor-made to the customers’ wishes and the specific needs of the country and purpose. These are built to withstand the extreme climatic conditions in Turkmenistan, ranging from -20°C in winter to +50°C in summer, through highly efficient insulation and the use of powerful air conditioning systems. The OB vans feature 15 Sony cameras, including SuperMotion and UltraMotion cameras, and sufficient space for up to 25 operators.

Due to their design with redundant power supply and efficient UPS units, both OB vans can be switched to generator mode interruption-free, in case of an electricity failure. The support trucks offer a technical room for the third PGM. The two SNG units (Volkswagen T5) transmit over dual band (extended-Ku / Ku) and thus can use conventional satellites as well as Turkmenistan’s own satellites.

As a special feature, the sets include three stage boxes with Mediornet Compact with remote supply via SMPTE 311 cable, and two stage boxes for wireless cameras with remote supply via SMPTE 311 cable. Furthermore all workplaces of the slow motion-, GFX-, operators, producer and assistant are flexible and can be configured for any occasion. For both OB vans, the internal video format is 1080p/50 (3G-SDI) or any other common HD or SD format.
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- **ASTRA MCR** playout automation
- **ASTRA MAM** media asset management
- **Redwood Studio** industry’s first News Studio-in-a-Box
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Aperi Corporation has appointed Joop Janssen as CEO, effective immediately. Chairman and Founder of Aperi, Eugene Keane said: “Now that the first products are installed at customers’ premises and additional financial backing from strong strategic investors is secured, the company is ready to be taken to the next level. Joop is the right man to lead Aperi to make it happen. “Since we founded Aperi, we’ve focused on creating a software-defined platform for live media networking and processing,” continued Keane. “The solution has been battle tested with select customers and we’re now ready to scale across the industry. Joop brings the ideal mix of experience and skills to drive Aperi in this exciting phase.” Keane will remain in a key role in the company, providing business development advice.

Etisalat and My-HD to carry Lollipop TV

Channels provider Mimyuni Media Entertainment has secured carriage for its new Lollipop kids channel with Etisalat and My-HD in the Middle East. The group’s Amoreyo, Cubayo, Chillayo, Lollipop, Party’s, Health & Wellness and Cinemachi Kids services are available on the Etisalat IPTV platform, while the Amoreyo, Lollipop, Party’s and Cinemachi Kids services are also available on My-HD in the region. Kids Music channel Lollipop TV was launched earlier this year.

BeIN completes Digitürk buyout

Turkey’s Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) has completed the sale of pay-TV operator Digitürk to Qatar’s beIN Media Group. Digitürk has an estimated 3.5 million subscribers. The sale price has not been disclosed but is reported to be in the region of $1 billion. At the time of the initial announcement of the Digitürk deal last year, beIN Media Chairman and CEO Nasser Al-Khelafi described the acquisition as a “natural step” for the company, given Turkey’s proximity to its core Middle East market.

OSN brings Syfy and Disney Junior Arabic to MENA viewers

Syfy, NBCUniversal International Networks’ science-fiction entertainment channel, will launch on OSN from 8 July, 2016. Syfy will feature a roster of series, movies and sci-fi programming for MENA viewers. The launch of Syfy follows the signing of a new and extended long-term deal between OSN and NBCUNI. NBCUniversal International (NBCUI), already hosts E! Entertainment Television on OSN. OSN will also launch Disney Junior in Arabic on its platform. The channel will offer Arabic audio and the option to watch it in English.
Chinese channel begins broadcasting from Dubai

CATV, a new Chinese channel, has been launched in the MENA to cater to the growing Chinese community in the region. Focused on news and infotainment content, the channel also covers business and tourism information in association with TV stations in China. It broadcasts from Dubai Studio City via Nilesat.

“Our effort is to build CATV as the informative bridge between China and Arab nations and to improve bilateral economic and trade co-operation,” commented Liu Haijiang, Chairman, CATV.

Following the satellite channel’s soft launch in September 2015, it now has 50 employees including broadcast journalists specialising in news from the UAE and China.

“We plan to have English, Chinese or Arabic subtitles for all of our programmes. While half of the programmes are with Chinese voiceover (with Arabic subtitles), the other half is in Arabic (with Chinese subtitles),” commented Svina Wong, Vice President of CATV.

“The UAE Government has been encouraging Chinese investors and tourists to come to the UAE. Policy-wise also, it is easy for the Chinese to travel to the UAE,” Wong added.

Du offers Eurochannel

European culture and lifestyle channel Eurochannel is now available in the UAE on du’s English Basic and French Basic packages.

The channel is available in 22m households, said Eurochannel CEO Gustavo Vainstein.

He added: “Eurochannel continues its vast expansion across international borders thanks to the launch of our channel in the Middle East.”

Du also announced that it has entered into a long-term partnership with Ericsson, which will manage and operate du’s IT infrastructure.

Al Jazeera Balkans launches in HD

Al Jazeera Balkans and Eutelsat Communications have announced that Al Jazeera Balkans is joining the TEAM:SAT TV platform operated by TEAM:MEDIA and will broadcast exclusively in HD, free-to-air from the EUTELSAT 16A satellite. The channel launched in HD on 1 July.

By integrating into this popular platform of over 20 television channels, Al Jazeera Balkans will deepen its reach into TV homes in the Balkans and offer viewers the benefits of superior HD quality. Al Jazeera Balkans broadcasts news and information in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian.

French regulator rejects beIN-Canal Plus deal

The French antitrust regulator has rejected a proposed sports distribution tie-up between beIN Sports and Vivendi’s Canal Plus.

The decision is a major setback for Vivendi, which has touted the five-year agreement with beIN as one of the key elements of its strategy to turn around Canal Plus’ growing losses by 2018.

The board ruled that the deal would give Canal Plus and beIN control of 80% of sports broadcasting rights in France. That would harm competition, adversely affect the financing of sporting events, and threaten Internet service providers.

ALTV launches in MENA

Telecom group Granahan McCourt Capital (GMC) has launched a new digital TV platform in the MENA region. Dedicated to the underserved areas of the world, the platform, ALTV.com, offers original content for free.

ALTV is now the latest addition to GMC’s history of connecting underserved regions across the globe. The MENA launch will be followed by South America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Launching in these markets, ALTV claims to develop a wide-ranging network of creative talents in each region, filling a major gap in these markets.
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The world’s elite squash players descended on Burj Park, Downtown Dubai for the PSA Dubai World Series Finals last month. Every minute of the action in the court reached millions of online and TV viewers across the world. Vibhuti Arora goes behind the scenes to find out what it takes to broadcast a truly world-class sporting event from the heart of the city.
When Saudi businessman Ziad Al-Turki took over the reins of the UK-headquartered Professional Squash Association (PSA), he was told that squash would never be televised, that the fledgling sport lacked the makings of a professional sport to break onto the world stage and would remain limited to specific territories. Today, the situation is quite different. Thanks to PSA-owned Squash TV, the sport is not only televised but also streamed live on different platforms in many parts of the world and has won a significant fan following over the last few years.

Broadcasting the sport has been instrumental in growing its reach and popularity.

“I think we’ve proven everyone wrong. The matches reach audiences around the world through our online streaming platform Squash TV and we hope to have TV coverage throughout the world in the near future,” says Ziad Al-Turki, Chairman of PSA.

Ziad Al-Turki, a squash enthusiast, first joined the PSA board in 2009. He says his interest in the game is purely altruistic and he got involved to help raise the bar for the welfare of the players.

“Squash had to compete with world-class sports if it wanted to get any kind of funding from sponsors, and in order to do that, I had to change the way the sport was presented. It required a total revamp of the courts, the lighting, the seating arena and even the technical infrastructure to televise it on broadcast-grade equipment.”

Al-Turki used the PSA World Series Finals as a showcase for what could be achieved with the right presentation. In January 2011, unveiling the purple Z-Court in an inflatable on Centre Court at The Queen’s Club in London

“**It was a milestone achievement for PSA and me when broadcasters such as Sky Sports and Eurosport came on board**”

Ziad Al-Turki, Chairman, PSA

Both manned and remote controlled cameras were placed at various positions in and around the glass court to capture every second of action of the game.
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“The glass court has a stunning visual appearance and is acclaimed by the TV industry for creating a dramatic setting that adapts perfectly to the demands of such a high-speed televised sport”

Peter Schmidl, International Affairs and Event Coordination, ASB SquashCourts

put squash in the limelight, and it began to receive recognition as a world-class sport. Consequently, Sky Sports televised the World Series Finals in 2012 and 2013, with Eurosport joining in 2013. “It was a milestone achievement for PSA and me when broadcasters such as Sky Sports and Eurosport came on board,” Al-Turki comments.

There was no looking back, and the sport continued to make strides in the international arena. Following an agreement between Dubai Sports Council and PSA, facilitated by Falcon and Associates, a strategic advisory company working on behalf of the Dubai leadership, the PSA World Tour was brought to Dubai this year. “For Dubai to consider hosting the World Series Finals was a stamp of approval that all of the efforts over the past few years had come to fruition. Dubai is definitely the catalyst that will take squash to the next level,” says Al-Turki.

The 2016 PSA Dubai World Series Finals saw the world's eight best male and female players compete in a five-day squash extravaganza. Within the purpose-built venue set against the backdrop of the world’s tallest building, the iconic Burj Khalifa, a state-of-the-art glass squash court took pride of place complete with world-class broadcast infrastructure to showcase the matches around the world.

Peter Schmidl, International Affairs and Event Coordination at ASB SquashCourts, the German company behind the court in Dubai, says his team built the glass court from scratch keeping in mind the requirements of the game, the players and the spectators, as well as the TV crew. To date, ASB has supplied more than 6,000 ASB squash courts to customers in 70 countries.

“The glass court has a stunning visual appearance and is acclaimed by the TV industry for creating a dramatic setting that adapts perfectly to the demands of such a high-speed televised sport. Everything required for the court was brought in from Germany and assembled here with the help of our engineers,” says Schmidl.

The court this year had a new front wall with a complete LED screen behind it, used to show videos during breaks. This kind of distribution of content has never been done before on a squash court, according to Schmidl.

Al-Turki elaborates on the special addition of the LED screen, calling it prime advertising space to target both live and TV audiences.

“We have to constantly innovate to stay at the forefront and engage both spectators and sponsors. The new LED wall offers sponsors the ability to engage spectators by getting their message across either through video or branding and gives us endless possibilities to engage with spectators.”

The video wall was built with frosted glass that has the same characteristics as the glass used for the court walls, with LED screens behind it. “This was a first step and by no means perfect, but presenting it for the first time in Dubai, a city known for being at the forefront of innovation, was the logical thing to do. We now know what changes we need to make to perfect it and have already started working on those changes. We've also been approached by manufacturers that have cutting-edge displays and want to help us perfect this innovation while also showcasing their technologies,” says Al-Turki.

Filming the game
In order to capture the live action from the court, eight cameras – fixed position, remote operated and roaming – were installed in various positions in the tent. 21 flight cases of heavy-duty broadcast equipment were flown in from...
London to Dubai, including cameras, encoders and hundreds of metres of cabling for a live TV production.

An 11-person TV crew was also flown in, including a director, replay operator, graphic operator, sound engineer, equipment engineer, ENG cameraman, remote camera operator, slow-mo camera operator, slow-mo cameraman, features and news editor, and a colour footage cameraman.

Six Panasonic remote control cameras (known as ‘hot heads’) were deployed alongside a Panasonic ENG / P2 camera and a super slow-mo camera. The cameras were positioned strategically to capture the action from all angles so viewers would not miss any of the action on court.

Nathan Clarke, PR and Communications Manager of PSA, gives the details of the choice of cameras and their positions: “Two raised main cameras focusing on the front wall, an overhead camera and two cameras on the back wall facing the court, as well as two on the glass front wall also facing the court, ensured every second of the games was captured from various angles. An additional camera was installed for beauty shots.”

Clarke says that hot heads are a great fit for events, where there are space constraints. “Hot heads fit into tight spaces and don’t block any camera views of the court. They also allow one operator to man many cameras, giving production a bigger feel on a smaller budget.”

The super slow-mo cameras added several levels to production. They came in handy to add a visual element to the commentators’ descriptions of techniques and to showcase the athleticism of the players. The ENG camera allowed more range of movement and was...
used for player close-ups, walk-ons and so on. This camera also doubled as an interview camera.

The audio was captured using five mics installed strategically in and around the court. The guest commentators for the matches used two commentary headsets with lip mics. Two court mics and two audience mics were clamped to the court fins. One ‘tie’ mic was also subtly placed on the fin by the glass door of the court.

UK-based Squash TV streams close to 500 matches live and the crew also produces daily highlight edits for YouTube and shares live content on social media. The PSA matches are also streamed to Eurosport Player as well as to mainstream broadcast partners Tennis Channel, BT Sport, beIN Sport, Astro Sports, China Telecom, FOX Australia, NOW TV Hong Kong, Singtel, Sky Sports NZ, Super Sports, Ten Sports, Truevisions and Eurosport.

Clarke explains that for the first few days the footage was transported to the London hub using dedicated web uplink servers. For the Finals, however, an SNG truck was used to uplink the footage. For the Eurosport live feed, a direct stream from Dubai was re-encoded in London to reach 13-14 different platforms.

At the heart of the production was a NewTek 3Play multi-camera replay server used for four-channel redundant recording and fast turnaround time for post-production workflows. The idea was to capture every angle of live action for instant replay, playback or archive. The mixing desk, remote camera controls, sound desk and hyper deck for recordings and a series of engineering racks were housed in a broadcast area in the tent, with all cabling running under the stands or over them.

A single stream was specifically tunnelled from the tournament to the Squash TV hub in London, using a minimum 10GB upload speed with a safety margin to ensure reliability. From London, it served encoders for Squash TV and Eurosport Player. The stream was transcoded for viewers on a multitude of devices from mobiles to smart TVs. For the semis and finals, the feeds were sent directly to partner broadcasters.

The editors received a live feed via HDMI cable hardwired to their laptops for online editing. The footage in Apple Pro Res (422) 1080p format was stored on two WD drives.

“We could play the highlights within five minutes of the match. Both FCP 7 and Premier Pro were used for editing, which was done on-site and heavily linked with the rest of the production.”

Nathan Clarke, PR and Communications Manager, PSA

allow on-the-fly editing of matches, which is important for long days and short turnaround times. Usually, a full men and women 32-draw tournament is around three TB. We keep back-up on the QNAP in case of any disasters,” notes Clarke.

UK broadcast graphics company MOOV worked on the project with long-time partner ChyronHego, for its first Virtual Placement project. Virtual graphics can be placed into a scene within minutes of set-up, ready for use in a multitude of applications using Virtual Placement without having to add any specialist camera encoders or lengthy calibration processes.

When the robotic camera looked up, the roof structure was replaced with a live shot of Burj Khalifa, accompanied with player images, logos and a five-metre-wide #squashindubai image from outside.

The editors received a live feed via HDMI cable hardwired to their laptops for online editing. The footage in Apple Pro Res (422) 1080p format was stored on two WD drives.

“While our TV rights aren’t very lucrative, they do provide the base for us to achieve lucrative contracts from world tour sponsors, and help local sponsors secure sponsorships for their individual tournaments. In addition to our existing three-year deals with broadcasters, we are looking to cover the remaining missing parts of the globe with future broadcast partnerships.”

Dubai will host the World Series Finals for the next two years, with the venue moving to Dubai Opera.

“The 2,000-seat Dubai Opera is an amazing modern facility with endless possibilities. Although we are still a year away from the tournament, we have already started thinking of next year’s presentation. We plan to have the LED screen in the new venue and hope to perfect it the next time around,” concludes Al-Turki.
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At a press meet hosted by Discovery Communications at Roland Garros in Paris last month, the network revealed its sports strategy as well as a number of partnerships across different markets and platforms. BroadcastPro ME brings you some highlights from the event.
In the last 30 years, Discovery Communications has grown manifold and at various levels. What started as a one-market, one-genre, one-brand company now reaches 220-plus countries and territories with three billion subscribers; it is now a multi-genre and multi-platform network that operates on multiple business models. Last year, the network completed the acquisition of Eurosport and acquired European multi-platform broadcast and distribution rights for the four Olympic Games between 2018 and 2024. Discovery’s Olympic Games deal is valued at $1.44 billion across all platforms, including free-to-air and pay TV, online and mobile phone in all languages across 50 countries and most territories in Europe.

Addressing the press at Roland Garros, David Zaslav, President and CEO of Discovery Communications, revealed how sports was growing in importance for the network. While factual entertainment remains at the heart of Discovery’s offerings, the network claims its foray into sports has resulted in more viewer share in more markets.

“In recent years, most of the growth for us has been outside the US. Since we took over Eurosport, we have grown the base now in 140m homes, 55 countries in Europe. Our real ambition in sports is already accomplished and we have hired a great sports team to deliver the best content to our viewers.

“This is a huge deal for us. As the largest international media player in the world, we make over a billion dollars outside the US,” he said.

Zaslav pointed out that Discovery’s investment in Eurosport is now up from $150m to $300m.

“We are investing more in content. With the Olympics for the next decade, we are committed to spend $5bn in sports content. We want to accelerate our leadership in Europe with a quality product that we own exclusively.”

Zaslav likened the Eurosport app to sports Netflix. It has a few hundred thousand subscribers, with the goal of reaching a million. Discovery is the first sports media company in the world to launch a VR sports app, beginning with the French Open.

“After Rio, the Olympic rings will appear on Eurosport. We are trying to innovate in sports, not just how we are delivering to different platforms, but the type of content we are carrying,” said Zaslav.

Combined with best-in-class and new state-of-the-art production facilities, Discovery is securing some of the world’s most sought-after talent at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games. Zaslav emphasised that 95% of Discovery’s business still involves putting content on channels around the world.

“We are cognisant of the quality of that content. Our content has been converted into HD and 4K. We have the largest 4K library of content. We are using our content for...
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mobile, direct to consumer apps. We are doing more in that area with digital offerings such as Discovery GO, Dplay and Eurosport app. Digital business is profitable for us; it has significant margins and we are aggressively moving forward in that direction,” he noted.

He further added that Discovery’s investment in content has been growing and is set to grow further.

“Three years ago, we were investing $1.8bn in content; this year, we have invested well over $2bn. We are looking to spend more money on bigger content, bigger events and bigger audiences.”

JB Perrette, President – Discovery Networks International, added that Discovery in the last three decades has evolved and adapted to the changes driven by consumer habits.

“We are one of the few traditional companies that have a real digital presence, and our direct-to-consumer business is quite robust. Our strategy will be to continue to innovate and disrupt models. Sport fits into our strategy and grows our audience, as well as our share in each of the markets that we operate in. It’s no longer about TV audiences but audiences across all platforms,” he said.

The network’s strategy centres on developing and owning content and tapping into new markets.

“Our focus continues to be relentless pursuit of audience share and growth on all platforms. There is no such thing as a pan European fan; sport in every territory is different, we want to differentiate our content to make it more local, more relevant, to resonate with passionate fans across Europe,” Perrette added.

Peter Hutton, CEO of Eurosport, commented on the Eurosport legacy that is now transforming into a business transcending platforms and regions, and offering relevant content to viewers.

“Being part of a bigger media group means having a long-term vision, and setting ourselves world-class standards. The industry has noticed that Eurosport has changed, viewers have noticed that we’ve changed, and so have the federations and partners that we work with. They have come to us repeatedly and told us that what we’ve done is remarkable.”

He also added that in sport it’s about big events and doing justice to big events. Technical innovation and investment enable the company to become a local channel in specific territories and showcase locally relevant content in those markets.
Interview

In an exclusive interview with Kasia Kieli, President and Managing Director for Discovery Networks Central & Eastern Europe, Middle East & Africa (CEEMEA), a division of Discovery Communications, we find out more about the network’s strategy to keep up with the ever evolving media landscape and how it plans to carve out a leadership position across the MENA region.

Can you take us through the journey of Discovery so far in the Middle East?

Discovery Networks has been broadcasting in the Middle East since 1998 and has a strong presence in the region with 11 pay-TV channels, distributed across OSN, beIN and My-HD. Quest Arabiya is our free-to-air channel in partnership with Image Nation.

We have invested a lot in the region, which also includes investment in a local team. We have upgraded websites and added a host of channels to both the free-to-air and pay platforms. The Middle East is one of the top regions for us in terms of both revenue and investment.

It’s a strong growth market for us. Five years ago, we were operating an export business out of the UK. Our office in London handled the distribution of channels in the Middle East with no local presence. Today, we have a team based in Dubai that handles various disciplines including scheduling, marketing, commercial and digital.

I really believe in the region, and there will be a continuous stream of new announcements from there. Our investment in building a team in the Middle East shows our commitment to the region.

I took over CEEMEA six years ago, and for me personally, the Middle East has been a real area of focus. We have made a move forward in the region with the acquisition of Fatafeat, which was the first acquisition of CEEMEA for me.

Discovery works closely with beIN and OSN.

What’s new on that front? Any other regional deals in the pipeline?

We have packaged our channels for beIN under the ‘D’ brand with Fatafeat as the flagship channel. Three new channels, DLife, DMAX and DKids, are set to launch on beIN on August 1 this year. Dkids, which will be launching with beIN, is the first kids channel launch for us in CEEMEA.

Transferring Fatafeat to the pay environment has been another big move for the region. We are continuing to invest more in the channel to make it bigger. There has been significant movement on the Fatafeat online service as well, and we launched the Fatafeat cooking academy last year to give the brand a further push. The idea is to make the Fatafeat brand more robust, offering a whole lot of services to its subscribers.

We recently announced a partnership with Doğuş Media in Turkey, which has been an important market for Discovery. Our expanded relationship with Doğuş, including ad sales representation, and new investments such as the acquisition of the CNBC-e channel, has led to an even stronger position for us in Turkey.

How much of the content targeted at the Middle East market is produced locally? Is local production a focus area for you?

We have quite a lot of shows from the region that are produced locally. 50% of Fatafeat’s programming is produced locally. An Arabic talk show hosted by Iraqi-born humanitarian Zainab Salbi, Nida’a was the first local commission for TLC, launched in 2015. We have just re-commissioned a second series of Nida’a and the show will be returning to TLC later this year.

Quest Arabiya features a mixture of local programming as well as international content from our vast pipeline. The number of local hours CEEMEA is commissioning is going up by 40% in 2016 to around 400 hours, due to

Kasia Kieli says Discovery has had a strong legacy of being a disruptor and has constantly adapted to change.
the growth of our region, our new partnerships and our strategy of reinforcing local relevance for our key brands.

**Are you looking into any sports deals in the MENA?**
Sports is big in the Middle East market, but we are not looking into it yet. Having said that, if an opportunity comes up in the future, we will consider it.

With the acquisition of Olympic rights for most of CEEMEA’s 40+ countries, sports presence in CEEMEA is big for Eurosport.

**What is Discovery’s strategy for growth?**
From a strategic perspective, we leverage the global scale but talk in a local language. We start with building a local team and localise the portfolio to offer relevant content to our viewers.

Quest Arabiya, for instance, has gained a lot of traction in the region and is an example of a locally relevant show. In the UAE, the channel already has an average daily reach of 4.5% of men 16-44 and is 18th in the channel rankings.

With the addition of a free-to-air channel to our portfolio of documentary, factual entertainment and sports channels, we have a stronger offering for our viewers and commercial partners.

**What are some of the challenges for a network such as yours in today’s fast-evolving media landscape?**
The change in media is fascinating. I won’t say these are challenges but I see them as opportunities. We have been talking about the change for many years, and now we are living that change.

We are in an era of video. Never before has video been consumed so much. We are super serving those video communities like never before. There is more focus on offering the most relevant content. It’s all about content today.

Discovery has had a strong legacy of being a disruptor. We are not afraid of new technology, and we are not afraid to disrupt. It’s about the survival of the fittest, and evolving and adapting to change is the only way to move forward.

**How do you position yourself in the Middle East?**
We are very well positioned in the Middle East market, especially with our partnerships with OSN, and beIN. On the FTA side also, Quest Arabiya is a very strong offering.

We are happy with the developments in the region and there will be more to come.

**What kind of content works in the region?**
We offer a mix of local and international content to the MENA audience. Our key focus area, however, is factual entertainment. Through our partnerships with OSN and beIN, we will continue to offer more content to the MENA audience.

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As the broadcast landscape continues to evolve, infrastructural needs of broadcast facilities have changed drastically. A critical part of this infrastructure is the cable. **Josh Simons** takes us through what modern cabling entails.

For so many years, cabling in a broadcast installation was all about co-ax. The art was to choose the right co-ax, which gave the performance you needed, at a cost which met your budget. Then you teamed that with matching BNC connectors and your decisions were made.

Today, the situation is rather more complex. Fibre is increasingly providing the SDI connectivity, and that brings both huge benefits and new challenges. More recently, Ethernet over twisted pair has become very significant, as interest has grown in IP connections.

The result is that many systems engineers are now faced with installing all three cable types, and I will look at each in turn. It is important, though, to remember what they have in common in our industry.

We are tough on our cables. Even installation cables in the backs of racks tend to be handled much more than in other branches of industry, because we change our equipment configurations much more.

At the front end of the business, around production, cables have a very hard time. Camera and microphone cables are routinely dragged around the studio floor, or literally pulled in over long distances on outside broadcasts.

So it is really important that you choose the right cable for the task. If it is a cable that is going to be handled, ensure it is ruggedised, and if it is going outdoors then use a dedicated solution for harsh environment. Cable failures can cause significant loss of time on a production, and are disastrous on a live event, so choosing the right cable is important.

In the machine room, there will still be a lot of patch cords in use. These again have very special characteristics. Flexible jackets allow the cables to be pushed aside, but the connectors need to be plugged and re-plugged a lot so a good tight bond to the cable, which does not put any stress on the cores, is vital.

Incidentally, while the general view is that fibre optics are inherently fragile, patch cords have been a practical proposition for some years now, with many G657A bend insensitive single mode fibre cables becoming readily...
available. As always, choosing the right cable for the job is vital.

**IP**

IP signals travel over Ethernet cables, which are surprisingly simple. They use the very old principle of the twisted pair: one cable has a positive voltage, the other a negative, so any interference should be cancelled out. The result is that even high-speed data signals are amazingly robust on what appears to be a very simple cable.

When shopping for an Ethernet cable, you may see the abbreviations UTP and FTP. UTP simply stands for unshielded twisted pair, the most common form of Ethernet cable. It provides very high speed performance, including Cat 6 Ethernet, which provides the gigabit speeds we need.

FTP means foil-shielded twisted pair. For our applications, this is usually an aluminium-laminated plastic foil which provides an extra layer of electrical protection. More important, perhaps, this together with the rugged jacketed cables provides more physical protection to the cable for outside broadcast applications.

Multicore IP cables are available for installations, and as with any cable it is really important to choose suitable matching connectors. You need to consider if this is a permanent connection or if there will be regular plugging and unplugging, as well as the best electrical matching.

**Tactical fibre**

We are seeing a rapid increase in the use of tactical fibre, particularly in outside broadcasts. Cables can contain as many as 24 fibres in a single cable, which with multiplexing means that many signals can be carried down one cable.

That is particularly important on outside broadcasts such as music festivals and major sporting events, where the time to rig and de-rig is a significant cost factor. Being able to do everything on one or two tactical fibres is a real time saver.

On the other hand, these cables can be prone to damage, so riggers need to be trained in how best to handle them. Breaks, should they occur, tend to be at the connector or in the last metre.

**Ultra HD and more**

Over the last couple of years, there has been a great deal of interest in higher resolutions than HD, 4K and even 8K. The problem for those wanting to implement them is that there has been no standard for interconnections. Each vendor has chosen its own route.

Now we are in the happy position of clearly defined SMPTE standards, covering both copper and fibre cabling for high resolution signals. In particular, we have a clear definition of how to handle signals up to 12 gigabits a second.

This is important, because it allows vendors to develop standard interfaces for their products, such as cameras, switchers, routers and servers. It also allows the test and measurement specialists to develop appliances which can accurately evaluate equipment and systems: Tektronix, for instance, launched such a device at NAB this year. That, in turn, allows cable specialists to determine precisely what can be achieved using different cables.

We are waiting for the new generation of test equipment to make our own evaluations, but what the major cable manufacturers like Draka and Belden are telling us is quite surprising. It looks like appropriate co-ax copper cable will be able to carry 4k video over distances of 100m or more.

All this points to the future of cabling being much the same, which is a hybrid mixture of SDI over copper and fibre and IP over Ethernet. And as ever, the best advice on choosing the right cable and connector is to talk to an expert who has thoroughly tested, measured and evaluated the products on the market and can recommend the best products for the job in hand.

“While the general view is that fibre optics are inherently fragile, patch cords have been a practical proposition for some years now, with many G657A bend insensitive single mode fibre cables becoming readily available. As always, choosing the right cable for the job is vital”

Josh Simons, Technical Director, Argosy

Josh Simons is Technical Director at Argosy.
At the recently concluded DMI technology week, Dubai Media Incorporated invited select vendors to showcase their latest technology offerings. BroadcastPro ME brings you the highlights.

DMI HOSTS TECHNOLOGY WEEK

Dubai Media Incorporated (DMI) hosted a technology week this May, showcasing the latest technological offerings from broadcast vendors. Featuring presentations and product demos, the event brought together leading vendors from various parts of the broadcast chain at DMI headquarters in Dubai.

The first-of-its-kind event proved to be a learning experience for the attendees and gave the presenters an opportunity to engage with their end users directly. According to Saleh Lootah, Head of TV and Radio Engineering, Dubai Media Inc, the event was an offshoot of NAB.

“None of us attended NAB Show this year because of our busy schedules around that time, but we didn’t want to miss out on what it had to offer. So we decided to bring a slice of NAB to our staff. The idea was to familiarise our engineers with what’s out there and give them a first-hand experience of the technology available today. I think it turned out to be a worthwhile effort. We hope to make it an annual event now,” says Lootah, adding that the response from vendors was overwhelming, but DMI had to restrict the number of presentations due to time constraints.

“We handpicked the vendors based on the relevance of their products to the DMI ecosystem. We are aggressively moving towards a file-based virtualised environment, which calls for a change of mindset on the part of our technical teams. This event was a step in that direction to educate our teams to prepare for the future.”

The interactive sessions gave attendees a chance to ask questions relevant to their systems and discuss the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Participating vendors included Sony, Evertz, Avid, SAM, Qvest Media, Riedel, Harmonic, Imagine, Vizrt, Microsoft and Adobe.
The presentations showcased solutions from the broadcast chain to cater to the changing needs of a modern broadcast ecosystem focusing on IT in broadcast.

Adobe introduced the new features of its Creative Cloud and discussed in detail its current release. The new products covered were Adobe Anywhere Collaboration hub, the new Adobe Media Encoder release and the new Adobe Character Animator. Attendees were introduced to Adobe Premiere Pro, Adobe AfterEffects, Adobe Photoshop, the Adobe Creative Cloud Services and collaboration features, as well as Adobe Stock. The presenters spoke about Adobe’s 50 million-plus royalty-free, high-quality photos, videos, illustrations and graphics with complete integration with Adobe CC products.

Microsoft presented its Azure Cloud offerings and discussed at length how they can be used to reach out to new audiences and capitalise on existing content rights. Also introduced were media analytics tools and how broadcasters could associate more closely with their audiences.

The Sony MEA team provided a post-NAB update on its latest technology and product offerings. The presentation mainly covered new technologies and workflows for HD, 4K, high dynamic range, storage and IP live production, and included updates on new models and featured upgrades on widely used products like camcorders, cameras, monitors, switchers, storage and archiving.

Sony is enhancing its fully interoperable IP Live Production system with Networked Media Interface (NMI) and continues its commitment to delivering IP interoperability among a wide range of compatible live production products through its IP Live Alliance.

A key product introduced to the DMI team was the new HDC-4800, which uses a Super 35mm 4K CMOS sensor which combines 4K resolution with enhanced high frame rate capabilities – 8x at 4K, and up to 16x in full HD. HDC-4800 is complemented by the BPU-4800 combination baseband processor unit/replay server, creating a fully networked, 4K live ultra-high speed production workflow. It supports PL mount lenses to capture crisp high-resolution images for live sports shooting.

Sony added two new switchers to its multi-format line-up. XVS-7000 supports In HD, 6ME operation with 112 inputs; in 4K, 3ME operations with 28 inputs. XVS-6000 supports In HD, 4ME operation with 48 inputs; in 4K, 2ME operation with 12 inputs. Also discussed was CLEDIS display technology, a new large-scale canvas solution that builds on Sony’s self-emitting display capabilities.

The second generation of Sony’s Optical Disc Archive System was introduced at the event.
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Sony’s presentation was followed by that of Evertz. The company spoke about its virtualisation and IP solutions. Evertz cloud service was discussed, demonstrating how the service has been deployed by other broadcasters. The key product introduced at the event was the Evertz Dreamcatcher, an IP-based production and replay system. Dreamcatcher’s features were discussed at length, including its editing capabilities and enhanced production workflow.

DMI’s association with Vizrt goes back many years, with its solutions being used extensively by the broadcaster. Vizrt gave an overview of the latest developments in its key products and its product roadmap.

The first and most important announcement of the event was the presentation of the brand new Viz Story, which won the Best in Show award at this year’s NAB. Viz Story is a web-based tool allowing broadcasters and other media companies to publish broadcast quality video clips and graphics online and to social media in the fastest possible time.

Recent developments of Viz Engine were also covered, including photorealistic graphics enhancements, video playout capabilities and support for IP Streaming. In addition to its well known SDI input and output capabilities, the latest version of the Viz Engine can also simultaneously handle real-time graphics and video compositing with IP stream inputs and outputs, in any of the leading streaming formats, from the same box.

SAM’s presentation was hosted on the second day of the technology week, and its key messages revolved around IP and the vendor’s involvement with AIMS (Alliance for IP Media Solutions). As a founder member of AIMS, SAM discussed how to ensure industry standards and achieve interoperability between technology vendors to help broadcasters in the switch from the SDI to IP production environment.

Product demos included SAM’s Enterprise router, the S800 range and the Kahuna Production Switcher, all of which have IP capabilities. Also discussed was the transition to a virtualised playout, where SAM’s ICE channel-in-a-box is now available as a software-only option offering customers the ability to move from capex to opex business models.

Riedel brought to DMI the concept of its latest decentralised router, discussing how interconnected MicroN units can be deployed to create a decentralised routing system. It was demonstrated how the router can be used to simplify OB operations, especially in sports broadcasting. The vendor also gave an overview of the latest router deployments in France and Belgium.

Harmonic gave an update on the company, highlighting the recent acquisition of Thomson Video Network and progress on the active and swift integration of the companies and the unified product lines. It also introduced two new Harmonic VOS offerings powered by the cloud – VOS Cloud and VOS 360.

VOS Cloud enables content and service providers to manage video production and delivery workflow for broadcast and OTT applications via standard IT hardware over public or private cloud infrastructures. VOS 360 professional cloud media-processing service provides operators with a software-as-a-service solution hosted in the public cloud and maintained and monitored by Harmonic, enabling customers to launch revenue-generating, broadcast-quality OTT services in a matter of hours instead of weeks.

Imagine Communications presented its latest solutions in hybrid infrastructure, playout and cloud DVR. The key points of discussion were the integration of 4K/UHD and High Dynamic Range (HDR) capabilities across the company’s entire networking and playout platforms. The company showcased its advanced support for HEVC/H.265 compression on its Selenio platform.

Avid addressed both the engineering department and the production department. Avid’s integration with Adobe premier was discussed while also touching upon its graphics integration with Spark and 4designer. Also discussed was Avid Nexis, a software-defined storage platform that enables fully virtualised storage.

DMI Technology Week was received well by both vendors and attendees. While the vendors welcomed the opportunity to interact directly with end users, it was a learning experience for DMI’s engineers. The broadcaster plans to make it an annual event from next year.

“We decided to bring a slice of NAB to our staff. The idea was to familiarise our engineers with what’s out there and give them a first-hand experience of the technology available today. I think it turned out to be a worthwhile effort”

Saleh Lootah, Head of TV and Radio Engineering, DMI
Digitisation and smart technologies in media and entertainment were at the heart of this year’s BroadcastAsia exhibition and conferences. The show brought together top industry service providers to showcase an entire ecosystem of the latest end-to-end solutions needed to stay ahead of the curve.

New launches included the first VR-ready Dell precision workstations for enhanced experiences, Imagine Communications’ Ultra High Definition production tools and operational management platform, Ideal Systems’ new revenue-generating systems for broadcasting industry, and more.

“The world of VR is quickly growing beyond media and entertainment, supported by the advancement of technology that allows for optimal VR experience, whether consuming or creating VR content. Dell has been delivering immersive computing experience for many years and is committed in enabling VR partners across the entire ecosystem, besides providing advanced hardware configuration. BroadcastAsia provided the platform to showcase how we can support the democratisation of VR for the masses in areas such as education, architecture and real estate, manufacturing and advertising. We have had overwhelming response at the booth, and look forward to developing new partnerships in furthering the growth of VR in the APJ region,” said Harveenpal Singh, Business Development Lead, Precision Workstation, Client Solutions, Dell APJ.

“We were very impressed with the level of real demand for the next generation IP-based broadcast systems. We saw tremendous interest in the new systems we launched in Asia for the first time at BroadcastAsia, from revenue-generating systems like Paywizard and Starfish right through to the revolutionary Electricfriends camera robotic system that we use to great effect with Vizrt in their augmented reality demos,” said Fintan McKiernan, CEO, Ideal Systems SEA.

New innovations from first time exhibitors such as CISCO, Dell, Tata Communications, Level3 Communications and Hyku attracted a lot of attention. Dell showcased how content experiences can be rejuvenated with the latest in 360 degree VR capabilities, and Hyku, social TV application with patented second-screen sync technology designed to better connect and engaged hyper-connected consumers of today.
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Consumer expectations in the region increasingly present new challenges to provide more convenient and reliable access to content. Building on the success of its debut last year, the popular TV Everywhere! Zone returned with an emphasis on OTT and multiscreen solutions and explore the entire value chain of non-linear broadcasting.

In addition to the TV Everywhere! Zone, attendees could explore other themed zones, including the Cinematography/Film/Production Technology Zone – where exhibitors demonstrated the latest motion picture production tools and software capabilities – and the Post Production Hub where industry experts shared their knowledge and experience using technology showcased at BroadcastAsia2016. Oscar nominated, multi Grammy-nominated producer of soundtracks, classical and jazz recordings and former Senior Vice President of Sony BMG Masterworks, Christopher Craker was a part of the lineup at the Post Production Hub, as well as award winning sound designer and composer of ‘The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, The Hobbit, King Kong, Dave Whitehead.

The Post Production Hub at BroadcastAsia also saw overwhelming interest from visitors, drawing huge crowds daily to the booths and presentations. Visitors had the opportunity to hear from Oscar- and Grammy-nominated producers, award-winning film makers and sound and visual effects experts, with content ranging from modern filmmaking techniques and technologies and how Hollywood drama uses LED lighting, to the art of refining sound to bring scenes to life.

“The crowd at BroadcastAsia have been most encouraging, with overwhelming interest and support of my presentations and demonstrations at the Avid booth. I'm grateful for the opportunity to travel to Singapore to share my experiences and techniques with fellow sound enthusiasts. I hope the experiences I have shared might help fellow filmmakers and producers enhance the cinema experience for their audience,” said Dave Whitehead, Sound Designer, White Noise Ltd.

Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director, BroadcastAsia confirmed that the exhibition will be moving to Suntec Singapore next year.

“The show has been great this year. It has been a very good knowledge sharing platform, which is the main idea of hosting shows like these.”

Calvin Koh, Assistant Project Director, BroadcastAsia

and the exhibition will be held over three days instead of four.

“We are also taking a segment of BroadcastAsia to Indonesia, which has huge domestic media and entertainment market. The special focus in Indonesia will be on audio, video and radio and the acquisition part of the media. The exhibition will also feature new innovations in producing and consuming media, and will be held this year in from August 31 to September 3,” he added.

At CommunicAsia and EnterpriseIT, the inaugural Asia ICT Innovation Forum organised in strategic partnership with Huawei, also served as a knowledge-exchange platform. Attendees interacted with regional ministerial representatives, internationally renowned economists and global ICT industry thought leaders in their discussion of the impact of digital technology on the Asia Pacific Economy, the value of Big Data analytics, and more.

Commenting on the event, Joe Deng (Zhou Jianjun), Carrier Business President, Huawei Southern Pacific Region said: “We were strongly encouraged by the enthusiasm, meaningful exchanges, and potential collaborations resulting from the inaugural Asia ICT Innovation Forum. We believe our message of accelerating digital transformation through ICT innovation and ecosystem synergies to deliver a better connected world have been well received. We will continue to provide platforms for the meetings of minds and facilitate dialogues to create an open, collaborative, win-win ecosystem to advance the vision of a Better Connected World, which leads to progressive economic development, vertical productivity and efficiency, as well as sustainable and safe living. Huawei is committed to helping the telecom and vertical industries digitise their infrastructure, operational systems and business models to realise their business aspirations.”

The 2017 edition of BroadcastAsia will be held from 23 to 25 May at Suntec City Convention Centre, while CommunicAsia and EnterpriseIT will remain at Marina Bay Sands. The inaugural edition of Broadcast Indonesia will be held this year from August 31 to September 3.
**Harmonic in the cloud**

Harmonic showcased two new VOS offerings powered by the cloud — VOS Cloud and VOS 360.

An extension of Harmonic’s VOS software-based media-processing platform, VOS Cloud is a media-processing platform that enables content and service providers to manage the video production and delivery workflow for broadcast and OTT applications via standard IT hardware over public or private cloud infrastructure. Harmonic’s VOS 360 professional cloud media-processing service provides operators with a software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution that is hosted in the public cloud and maintained and monitored by Harmonic, enabling customers to launch revenue-generating, broadcast-quality OTT services in a matter of minutes instead of months.

The company also showcased HDR in action using its VIBE 4K real-time encoder. As part of the demo, the company used footage from the NASA TV UHD channel.

**PlayBox Technology debuts Neo and CloudAir**

PlayBox Neo and CloudAir made their first APAC show appearance at their stand.

The core element of the PlayBox Neo suite is the AirBox Neo playout server. Designed for 24/7 unattended operation, it can also be operated manually — including the ability to handle live-to-air throughput. AirBox Neo supports UHD, HD and SD in single server. CloudAir can also be deployed as the basis of a disaster-recovery system.

**Going Solo with Domo Broadcast**

DTC, Domo Broadcast (previously Cobham TCS) introduced the SOLO7-OBTx, a modular, feature packed camera-back transmitter, to the Asia Pacific market at Broadcast Asia 2016.

The SOLO7-OBTx is a new, ultra-small camera-back transmitter that features 1080p60 and 4:2:2 with integrated camera control. It includes swappable RF modules (340MHz – 8.6GHz) and H.26x/MPEG-4 AVC video encoding. The transmitter’s superior latency can reach an ultra-low 10ms. Moreover, the unit’s low power consumption provides plenty of scope for extended field performance.

Also featured was the SOLO8 SDR (“software-defined radio”), a dual-input HD-SDI COFDM and IP mesh transmitter that includes integral video analytics, recording, and IP streaming. Because IP Mesh is self-forming, and self-healing, it constantly readjusts to find the best route to send high quality data between nodes.

**RTW in control**

RTW introduced its new audio processor hardware, APRO-CLC01 for Continuous Loudness Control (CLC) at BroadcastAsia2016.

The APRO-CLC01 includes the first OEM hardware for the CLC algorithm that RTW developed in cooperation with the German Institut für Rundfunktechnik (IRT). The new custom hardware feature enables engineers to use the company’s processing algorithm for continuous loudness and dynamic control of a live signal in their professional audio equipment.

Allowing users to constantly control and regulate a given programme-loudness value, the CLC signal processing algorithm provides a definable loudness range with minimal obstacles for unknown, live content. The main advantage of the complex adaptive morphing algorithm is its real-time capability. The CLC algorithm “learns” about the dynamic structure and intention of the sound signal during processing, and uses that learned information to constantly predict what comes next.

**www.domotactical.com**

www.harmonicinc.co.uk

www.domotactical.com

www.playbox.tv

www.rtw.de
Socialise with Vimond Connect

In its debut at BroadcastAsia 2016, Vimond Connect provided new way for viewers to socialise while watching online television. Viewers can comment on the content as they watch, but the comments are anchored to the exact moment in the video when they were posted, allowing the comments to be seen at the same point by VOD viewers watching later. This enables a spoiler-free conversation around television content between viewers watching at different times, with a spontaneous social experience. Since the communication is tied to the triggering events in the video, the users can easily find all commenters that are interested in that specific event, making it easier to interact.

www.vimond.com

Cinegy debuts at BroadcastAsia 2016

In its first ever appearance at BroadcastAsia, Cinegy featured all of its new products, led by Cinegy Air PRO 11, the latest version of its real-time playout server and multi-channel broadcast automation software. In addition to support for high frame rate Ultra HD formats (50/60p), Cinegy Air PRO Version 11 has integrated HEVC stream encoding with specific NVidia graphics cards, plus the ability to offload HEVC and H.264 stream encoding to the NVidia GPU. Users can use commodity hardware to stream UHD, and because Version 11 includes a loudness limiter and Dolby E encoding and decoding, external devices or internal software used for compliance, decoding, or subtitling can be eliminated. Importantly for BroadcastAsia, Version 11 also supports Australia’s OP42/47 subtitling requirements. Air PRO Version 11 also includes Cinegy’s in-built channel branding.

www.home.cinegy.com

Aspera powers file transfers

At BroadcastAsia 2016, Aspera showcased its latest high-speed transfer solutions for live streaming, collaboration and workflow automation.

Aspera FASPStream is a new turnkey application software line that represents the first open video transport solution for live streaming of broadcast-quality video over commodity Internet networks with glitch-free playout and negligible start-up time – reducing the need for expensive and limited satellite-based backhaul, transport and distribution.

FASPStream software uses Aspera’s FASP bulk data protocol to transport any live video source (local multicast, unicast UDP, TCP, or growing file source) and provides timely arrival of live video and data independent of network round-trip delay and packet loss. Less than five seconds of start-up delay is required for 50 Mbps video streams transported over 250 milliseconds round-trip latency and three percent packet loss, sufficient for 4K streaming between continents.

Aspera Orchestrator 2.5 workflow orchestration platform now has over 150 third-party plug-ins, including new plugins for Dalet, Xytech, SGL FlashNet, Marquis, Emotion, ShowMgr, ARRIS CMM, DATDV, Snell, Fortium, Ateme, Minnetonka, MOG, and Baton. Enhancements to the Designer provide step-wise versioning and yield faster execution, while new Activity and Statistics screens show visual progress of workflow.

www.asperasoft.com

Linear Acoustic demonstrates Sdi Xnode

The Linear Acoustic SDI xNode is a crucial bridge between SDI and Audio over IP (AoIP) systems. TV facilities can take advantage of fully distributed I/O and Audio over IP for HD/SD-SDI signals, enabling incredible flexibility in audio routing and distribution.

One SDI xNode is capable of de-embedding multiple channels of audio from its dual SDI inputs, taking audio from standard-definition and HD SDI streams, and translating them to real-time Livewire+/AES67 audio streams — which can then be routed to an AERO. soft Processing Engine or to destinations throughout the plant. Livewire, the broadcast AoIP technology introduced by Telos in 2003, now powers more than 6,500 broadcast studios worldwide. Livewire+ is completely AES67-compliant, ensuring interoperability with the growing number of broadcast devices that support the AES67 standard.

Each SDI xNode manages dual, independent HD/SD-SDI paths, and can de-embed.

www.linearacoustic.com
Watching TV has traditionally been a family experience whereby everyone sits in front of the television waiting for their favourite movie or show to broadcast at a set time. The young Arab population is turning this experience on its head by watching their favourite TV shows and movies online through video-on-demand (VOD) services.

With more than 60% of the MENA population aged 25 and under, this shift is leading to a major transformation in the MENA media industry. Adding to this shift is growing broadband penetration and the increasing demand for premium content – two behaviours that are creating opportunities for new players and challenging the incumbent model of the broadcast industry. The newly emerging streaming industry will not replace broadcast TV and linear channels, but digital streaming services – especially when packaged with device manufacturers and telecom operators – will certainly reshape the media landscape.

According to a recent Nielsen Global VOD survey, 21% of respondents in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) have used a paid VOD service to watch their favourite shows and movies. Such VOD platforms are changing the television landscape daily – not only by taking eyes off broadcast TV, but by making premium content affordable and available on a range of devices including smartphones, smart TVs and gaming consoles. Furthermore, increased penetration of IPTV networks – such as Etisalat’s eLife service in the UAE and Ooredoo’s Mosaic service in Qatar – allow telecom operators to play a key role as enablers of digital platforms by providing access to additional networks and convenient billing methods.

Content producers and studios, particularly Arabic content producers, are now recognising this shift and are looking for additional ways to distribute and monetise their content through these VOD platforms. These trends are combining to create a better experience for viewers by ensuring more localised, targeted content for audiences in the MENA region.

This combination of content producers, VOD platforms and telecom operators now brings Arab consumers the premium content they want at an affordable price, and offers them greater control over what they watch, when they watch and on what device they watch. Furthermore, with no service-specific hardware requirements like dishes, cables or set-top boxes, access to VOD services is instantaneous and contract-free.

Digital media is also benefiting from the rising use of smartphones and mobile broadband to access social media, e-commerce and VOD services in MENA. According to a recent survey by Strategy&, nearly two thirds of MENA social media users regularly use social networks to seek product recommendations. Digital marketing is taking market share away from other traditional mass media marketing channels – not only because of its reach, but because it is much more efficient in targeting selected demographics and offers more measurability. Given the exceptional success of social media in MENA, advertisers are increasingly adding digital and social media marketing spend to their overall marketing budgets, further challenging the revenue streams of the broadcast and linear TV industry.

As established and emerging VOD players take advantage of this industry shift, content is still king. For VOD platforms, content curation is no longer an obscure art form but rather a science based on quantitative data and facts. Content selection is often based on a demand rating that is an aggregation of online search, social media trends, customer feedback and real-time consumption data and other factors, such as 4K quality, that will best resonate with MENA audiences.

These are exciting times for the VOD industry. According to Digital TV Research in the MEA region, 2.8m VOD subscriptions are expected by the end of 2016, with that figure rising to almost 20m by 2021. With subscription VOD revenues expected to increase from USD 124m to $1.24bn over the same time frame, the MENA media industry is starting to sit up and take notice.

Maaz Sheikh is CEO of STARZ Play.
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