New strategies from the CEOs of OSN and Zee Middle East bring fresh twist to MENA media scene

SHOW ME THE MONEY
Pierre El Daher, CEO of LBCI, on making TV profitable in Lebanon

MUSIC TO THE EARS
Anghami founders share their success story

REVIEWS
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Welcome

It’s not every month that we get to meet with more than one CEO who is changing the game within the media space. Last month, we had the pleasure of meeting with five such game changers, and what perfect timing! No edition of BroadcastPro ME could have done them as much justice as the CABSAT show issue.

We were the first to secure an audience with Martin Stewart, who has now made OSN more accessible to subscribers than it has traditionally been, with a completely revamped pricing structure and more features to come. Mukund Cairae has taken Zee Middle East several notches up by meeting from being just a TV network to making TV more commercially viable to media owners. We also met with the founders of the famed Anghami music streaming service; the story of how they have achieved fame is truly impressive.

Then we have Pierre El Daher, CEO of LBCI, who has been leading the charge of Lebanese broadcasters to make TV more commercially viable to media owners. Last month, we had the pleasure of meeting with Pierre El Daher, CEO of LBCI, on making TV profitable in Lebanon. It’s not every month that we get to meet with more than one CEO who have achieved fame is truly impressive.

In the meantime, we have so many fascinating stories to share with you this month from across the Middle East, Africa and Turkey as well as news about what’s happening at CABSAT and online broadcast community! A gentle reminder! BroadcastPro ME and SatellitePro ME are the official media partners for CABSAT. See you at the show!

Vijaya Cherian, Editorial Director

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News flash: Paul Wallis exits Imagine Communications; PBS mulls sale

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GatesAir secures ERTU deal for large SFN FM radio rollout

State broadcaster, Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), has chosen GatesAir’s FM radio transmission technology, including its Flexiva transmitter, Intraplex intelligent IP networking, and Single Frequency Network (SFN) solutions, to expand its multi-channel FM radio services across Egypt. GatesAir joined forces with local partner Cairo Communication Systems (CCS) to negotiate the deal. The contract was awarded in December 2016 by ERTU, led by Managing Director Amr Shedid. GatesAir will serve as a technology provider to CCS, which will be responsible for providing ongoing technical and installation support to ERTU. The installation is set to begin in Q3 of 2017 and is scheduled for completion at the end of the year when the transmitters will be broadcasting ERTU-run FM radio stations over the air.

As the largest digital FM radio rollout to date in the Middle East, the deal will see the deployment of 27 GatesAir Flexiva FLX 10 kW liquid-cooled, solid-state transmitters configured in an 8+1 single-frequency network (SFN). When completed, the infrastructure will consist of three transmission sites, each of which will have a cluster of eight synchronised Flexiva transmitters, plus one transmitter serving as a backup that is set up for automated failover.

Arabsat and ONT launch Tunisian platform

Arabsat and ONT (Office National de la Telediffusion) have signed an agreement to launch a Tunisian broadcast platform on Arabsat Badr-4 at 24°E. The platform will be operational by Q2 of this year and will give Tunisian and regional broadcasters direct access from Tunis to the growing 24°E neighbourhood, with coverage encompassing the MENA and Western Europe. This platform is the result of a long-term cooperation between Arabsat and the ONT,” said Khalid Balkheyour, CEO of Arabsat. Rohde and Schwartz has been contracted to install and commission the platform.

ERTU’S HQ in Cairo.

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Robotic camera dolly and track with innovative design
The Hexagon floor system is the latest design in the field of robotic camera tracks. It features a unique rail shape and robust dollies design for the most demanding environments. Its elegant and modular structure enables system designers to fit the solution to a wide variety of applications from high-end news studios to Broadcast rental setups (e.g. concerts, shows, sporting events). The Hexagon system is fully integrated with the Vinten control system (VRC) allowing you to have your best control system and the best dolly – a winning combination.

Features:
- Works with Vinten Control System: The Hexagon Dolly, motorized column and robotic head natively interface to the Vinten control protocol and can be fully managed from the Vinten robotic control system (VRC).
- Support for Shot Sequencing: Select multiple shots from the control surface, send all these to the Hexagon Dolly, and execute a seamless move through multiple key frames.
- Low Profile, Walkable Track: With only 3.0 mm (1/8 in) height from the ground, this is the lowest profile track design that is available today. While keeping stability and movement quality at the highest level, it is less obtrusive than competitive solutions while minimizing the risk of tripping over.
- Fast Set-up, Easy Assembly: Designed for the very challenging rental environment, the Hexagon system is easy to set-up and simple to amend or enhance track as the studio needs change.
- Integral Cable Management: With no cables outside the track, the dolly has a small footprint of 0.5 m (19.68 in), keeping it nice and tidy with nothing beyond this width. The cable management used also makes minimal noise as the dolly is moving.
- High Traction: 4 traction wheels with dual synchronized motors enable high traction operation with virtually no slipping.
- Optional Positioning Belt for AR/VR: The track position can be very accurately measured and sent to a graphics engine so that the system can be used in an Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality environment.
- Flexible Configurations: Options include straight or curved track shape, up to 2 traction wheels, and fully integrated with Vinten Robotics & controlled via VRC.

Specifications:
- Height of Track: 100 mm
- Width of Track: 500 mm (500 mm gauge), complete with internal cable management system
- Length of Track: Up to 50 m, straight or curved configuration
- Head payload: 30 kg
- Dolly maximum speed: 0.7 m/s
- Minimum height (from floor to lens center): 1 m
- Dolly weight: 80 kg (light weight aluminum construction)

Vinten Hexagon Track System

Innovative design & versatile track solution
Low profile track that is less obtrusive in the studio environment
Fully integrated with Vinten Robotics & controlled via VRC

MBC and Ooredoo launch channel

MBC Group and Ooredoo have announced the launch of MBC’s Ooredoo Channel for Ooredoo TV subscribers.

The launch is part of a multi-year memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by Ooredoo and MBC Group last year, which gave Ooredoo exclusive rights to some of MBC’s most popular HD channels in Qatar. With this partnership, Ooredoo TV customers will now be able to exclusively enjoy a selection of MBC’s best Arabic content.

Wael Al-Najd, Ooredoo Qatar Chief Executive Officer, said: “This is the latest step in our vision of offering leading local and international content to Qatar.”

MBC Group CEO, Sam Barnett added: “It’s a privilege to be partnering with such an innovative telecommunications company. The speed and sophistication of the network provided by Ooredoo means that viewers in Qatar are able to experience audiovisual content at industry leading levels of quality.”

Ideal Systems to represent LYNX Technik in MEA
LYNX Technik AG and Ideal Systems have entered into a distribution agreement for Middle East & Africa.

Broadcast SI Ideal Systems will represent LYNX Technik’s germMachine, yellobrik, Tester | lite and Series 5000 solutions from its Dubai office for sales, service and support.

“The Middle East is a promising growth market for us and with Ideal System’s reach and experience, we look forward to strengthening our presence and providing solutions together to address broadcasters,” commented Winfried Duschek, CEO of LYNX Technik AG.

G&D at CABSAT

G&D will be showcasing its multi-channel KVM system 5624 at the upcoming CABSAT in Dubai, May 1-3, Hall 4, Stand C2-31.

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Season two of Iftah Ya Simsim begins production

Children’s TV series Iftah Ya Simsim will return with a new season this September. The series is produced by Bidaya Media, a children’s education content development company, in partnership with twofour54 Abu Dhabi, the capital’s media and entertainment hub, and Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organisation behind Sesame Street.

Season two began production last month at twofour54’s Abu Dhabi studios. twofour54’s Film and TV Services division will provide production services as well as two months of studio space, equipment and a crew from its pool of industry freelancers, followed by six months of post-production at its facility.

This season of 52 11-minute episodes sees the debut of new characters Ka’aki (Cookie Monster) and Elmo, the furry red Muppet with an infectious laugh. Simsim will explore early childhood educational topics in an engaging manner, using clear language and STEAM concepts, to encourage learning and provide entertainment.

Calrec chooses Decibel as North Africa distributor

Calrec Audio has signed Decibel S.A. as its exclusive distributor in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. With an emphasis on Brio, Calrec’s all new compact digital broadcast audio console, Decibel will represent the full line of Calrec Audio solutions to broadcast customers throughout these territories and in Switzerland. Based in Vey, Switzerland, Decibel has provided professional audio solutions and products for more than 20 years and represents more than 30 pro-audio brands. Decibel’s extensive local market knowledge and multilingual staff are especially valuable in Switzerland, where the company covers five regions speaking five different languages.
Vuclip has announced the launch of Viu, a direct-to-consumer video-on-demand (VOD) service, in the Middle East. Vu has already seen adoption in Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The VOD streaming service brings cinema, TV and music from the Arab world, Hollywood, Bollywood and Philippines to eight markets across the region. Viu launches as a freemium service but consumers can also subscribe to a premium portion of the service which includes an ad-free experience.

Viu comes to the Middle East

Disney EMEA to introduce first original digital series

Disney EMEA is readying So Sammy on its dedicated app, the first original series for the Disney Channel app. The series will consist of 10 episodes lasting two minutes each.

The show has been produced by King Burt Productions (founded by comedian Miranda Hart in 2014), together with David Walliams (a comic and actor) and BBC Worldwide.

Aimed at six- to twelve-year-old children, the story is about Sammy, who is a vlogger, and her family. It shows her talking to the camera about her friends, her family and her new stepmother.

Introducing the show, comedian Miranda Hart said: “It has been really fun collaborating on a show set in the vlogging universe where kids hang out today. With the show set in the intriguing world of tween vlogging, it is a perfect fit that So Sammy has its platform on the Disney Channel app.”

Dejere has announced Brian Anderson as its new CEO, taking over from Brian Cran, who has headed the company for the last five years. Anderson’s priorities as he hits the ground will be to drive the launch of new connectivity solutions later in the year, that provide fast, reliable and secure access to the public internet and private networks.

belN Launches VOD service

belN has announced the launch of an on-demand service that will give its subscribers access to more than 2000 programmes. Its on-demand products include a Box office channel that will feature the latest Hollywood movies, subscription and transactional video-on-demand areas and catch-up. Read more on page 54.
Hitachi Kokusai Electric Turkey delivers new SNG vehicle to JRTV

Hitachi Kokusai Electric Turkey Systems has announced the delivery and successful commissioning of a new satellite news gathering (SNG) transmission uplink vehicle to Jordanian state broadcaster Jordan Radio and Television (JRTV). Throughout this project, Hitachi Kokusai Electric Turkey Systems worked closely with its local partner, Amman-based Hitat, for engineering and technology, a power generator, ensuring reliable stand-alone operation even in the most extreme Jordanian climate conditions.

The vehicle is a bespoke solution designed to meet the exact SNG transmission needs of JRTV. Based on the Mercedes Sprinter van, the OB vehicle integrates a PDA 150 Ku-band Drive News antenna, a 1.1 kW Ku band TWTA and MPS28-24 HD compression system and a built-in automatic levelling system. The vehicle also includes a high-power air conditioning system, an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) system and a power generator, ensuring reliable stand-alone operation even in the most extreme Jordanian climate conditions.

Africa’s Kwesé TV opts for EPG data provider EBS

EPG data provider EBS has added Econet Media’s Kwesé TV platform to its portfolio. Kwesé TV launched 56 channels in Ghana, Rwanda and Zambia this January with an array of entertainment, news and sports. Owned by Econet Media and part of the broader Econet Group, Kwesé TV’s multiplatform offering enables viewers to access content across linear, mobile and digital platforms via multiple devices as well as on both paid and free-to-air services across Africa.

The partnership with EBS enables Kwesé TV to deliver metadata and images for every programme via EBS EPG and metadata management application Pawa.

“Our objective is to give our audiences access to premium and accurate programming,” said Joseph Hundah, CEO of Econet Media.

“We are, therefore, pleased to partner with a service provider like EBS who has a similar focus. Following the launch of Kwesé in Ghana, Rwanda and Zambia, as well as the staggered approach that will be rolled out in the rest of the continent, we are looking forward to providing our viewers with a world-class viewing experience.”

Keith Bedford, EBS Managing Director, added: “EBS has been working very closely with Kwesé over the last few months to ensure the EPG was not only delivered on time for launch, but that it was accurate, comprehensive and appealing to the viewer. Kwesé TV recognises the fragmenting way in which viewers consume content. The necessity to be able to locate content quickly and easily across varied devices and media is paramount, and in order to do this, it is vitally important that channels deliver accurate metadata on time.”

Nigeria requires 30m STBs for digital switchover

Nigeria’s National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria has announced that the country requires thirty million set-top boxes to complete the digital switch-over (DSO) process. During transition, billions of naira (Nigerian currency) will be involved in the set-top box process, according to Mallam Is’haq Modibo Kawu, Director General of NBC. He noted that the country has already acquired 850,000 STBs at a price of $26m to start the DSO process.

Kawu pointed out that 39 local, national and regional channels were being switched to digital in Abuja, and that the technical part of the process was being carried out all over Nigeria. According to Kawu, the entire DSO in West Africa is being handled by Nigerian experts.

The QYOU expands into EAST AFRICA

Internet video curator The QYOU has partnered with South African subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service ShowMax, to curate a series of shows in East Africa. The deal signifies The QYOU’s expansion into the African market and demonstrates viewers’ growing appetite for on-demand video content globally.

ShowMax is owned by Naspers, a global internet and entertainment group. ShowMax expanded its online TV service in 36 countries across the continent in May last year and has now selected The QYOU to increase its reach among retaliates. Called Q Hub, the show consists of 13 half-hour episodes featuring highly localised, bespoke content aiming to appeal to millennial viewers from the area.

DIFF claims its 13th edition most successful yet

The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) topped previous records in its 13th edition with a selection of programmes from its line-up of chefs and a bigger offering of short-form videos. Fatafeat will present a new line-up of shows to prepare families for the year ahead, including Sweet Memories season 2 in March, which follows Chef Da’a d Abu Jaber through the preparation of deserts and more.

The channel is also gearing up for the upcoming Ramadan with a selection of programmes from its line-up of chefs and a bigger offering of short-form videos. Fatafeat will create more than 1,300 short-form videos to expand its digital offering. Chef Wafiq Belaid makes his debut on the channel with North African Cuisine, a gastronomic journey around the diverse and unique Flavours of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.

Icflix expands footprint in Pakistan

Icflix is reinforcing its position in Pakistan by strengthening its partnership with PTCL, the largest information telecommunication technology and entertainment service provider in the country. PTCL customers will be able to enjoy content on PTCL’s Smart TV, which is available in 150 major cities across Pakistan and is the first IPTV service introduced in the country. Over the years, PTCL has grown to provide customers with 100 live TV channels as well as a large content library of movies, TV shows and kids’ programmes on set-top boxes and through Android and iOS apps.

Icflix’s Smart TV Mobile Application was nominated for the GOMA Global Mobile Awards (GLOMO) 2016.

Fatafeat announces new shows

Discovery Communications’ Arabic food network Fatafeat will present a new line-up of shows to prepare families for the year ahead, including Sweet Memories season 2 in March, which follows Chef Da’a d Abu Jaber through the preparation of deserts and more.

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The dates for next year’s Festivalwill take place at Madinat Jumeirah, the home of DIFF. The festival, which features 156 films from 55 countries, including 57 world and international premieres, 21 MENA premieres, 12 Middle East premieres and 9 GCC premieres.

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**MIPTV to spotlight virtual reality and immersive content**

MIPTV 2017, which will take place in Cannes, France, from 3-6 April 2017, will feature its biggest-ever programme on immersive content with special emphasis on Virtual Reality (VR), through a top-flight keynote, a leadership summit, a full conference programme and a dedicated exhibition area. MIPTV’s new thrust into VR will be spearheaded by a keynote speech from Rikard Steiber, President of Vspot at HTC Vive. Steiber will discuss the different content players that are growing VR. Ecosystem with Vspot’s HTC has built a VR app store and content delivery platform that’s both consumer and enterprise-facing. The app store will soon be the first to introduce a subscription model for VR, helping consumers navigate through more than 1,000 pieces of content now available in the marketplace. Vspot recently launched a platform to distribute VR content globally into arcades and amusement centres, developing an important touch point for consumers to engage VR. Steiber will also highlight how the variety of experiences being created for VR is emblematic of its potential to become the next mass-adoption medium. In parallel, MIPTV is hosting the inaugural Immersive Content Leadership Summit. This invitation-only gathering of industry partners will shape the rules of VR transactional content marketplace, and explore how to turn VR content economy into a sustainable ecosystem. The roundtable summit will include VR executives from media groups, content distributors, producers and manufacturers. The comprehensive conference programme will feature a full series of panels addressing virtual reality through the lens of existing genres, addressing overarching topics such as social VR and augmented reality.

**New permits from IRIB to boost IPTV services in Iran**

Iran’s state broadcaster IRIB has issued temporary permits to five companies to deliver IPTV services. IRIB had previously issued permits last October for IPTV services and then revoked them a month later due to a dispute with national regulators. IRIB’s newly appointed director Abdolali Askari is reported to have issued the permits after introducing a new formula for the IPTV deals, though further details have not been disclosed. The recipients of the five permits are: Irancell, Iran’s second mobile operator; Asseman, a company owned by the Setad Ejare Faramarze; Emam, aka Setad Electronic Publication, an e-publication company; Fanap ICT Company and Arya Hamrah; and Tarashe Sabz, a company owned by the Setade Ejare Faramarze. The permissions are temporary, allowing companies to work with national regulators to finalise formal agreements. The new deal will give viewers in Iran access to more online as well as linear programmes.

**MENA streaming service ties with Media Square to monetise content**

ALTV, a free MENA streaming service based in Egypt, has partnered with Cairo-based advertising agency Media Square to support its monetisation strategy. ALTV claims to have a rapidly expanding digital video platform seeking to generate revenue through product placement, exclusive content and sponsorships and advertisements. Since its launch in 2016, ALTV has successfully grown its audience of aspiring content creators across the MENA region and helped them connect, create and share their Arabic content. At the core of this community is the Creative Collaborative, a talented production cooperative, which in coming weeks will announce a full slate of premium content and flagships exclusive to ALTV.

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**MIDIB TV**

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Zee to launch new channel in Vietnam
Zee Entertainment will launch a new channel in Vietnam on March 13, BroadcastPro Middle East can reveal. Zee Phim is the Thai channel Zee Nung so that it is available to Thai audiences as a free-to-air channel from March 13.

"We are the first Indian broadcaster to have both the landing rights and an editing licence in Vietnam and, therefore, the only one with the ability to go on air," Mukund Cairae, CEO of Zee Entertainment for the Middle East and Asia Pacific market, commented.

With 2017 being designated as the Indo-Vietnamese Year of Friendship, Zee has been working closely with both governments to bring Indian entertainment to Vietnamese audiences.

"The Vietnamese love our content and Vietnam is a huge content sales market," explains Cairae.

In addition, Zee Nung, which is available only as a paid channel will be made free-to-air from March 13. Both channels will carry a mix of Indian movies, drama series, cookery shows, travelogues and other general entertainment programmes that will be subtitled and dubbed into their respective languages.

"If you’re going to your library and want to see a film that is not available only as a paid channel will be made free-to-air from March 13. Both channels will carry a mix of Indian movies, drama series, cookery shows, travelogues and other general entertainment programmes that will be subtitled and dubbed into their respective languages."

LIVE HD and Etisalat conduct fibre tests
LIVE HD and Etisalat recently tested "transporting video over (dark) fibre." The tests demonstrated the transmission of multiple HD video, multiplexed over a single fibre core. The set-up replicated transmission over a distance of up to 10km. The tests were conducted using standard single mode fibre cables and other products from Barnfind. Aron Husken of Symbolical, Barnfind's distributor in the MENA region, explained how the proof of concept was carried out.

"In the trials, we used a number of Barnfind products including the BarnOne-02, which is a 1RU 10" rack mount device with 16xBNC and 16xSFP to convert the electrical signals to optical. The BarnOne has a built in 32x32 cross-point matrix to distribute signal from one source to multiple SFP outputs. To add even more flexibility, each SBC can be software controlled to be a transmitter or a receiver. We used a 4-port CRTDM, multiplexer to aggregate the multiple optical video signals into a single stream. At the other end, the process was reversed. The same product acts as a demux to segregate the signal and feed into the second BarnOne-02 frame. To set the configuration on the BarnOne units, we used the BarnInside GUI."

Remote production is one of the interesting applications where Barnfind is often used, "an obvious benefit is that production can be done directly from the production centre." This "allows a much more efficient allocation of resources. There are other locations, which cannot be connected by dark fibre, so the OB can be put to use there. Another possibility is for big events to reduce their number of OB vans from two to one."

Zain and iflix launch internet TV in MENA
Mobile and data services operator Zain and internet TV service iflix have joined hands to form iflix Arabia and bring iflix’s internet TV to the MENA region. Headquartered in Dubai, iflix Arabia will add Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Sudan to iflix’s global footprint.

The commercial launch of iflix’s internet TV service across the MENA region is planned for Q2 of 2017. The service will bring a range of TV shows, movies and episodes of children’s content with Arabic and English subtitles to the region. The iflix repertoire will also include an extensive collection of Arabic shows and movies and original Arabic series.

To help video providers address the transformative change that is sweeping the media and entertainment industry, Elemental Technologies – an Amazon Web Services company and leader in software-defined video solutions – will help video production, distribution and monetisation advancements, both on- and in the cloud.

"Only flexible software-defined video solutions and scalable cloud solutions can assure content availability everywhere, leverage new formats like UHD and virtual reality, and allow media leaders to embark on new monetisation approaches," said Dan Marshall, Senior Vice President Worldwide Field Operations at Elemental Technologies.

Returning to the show, Hitachi Kokusai Electric will feature its Outside BroadcastAsia 2017 to showcase software-defined solutions
BroadcastAsia2017 International Conference
The show will bring together a portfolio of top broadcast experts and industry influencers to discuss evolving industry trends, debate the best
Introducing the virtual radio console. Now at your fingertips.

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On January 30, 2017, 106.2 Hum FM, the UAE’s oldest Hindi-language radio station, was relaunched in the country under new owner Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited (ZEEL) as 106.2 big FM. The change is the beginning of Zee’s ambitious journey into the radio business, with the aim of offering a 360-degree media package that encompasses TV, radio and digital to advertisers.

Mukund Cairae, CEO of Zee Entertainment Middle East & Asia Pacific, explains the rationale behind the new acquisition in the UAE.

“In terms of growth, we could have moved in two directions. We could either have moved into untapped markets or untapped mediums. With regards to untapped markets, there’s really not that much left in this part of the world that we have not explored. In APAC, we believe there is still a lot of potential in TV, but not in this part of the world. With regards to untapped mediums, everyone is going digital, but in Q4 of 2016, digital has seen an unusual decline. When we looked back at the 2008 downturn, the one medium that remained unaffected was radio, so that was the route we felt we needed to take.”

The talks for the change from Hum were concluded in Q4 of 2016. Around the same time, Zee was involved in some significant deals in India, where it sold TEN Sports to Sony Pictures Networks and acquired Reliance’s broadcast arm, including its network of BIG FM stations.

“Getting into radio in the UAE and starting the acquisition of Reliance Broadcast Network in India created a synergy between our international and domestic operations,” explains Cairae.

106.2 Hum FM was one of the first Hindi-language radio stations to hit the UAE airwaves in the 1990s, and was previously owned and operated by Shamal Media Services. The frequency itself is owned by the emirate of Umm Al Quwain and the lease for the licence was coming to an end on December 31, 2016. When Zee learned that Shahid Jamal, founder and MD of Shamal Media Services, did not intend to renew the licence, it snapped up the frequency.

As the oldest station in the country, Hum claims to have the largest reach in the UAE with a market share of 26%. “In terms of ratings, it is a no-brainer. Hum has the highest reach and listenership by a wide margin,” claims Cairae, adding that Zee has revamped the content on its station substantially to make it more attractive to the 25 to 44-year age group.

Zee brought in a fresh bunch of talent with a brand-new strategy aimed at taking the channel’s content to a new level of sophistication, with greater focus on the music and celebrity culture.

“We have only acquired the frequency. We did not take any of the Hum staff. All the people we have here are new and specifically recruited to take our strategy forward,” clarifies Cairae. Zee’s Middle East head is also quick to point out that “our hosts are all MJs, not RJs, and our tagline is Pure Music.”

“We talk about music, how that music was created...
and its effects on you. Having a Benny Dayal as your MJ along with Lavanya on the morning drive time show, or MJ Ujjwal hosting the afternoon show followed by Palak Muchhal, one of the lead singers in Bollywood now, and MJ Arpit hosting the evening show, just makes this station much more attractive. Essentially, we have musicians along with each of our resident MJs so they also provide their perspective on the music being played, and this has not been done here before."

Although much of the content is locally produced, the acquisition of BIG means Zee has the opportunity to take some of the most popular content from India and share it with the audience here. "We have been able to take some blockbuster shows like Suhana Safar by Anu Kapoor, a retro show, as well as little snippets like Chutki and Shopkeeper. The rest of the content is produced locally," he clarifies, adding that taking programming from India as a whole and broadcasting it here will not work. "The programming here is headed by Gagan Mudgal, who is a veteran in the radio space and has been in radio at least for a decade and was with Cool FM, 101.6 "

"When we looked back at the 2008 downturn, the one medium that remained unaffected was radio, so that was the route we felt we needed to take"  
Mukund Cariae, CEO Middle East & APAC, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited

Zee’s radio studios can be used as a sound studio and an on-air facility.

BMM means Zee has the opportunity to take some of the most popular content from India and share it with the audience here. "We have been able to take some blockbuster shows like Suhana Safar by Anu Kapoor, a retro show, as well as little snippets like Chutki and Shopkeeper. The rest of the content is produced locally," he clarifies, adding that taking programming from India as a whole and broadcasting it here will not work. "The programming here is headed by Gagan Mudgal, who is a veteran in the radio space and has been in radio at least for a decade and was with Cool FM, 101.6 "

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Zee has a ten-year licence for the frequency and has invested heavily in setting up four state-of-the-art studios at the Zee Tower in Dubai Media City. The studios double as recording and on-air facilities and have been operational since the end of last month.

“The broadcast software is all RCS. On the sound part, we are the only ones who have dot wave files so the quality of the sound that you hear is far better than what you would normally hear. Also, it is completely automated so it is also remotely done, and we have three levels of redundancy to ensure the service remains uninterrupted,” confirms Cairae.

Listeners were in for a surprise when they tuned into 106.2 big FM on January 30.

“Our aim is to have a range of offerings for our advertisers across TV, radio and digital, so that any budgets that are available are directed to our network”

Mukund Cairae, CEO Middle East & APAC, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited

“The humour is different. With our target audience being between the ages of 25 and 44, we have opted for more mature humour instead of slapstick. This channel aims at not just entertaining the listener but also helping them develop a finer taste for music.”

One of the big objectives of Zee is to cultivate the celebrity culture among NRIs.

“It’s all about celebrities and most radio stations in the UAE do not work with celeb RJs, and we identified that gap,” Cairae points out.

Zee’s interest in the local radio market is not unsubstantiated. The size of the UAE radio market alone is $130m, of which $38m is believed to go into the Arabic kitty, $35-36m to English, $30m to Hindi and $20m to Malayalam, with the balance being distributed between Tamil, Farsi, Tagalog and Russian.

“We are interested in the top three, namely Arabic, English and Malayalam/Tamil,” Cairae confides.

Hum, therefore, is only the beginning of Zee’s radio roadmap. By Q1 2018, Zee hopes to have at least four radio stations catering to different demographics in...
the country, with English a top priority in the coming months.

“There is only one English-language radio channel here that follows the franchise model, and it primarily addresses Western expatriates. From a population perspective, 50% are South Asians, so naturally a large number of the people who are listening to it are also South Asian.

“I believe we can do a better job of targeting this population through syndicated content from outside known brands or even franchise brands. We are in talks with two or three at present,” explains Cairae.

Zee’s plan is to launch a second radio station in September, a third in January 2018 and the fourth next April. With the four launches, the media network hopes to offer an entire spectrum of choices to the advertiser.

“Our aim is to make our way to the middle and take on a leadership revenue position”

Mukund Cairae, CEO Middle East & APAC, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited

“Our aim is to have a range of offerings for our advertisers across TV, radio and digital, so that any budgets that are available are directed to our network. We are working to ensure that each of our products have the best ratings. We want to make sure we present a full-dledged network to everyone here so that even a client that has $3,000 should be able to come to us.”

Cairae is open about competition, saying ARN presently enjoys the largest chunk of revenue from the radio business “because they have a wonderful set of channels”, followed by Abu Dhabi Media Company’s radio stations.

“Our aim is to make our way to the middle and take on a leadership revenue position,” he says, though he is quick to add that at present, Zee is too insignificant to make any dent in anyone’s revenues – the more important task at hand is to create the right content. With cricket a favourite in most Indian households and Zee having the broadcast rights to BCCI and T20 matches, the radio station intends to provide ball-by-ball updates when the T20s are on, with a break from music.

“The T20 matches were never about cricket; it’s all about entertainment. During this time, we don’t feel there’s any need for music. There’s a lot of glamour in this,” Cairae says.

Zee’s ambitions do not stop at traditional radio. While content has been revamped and a whole group of champion DJs with a passion for music have joined the radio station, the media network is also upping its digital game, simultaneously working on several elements.

“Apps are a given, and we will be doing that as well,” explains Cairae. “Our aim, however, is to see how we can take that one step further.”

“She recently upgraded to an IP infrastructure making it easier to go on air.

“I’m very bullish on the radio market growing”

Mukund Cairae, CEO Middle East & APAC, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited

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further and make our digital platforms truly social and engaging. Presently, Zee TV, Middle East’s Facebook page has more likes, more fans and more traction than the leading print platform here.” Zee has already hired a 30-member team for its digital arm and an Arabic portal is scheduled for launch prior to Ramadan. Like many broadcasters and content producers with content on YouTube who are dissatisfied with the revenue generated, Zee too expresses discontent. “The kind of consumption we are seeing and the revenues we are generating are not proportionate, plus Google gets to decide the CPS. We had never done Arabic before,” he says, referring to the success of Zee Alwan and Zee Alwan, both of which provide South Asian content, primarily from Bollywood, dubbed into Arabic for Arab audiences. While radio is a very powerful and successful medium, one of the biggest challenges in this space is the paucity of frequencies, laments Cairae. “I’m hopeful that digitisation will make more frequencies available. Presently, all radio is analogue but we hope that by 2019, this will change.” For now, Zee is aggressively moving forward with securing frequencies, strategising on how to best use the bandwidth for sending a large number of episodes for dubbing and receiving them on time. “This has given us the flexibility to deliver content easily not just for Zee Alwan and Zee Alwan, which are uplinked locally, but also for the playout of Zee Alwan and Zee Alwan for US markets. The locally produced shows for Zee TV are sent to Noida in India for transmission,” explains Kapoor. “On the radio side, the present workflow involves the creation of a database for songs, categorising them and then moving it into the database so that the quality is maintained and controlled. The metadata created for each song gives us the ability to take advantage of many features in the automation system.”

The complete workflow does not include any compression of the sound files in the chain; this feature allows the team to control the on-air quality and deliver the best sound for transmission. The entire radio automation at Zee is provided by RCS and includes its Di-selector music scheduling software, its Aquaria ad scheduling software and Zetta, which combines the legs from both for playout. The digital radio console used in the chain is from Wheatstone LX-24 with bladas from Wheatstone. A phone system from Comrex provides 10 lines. “We have wired these studios for future expansions so that when the business team decides to add more frequencies to the station, it can be done with ease,” says Kapoor. “The transmission is from Umm Al Quwain Broadcasting Network (UBN) and the stream from the studio is sent using a du link, although they do not have a fibre link. It uses a Microwave link to receive the stream at the UBN end. An IP Link 100 from GatesAir provides the links at both ends. This is used for outdoor broadcasting too.” Kapoor explains that these systems place greater control in the hands of the MJ and the production team to add more options to the input feeds coming into the station. “The automation software is given to the MJ himself so he can listen to the call, edit the audio as he wishes and put it on air at the same time,” he says. On the other hand, the IP system provides the technical team with greater flexibility to handle control configuration changes within a very short time. Monitoring the system becomes easier when all of the equipment is running over the network, he says. “The in-house team of radio and IP engineers (Manjay Sathyan, Krishna Krishnapalii and Rajoy Thomas) work round-the-clock to keep the operations running for all innovations needed for the business. Zee’s radio broadcast is also streamed online with the help of a local CDN provider. The other element is the digital platform, which involves transcoding all the video content based on the online and digital requirements. “We have more than 5,000 hours of content on the network which is now being converted for either platforms. This requires a huge in-house infrastructure to transcende them to different file formats for end users,” adds Kapoor. “We are also creating an online farm for transcoding content and an online storage for the team. The hardware used in this case is the Isilon X400.” The backend infrastructure of Storage (Isilon X400), Cisco switches and cores switches handle the complete flow of video and audio content in the network. The speed of transfer and delivery of content to each functional team is very critical for business deliveries and success,” he explains. The interesting thing, he adds, is the huge flexibility to use the content across different platforms with the existing infrastructure. Working on multiple frequencies with a small team of 30, “When big stars are invited to our studios, our MJs may be there to take an audio bite. A video footage could go on our FB page, another version could go on our TV networks and the ability to move seamlessly between these platforms gives both the flexibility one requires. This is why I say that the TDM world is over and the IP world has come up. The old way of doing radio stations or running a TV network is at the end of its life. IP is the way to go.”

The infrastructure

Last month, four studies were integrated and became operational from the first floor of the Zee Tower at Dubai Media City, as part of the media network’s new radio arm. In a special interview with BroadcastPro ME, Monish Kapoor, VP of IT and Broadcast at Zee Entertainment, gives us an overview of how Zee’s complete network infrastructure is used by its three businesses: TV, radio and digital online platforms. Each of Zee’s radio channels has been created to serve as both a sound studio and an on-air facility, says Kapoor, adding that the media network has been able to fast track all of its technology owing to the recent upgrade of its infrastructure to Cisco.

“We are keeping our radio on IP, which means if you give me a room and a set-up, you can go on air. We are able to provide this flexibility to the network because of the IP infrastructure. We did this two months ago, and the technologies we have deployed now are very mature to handle the task of going to air quickly.” Kapoor’s IT background has provided him with the opportunity to come up with simpler solutions that have kept technical manpower at a minimum at the company’s Dubai office. “Previously, the ownership of the equipment used to lie with those who knew the systems only and this was a huge limitation because it increased your dependence on major systems integrators and manufacturers. With new technologies, you have multiple options and means to achieve the same result. The second thing is the configuration capability. Today, our units can be configured or reconfigured remotely and the flexibility that provides is huge,” he explains. With Kapoor at the helm, Zee has converted all of its TV library to digital. “We have a digital platform and all of our assets have been digitised. We are the largest content keepers for Zee outside of India,” Kapoor says. On the TV front, the broadcast business required a workflow that could handle large video transfers across the network. This included recoding new content from India and creating new video content locally, taking the content into post-production and then transcoding it for delivery. Because the two channels are in Arabic, the files are sent for dubbing and subtitles; these are again done in low resolution to optimise the use of bandwidth for sending a large number of episodes for dubbing and receiving them on time. “The transmission is from Umm Al Quwain Broadcasting Network (UBN) and the stream from the studio is sent using a du link, although they do not have a fibre link. It uses a Microwave link to receive the stream at the UAE end. An IP Link 100 from GatesAir provides the links at both ends. This is used for outdoor broadcasting too.” Kapoor explains that these systems place greater control in the hands of the MJ and the production team to add more options to the input feeds coming into the studio. “The automation software is given to the MJ himself so he can listen to the call, edit the audio as he wishes and put it on air at the same time,” he says. On the other hand, the IP system provides the technical team with greater flexibility to handle control configuration changes within a very short time. Monitoring the system becomes easier when all of the equipment is running over the network, he says. “The in-house team of radio and IP engineers (Manjay Sathyan, Krishna Krishnapalii and Rajoy Thomas) work round-the-clock to keep the operations running for all innovations needed for the business. Zee’s radio broadcast is also streamed online with the help of a local CDN provider. The other element is the digital platform, which involves transcoding all the video content based on the online and digital requirements. “We have more than 5,000 hours of content on the network which is now being converted for either platforms. This requires a huge in-house infrastructure to transcende them to different file formats for end users,” adds Kapoor. “We are also creating an online farm for transcoding content and an online storage for the team. The hardware used in this case is the Isilon X400.” The backend infrastructure of Storage (Isilon X400), Cisco switches and cores switches handle the complete flow of video and audio content in the network. The speed of transfer and delivery of content to each functional team is very critical for business deliveries and success,” he explains. The interesting thing, he adds, is the huge flexibility to use the content across different platforms with the existing infrastructure. Working on multiple frequencies with a small team of 30, “When big stars are invited to our studios, our MJs may be there to take an audio bite. A video footage could go on our FB page, another version could go on our TV networks and the ability to move seamlessly between these platforms gives both the flexibility one requires. This is why I say that the TDM world is over and the IP world has come up. The old way of doing radio stations or running a TV network is at the end of its life. IP is the way to go.”
Martin Stewart has not had an easy ride since he assumed office as CEO of OSN on August 1, 2016. But the changes he has wrought indicate he is willing to adapt to market conditions and steer the company through tricky waters.

Stewart entered the market at a time when OSN’s boat had been rocked significantly. After enjoying monopoly status as the region’s only premium pay TV service for several years, the entry of beIN with a much cheaper entertainment package last November, and the arrival of a number of OTT players, created enough of a stir in the market for the pay TV provider to recognise that it needed to change its game.

Stewart is no newcomer to the media business. He has many feathers in his cap, but the one that stands out is his role from 1996-2005, when he served as CFO of Sky UK. He is reported to have been instrumental not just in launching Sky’s digital platform but also in helping to double its subscriber numbers to seven million before eventually moving to EMI, the music company. Stewart has also served as Director General of ONO, the Spanish broadband communication and entertainment company, delivering integrated telephone, television and Internet services. Besides number crunching being his forte, he has served on the boards of several companies including OSN and is no stranger to how the commercial aspect of the business works. So when the role of CEO at OSN became vacant, Stewart seemed the perfect fit for the role.

How has the ride been so far?

It’s been an amazing six months. It started in a whirlwind because every single day in August and September, I sat in the boardroom with teams coming in and making presentations and asking the same three questions – Tell me what you do? Tell me how you can do it better, and why you haven’t done it so far? And tell me what I need to do to help?

By the end of those presentations with every team, we had a strategy, got the sign-off for it, and then came the difficult part, which was the implementation. The first part of that strategy has been the launch of the new OSN with its new pricing and packaging structure.

It became very evident that to take us from where we are and be more successful in the future, we needed to listen to our customers. Customers were asking for more flexible pricing and more choice. We needed to recognise that everybody loves entertainment, but everyone wants it at a price point that they can afford or are willing to set aside for this purpose. We recognised that we needed to provide more flexible and affordable pricing if we were to attract a new set of subscribers.

How have you structured the pricing now?

The pricing is very simple. We have simplified everything into five basic building blocks, sort of like playing with Lego. You start with the foundation, which is the Get-Started pack at just $20. It has 32 general entertainment channels in both English and Arabic and includes Disney, Nickelodeon, a number of premium factual channels and more.

Once you have the Get-Started pack, you can add the rest of the blocks that you want. Some may want to subscribe to more movies, sports, Alfa, Pehla, Pinooy and so on. Our top proposition will be titled Get it All. The price range is between $20-89. We will be adding multi-room on top in early March.

Right from the basic package, our subscribers will be receiving premium content. This price point gives us the opportunity to have a conversation with the customer about what they want, what their families like, and then we can help build an entertainment package that suits their requirements.

“In terms of our ambition and where we are going, and the scale of what we are doing, we aim to triple our business. That’s our five-year ambition. So there’s never been a better time to be an OSN subscriber than now” — Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN
We allow them to make the choice. That’s the key difference between how we were before and how we will be in the future. We will listen, we will advise, and I’m certain customers will see greater value in what they are buying.

You mentioned four principles that you had adopted for the business. Yes, there are four overriding principles that we have adopted for our business for how we will build OSN and how we will build on top of it. These four principles are digitisation, partnerships, people and communication.

We see the need to be digital in everything we do, whether it is communicating internally with our customers or how they can interact with us and have service options.

From a partnership point of view, we are working more closely with other major entertainment organisations and service providers in the region to make sure we can service our customers on any platform that they want to be serviced on. Entertainment everywhere at a price for everyone is essentially what OSN is now looking to offer.

Regarding the third element, we have two thousand people working in this organisation and it’s important that everyone is moving in the same direction. We have spent a lot of time taking the two thousand people with us and making sure that everyone is involved in this journey with us.

The last is communication both with ourselves and with everyone. We are on a new journey. We have started with the new OSN packages and pricing. This will evolve further as we deal with partners and create more products for our customers and service them better. You will see a very different marketing approach and a new service approach as part of our pricing package, and in due course, you will also witness a different sales approach.

Do you plan to roll out more elements as part of your business strategy? Yes. In early March, you will see the first step in the evolution of our other products. Our OSN Play live streaming channels will increase in size from 20 linear channels to 30.
In summer, our OTT services will be revamped and enhanced. We will have bundles focused on sports, movies, entertainment and so on, with different pricing options. We will relaunch in the summer and those pricing options will be much more flexible, down to the part payment options. That's the next logical step, which is looking at what sort of products we want to put in front of our customers.

Additionally, the content we can offer to our customers in the OTT space is premium content. It will provide a strong package for customers and I understand that people are buying different rights all the time. We are very comfortable with our position and we are sure that we will compete very strongly with what is out there.

Do you not run the risk of some existing customers downgrading their packages? They have the freedom to do that, but just as we have great staff who have been with us for many years, we have a lot of customers who have been with us a very long time and will continue to be with us. Those people are very happy with the existing packages they have and have been receiving the best service we can offer.

Our new packages are aimed at attracting new customers. We want to be able to get them in at a price point that is affordable to them and allows us to engage in a conversation with them. We want to use the $20 package as a starting point. It is the start of a conversation. Based on research, we know that most people start with a basic package and then tend to see value in adding bundles.

Your USP has always been first-run programming. If you lower your prices, can you afford to invest in premium entertainment? We have announced that most of our contracts have been renewed on a long-term basis with most of the Hollywood studios, so that's proof of our commitment to always securing the best content. We also announced the Disney deal and the UFC last month. The Disney deal is a terrific addition, and it gives us tremendous rights.

We are also launching a number of Nickelodeon channels and a sports channel called Ginx Esports TV that is aimed at the younger audience in this region, where the population under 30 is significant. Particularly in sports and general entertainment and movies, we are trying to make sure we appeal to the younger audience in this region, where the population under 30 is significant.

I think we have gone one step further because we have better content in the entertainment space. First-run content starts in the very basic package. Now we are marrying our great content advantage with a great pricing advantage.

Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN

We now have more rights to be able to create different sorts of offerings for customers than ever before. We can now sell more products to more people in more countries, and I think that combination will give a big boost to our future profitability

Disney deal and the UFC last month. The Disney deal is a terrific addition, and it gives us tremendous rights.

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It is important for us to be able to appeal to the younger people, as they are the customers of tomorrow. Their method of accessing content has changed, and those two things are the decisions behind the types of content we offer and how we present it. It's hugely important for us that we are on any screen and on any device. That's got to be our long-term aim.

You don't have all your linear content on your OSN Play platform now. What's the challenge to making that possible? It's purely a technical challenge because of low bandwidth availability. In the long run, I would like to see a complete duplication of the content between platforms, so if you buy your main subscription for the home, you should be able to take that and have it on any other screen.

Would you say you are now positioned to compete with beIN in terms of pricing? I think we have gone one step further because we have better content in the entertainment space. First-run content starts in the very basic package. Now we are marrying our great content advantage with a great pricing advantage.

What's your opinion of the MENA pay TV space? The overall market for pay service in the MENA region is under-penetrated. There is huge opportunity for growth here; it's about making sure that you can provide entertainment packages at prices that people can afford and in ways in which they can watch it. If you make it affordable, we will be able to penetrate the market further, and our overriding aim is to see massive net growth in our business. We have had a great start, but we now need to build on that and take our ambition to the next level.

With your strong financial background, it is rumoured that you are prepping OSN for a sale. That's not true. I was brought in to take the business to the next level; it has the strong support of the shareholders, who have been in the business for more than 20 years. They see a huge upside in the market; it's under-penetrated in terms of overall consumption. Our objective is to grow right across the board. We didn't have enough flexibility before. We have addressed...
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Taking Arabic content to a new level

Emad Marcos, Chief Content Officer at OSN, is responsible for negotiating the content deals at OSN. He elaborates on the new direction OSN is taking in terms of Arabic content. “I don’t want to do game shows and talent shows, because FTA does an exceptional job in that area. I don’t see why I should go down the same path and create content that is already incredibly well produced. We are looking at a series or a show that has a host in it and interviews celebrities. Take The Oprah Winfrey Show, for instance. She is more cable TV US, and not FTA. Essentially, we are looking at outlets that cater to pay TV audiences.”

“We continue to increase our investments in Arabic. We are in a market that speaks Arabic, so we want a sustainable five-year direction for the content. This is not an ad-hoc approach to Arabic. With Disney, we now have an app that is in Arabic and teaches English. We also have Disney Hindi for OTT, and there are a lot more investments going and deals across the board and the different demographics that we serve. We have so much to tell our existing customers about so many new services on so many new deals.”

Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN

“I believe that demonstrates our resolve to continue as the home of all premium entertainment in this region. These deals have helped future proof our business, because the rights we have obtained are all long-term deals. The utility we have obtained in terms of VOD, localized production, 4K and so much more means we have an incredible amount of rights that will take us forward for the next five years. These are not just linear licensing agreements – we have bespoke feeds, OTT solutions and so much more to offer.”

What is your plan for your Arabic productions?

“We are simply not operating in some countries for which we do have the rights. Our aim is to develop new offerings that customers can enjoy and bring new offerings to those markets”

Martin Stewart, CEO, OSN

“We are developing a 4K box, but that is scheduled for later this year. In the meantime, though, we feel that the existing technology in our boxes is under-utilised. Our users are not maximising the potential of the boxes they have. We need to first explain what services our boxes have, like the PVR functionality or the ability to connect the box to the internet and watch from a huge library of premium on-demand content. They will enjoy our services more only if they will use what is already in their hands today.

We are adding new shows as part of our local productions. While we will showcase more news about OSN, upcoming movies, features, red carpet interviews, sports shows and so on in this channel, we also intend to show how to use our boxes effectively.

What new programmes are you producing locally as part of your sports package?

“We are the home of WWE and UPC, and those two properties are incredibly popular in this region. Outside of the US, this region has the biggest fan base for both those sports. We are going to enhance people’s enjoyment of those sports by bringing weekly shows in Arabic to better connect fans with their heroes. We will also show like Ultimate Fighter, and if we can help find the next star to fight in the UFC or WWE, that will be quite interesting. Does OSN have the financial resources to go head to head with beIN for deals coming up for renewal?

In the last few months, we have renewed almost all of our contracts, and I believe that demonstrates our resolve to continue as the home of all premium entertainment in this region. These deals have helped future proof our business, because the rights we have obtained are all long-term deals. The utility we have obtained in terms of VOD, localized production, 4K and so much more means we have an incredible amount of rights that will take us forward for the next five years. These are not just linear licensing agreements – we have bespoke feeds, OTT solutions and so much more to offer.”

What kind of rights do you have now?

Just linear, or the whole shebang?

When we sign contracts now, we ask the channel, we also intend to show how to use our boxes effectively.

What new technical initiatives are on OSN’s agenda for this year?

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Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI) is working with other broadcasters in Lebanon on structuring the relationship with local distributors. In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Pierre El Daher, CEO of LBCI, sheds light on the state of Lebanon’s TV sector and how things can be turned around to favour the market.

**How would you characterise the current state of the Lebanese television sector?**

We are facing an existential crisis. Not so long ago, Lebanese television channels were pioneers in the region in content, distribution and innovation. We have now retreated into a shell of our former selves. Domestically, while we remain the dominant media consumed by Lebanese citizens, the size of our advertising market does not support the current number of channels while programming costs continue to rise. All channels have significantly cut back on their flagship show productions. Regionally, we have retreated from the stage in the face of better funded and more locally relevant channels. While Lebanese freelance production talent is still formidable, their work opportunities are increasingly migrating to Cairo or Dubai. Finally, we are woefully ill prepared for the impact of digital. Altogether, these are compelling reasons for making drastic changes.

**How can the situation be turned around?**

We have to rethink all aspects of our business and we have to do it together to succeed. For example, Lebanon is effectively a 100% pay-tv market, yet the TV channels do not receive any of the fees that every household pays to their local distributor. While we have a very loyal Lebanese diaspora audience, we do not always monetize our content or deliver it to their local markets in a commercially viable way. Whether in the region or across the globe. As a country, we need to create incentives for creating premium Lebanese content and to convince our talented creative community to remain in the country.

In digital, there is an opportunity for us to create value and reach markets across the globe in a way that was not previously possible. However, in order to capitalise on these opportunities, Lebanese television channels need to work together. Otherwise we risk repeating the same mistakes and financially driving each other into the ground.

**The theme of cooperation between TV channels is obviously important to you. Doesn’t this go against the principles of competition? Are you advocating creating a cartel?**

Not at all. Every television channel will always have its unique strengths that they can capitalise on to gain market share. I simply want to move away from the current status where we are rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

**Are you advocating creating a cartel?**

I am advocating creating a partnership. Where we are working together on this project for some time and we hope to make it a reality soon. It is not straightforward, as it requires commercial and regulatory support. However, the Lebanese government has been very supportive of this project.

Once domestic distribution is sorted, we need to look at our regional and international distribution. All Lebanese channels are currently available as free-to-air channels in the MENA region, and this does not make any commercial sense since we do not extract any associated advertising revenues. We need to stop giving away our content for free and negotiate carriage deals with all leading DTH, cable and IPTV platforms.

**All Lebanese channels are currently available as FTA channels in the MENA region, and this does not make any commercial sense since we do not extract any associated advertising revenues. We need to stop giving away our content for free and negotiate carriage deals with all leading DTH, cable and IPTV platforms.”**

Pierre El Daher, CEO, LBCI
The impact of digital on the media sector is unquestionable. You can argue the timing, but digital will irrevocably change consumption habits and redefine business models. While in mature markets with established revenue models based on advertising and subscriptions, digital may appear to be a threat, for our market it is an opportunity. Even at a regional level, the business model of free-to-air broadcasting has failed except for a handful of players. Therefore, digital cannot be a threat when there is nothing to lose. Amazon, Apple and Google understand that content is a gateway to consumers. We can apply the same principle to Lebanon. Imagine if every Lebanese household subscribed to an on-demand platform that provided all Lebanese content and channels.

The opportunities this would create are very interesting. Outside Lebanon, digital allows us to create compelling VOD/SVOD products, deliver Lebanese channel bouquets over IP, license our content to OTT platforms and economically reach Lebanese diaspora subscribers across the globe.

Are you concerned that LBC may cease to be relevant as media consumption shifts from passive linear towards on-demand models?

As broadcasters, if we sit back and do nothing then we deserve to become extinct. However, if we understand that we need to own more of our content, have more flexibility on how we can distribute it, whether directly or via licensing, and become platform-agnostic to follow the audience wherever they may be, then we will be able to manage the transition. The challenge remains in the timing of this transition, given that broadband penetration differs across markets and advertising spend usually lags behind viewers in their shift to digital, but the right moment will come and broadcasters must have already made the transition in their mindset, business models, content and organisations.

How do you define the Lebanese media sector’s success in five years’ time?

If we, the Lebanese television channels, accept the need to radically change our approach to business and to each other, there is no reason why we can’t regain our position as the most innovative media sector in the region. There is no reason why we can’t produce content that reaches global audiences. There is no reason why we can’t thrive and grow far beyond the confines of our domestic market. We simply cannot afford to lose them. Obviously, the government shares our concerns and thus talent will have more work opportunities we create. The more work opportunities we create, the more work our producers will get, and the more our talented people are our best assets. We simply cannot afford to lose them. Obviously, the government shares our concerns and has the same objectives.

The Lebanese Central Bank (BDL), for example, has issued a circular that provides long-term loans for content production. We are also working with the Ministry of Information to revise the media law, which is now outdated and lags behind developments in the media sector. Most media view digital disruption as a threat, yet you mention it as an opportunity. How so?

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EGYPT’S RISING CONTENT COMMUNITY

ALTV is a community-led digital media platform launched in 2016 to bring more locally produced content to underserved areas of the world, especially the MENA. Rehab Hany, ALTV’s Team Lead and Community Manager for Egypt, speaks exclusively to BroadcastPro ME about her role in helping young filmmakers hone their skills through the web site’s creative collaboration recently and dominates a big portion of the broadcast market.

It certainly seems as though the established channels are undergoing a shift in identity or struggling to adapt to new trends, while new players are generating a lot of interest and claiming big stakes in the market.

Is there a big creative community in Egypt?

Yes. Here in Cairo, there is plenty of talent, but those with the vision and the ideas and the drive don’t necessarily have the means to turn those ideas into content. They lack the training and the platform, but now, with ALTV, they’re able to produce low-budget, high-quality productions.

What really like about ALTV is that they actually provide these training sessions and the fundamental of how to light a scene, record the sound, right through to how to structure a compelling story. The first one I witnessed as a Community Manager was a one-man crew workshop which explained how you can do everything on your own – the shooting, the editing, the produce and everything else.

People need the training, and at the same time they need a platform to showcase their ideas and put into practice what they have learnt through the training as well.

Is there a big appetite for local content? Yes, of course. There is a severe lack of content produced for Western audiences and dealing with Western values and cultures.

We are subjected to plenty of content produced for Western audiences, and dealing with Western values and cultures. Viewers from these regions are looking for content that speaks to them and engages with them.

Rehab Hany, Team Lead and Community Manager for Egypt, ALTV

“We’re subjected to plenty of content produced for Western audiences and dealing with Western val-ues and cultures. Viewers from these regions talk about what speaks to them and engages with them.”

What are the latest market trends? What are the challenges of working in the Middle East?

We also experience an obvious lack of objectivity in political commentary. The internet is allowing people to express their opinions and explore other angles that are not explored in mainstream media. Our mission is to produce and share as much local content that feels relevant to the viewer and true to the producer.

There is a rich collection of vibrant cultures across the MENA region, and within each of those cultures there are questions, themes and ideas that there is opportunity now to express and share through our platform.

How does Egyptian content fit within the global landscapes?

There is no real appeal for global audiences when it comes to watching mainstream Egyptian content. Global audiences don’t have the means to access it or the want, but ALTV’s content is accessible to anyone – and this is exciting for content creators, because it’s an open channel through which global audiences can view their content and engage with Egyptian culture.

We are working with young, exciting creators and this pool of talent is positioned to create content that engages and interests those outside of Egypt, as well as the Egyptian audience for whom this content is primarily created.

PROEGYPT

PROEGYPT
TRT World has expanded its footprint across 10 satellites to
reach 190 countries around the world. In an exclusive interview
with the channel’s tech team, Vibhuti Arora finds out how the
channel achieved foolproof connectivity without breaking the bank

Turkish broadcaster TRT World recently announced
its plans to go global by launching the international
news channel on 10 satellites for coverage in
190 countries across Europe, the Middle East,
Asia Pacific, Africa, Australia and America. The
channel, previously available only via Turksat in
Turkey, has signed a multi-year agreement with
Globecast to run its international distribution.

This expansion has already begun and will be completed
in the coming months. In the meantime, the channel’s
programming department is developing new shows to
cater to a growing audience. The expanded programming
grid is due to be released this year and will boast talk
shows, documentaries and travel shows, among others.

TRT World has two studios in Turkey, with a third one
coming up later this year. The channel also has temporary
production facilities in London and Washington, DC. A third
international hub in Singapore will be operational soon.
The channel’s main distribution route to Globecast is
via satellite and IP over the public internet. The channel
has also created diverse circuits from its headquarters
in Istanbul, and from London and Washington, DC.

Roch Pellerin, Marcom and Distribution Director
at TRT World, says the channel’s distribution
network has been designed with the help of Turksat
and Globecast to achieve a global footprint.

“Turksat and Globecast are our technical distribution
partners and are responsible for building the entire
network across multiple satellites. While expanding the
footprint, we have to ensure that the channel’s quality
is not compromised. Having partners makes managing
our distribution network much easier, as we have a
single point of contact. Globecast is a well-established
global player that allows TRT World to benefit from its
experience, infrastructure and multiple uplink sites
offering a robust backup and resilient network,” he says.

Programmes are produced in-house between
the TRT World studios in Istanbul, London and
Washington, DC, with content received from several
locations around the world. London is the channel’s
main broadcast facility outside Turkey and its DR site.
The London facility has two multi-purpose studios to
serve the channel’s growing programming needs.

“We have built a flexible studio infrastructure to make
sure the initial infrastructure costs are kept to a minimum.
This, however, follows a scalable model approach to
be able to cater to future needs. We plan to adopt the
same approach across all the sites,” Pellerin says.

“While setting up our channel’s infrastructure,
connectivity between various bureaus was the
key. Sharing of content across all sites in
a seamless manner was our main requirement.”

The NRCS tools had to be made accessible to all broadcast
channels to allow users to see the rundown, edit scripts
and, more importantly, to maintain editorial control
across all sites. This was achieved through virtualisation
and connecting the sites via the public internet.

The channel is creating virtualised production systems
for smaller bureaus to ensure the various production
units are connected to the Istanbul and London hub,
explains Mohammed Akhlaq, Director of Technology and
Operations at TRT World, who gave us an overview of
the tech infrastructure and operations at the channel.

“Virtualisation allows full functionality to our production

**Snapshot**

- **Objective**: To expand the news channel’s footprint across the world via satellite and IP
- **End user**: TRT World
- **Location**: Istanbul, Turkey
- **Key solutions provider**: Globecast
- **Key vendors**: Grass Valley, Signiant, Net Insight, Front Porch Digital (Oracle)
Users can log into Istanbul or London and produce content remotely right from scripting and GFX to editing,” he says. The broadcast IT systems have been virtualised for users to access systems from different platforms including mobile phones, iPads and laptops. Virtualisation architecture enables a centralised production system with input from several different hubs, which means multiple resources can be run as a single resource and a joint system can be seamlessly established.

Beytullah Iyigün, IT System Specialist Lead at TRT World, explains that the server, disk unit and network systems are used as a single machine. TRT World’s current architecture uses eight main servers and two disk units to run more than 150 virtual servers running various services, which allow global access to the systems, drastically connected via the public internet, allowing secure remote access to various sites. The systems are secured by firewall certificates, policies and authentications. By using the application layer, the team can set access to applications for individual users and apply restrictions via license management. This enables bureaus and field reporters to access Stratus from wherever they are, from Windows, OSX, Linux, iOS, Android and Windows Mobile.

“We were the first company to have virtualised the GV Stratus system with the help of Grass Valley’s technical team. The same architecture has been used to virtualise ERP, Edius and iNEWS as well,” Iyigün claims. Each user is allocated 5mbps of bandwidth, enough for the production of news packages. The GV Stratus deployed at the Istanbul hub is the main production system bringing down the hardware cost by about a million dollars.

A core part of this installation is a Grass Valley Stratus production and content management system, which has been virtualised through a virtual graphics card and is connected via the public internet, allowing secure remote access to various sites. The systems are secured by firewall certificates, policies and authentications. By using the application layer, the team can set access to applications for individual users and apply restrictions via license management. This enables bureaus and field reporters to access Stratus from wherever they are, from Windows, OSX, Linux, iOS, Android and Windows Mobile.

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with 60T online storage used as PAM (product asset management) and near-line storage of 450T.

A Diva Front Porch archive system is currently being installed and will be fully operational by April 2017. The new archiving system will deliver one petabyte of near-line storage and one petabyte of tape storage as well. The channel uses Signiant file transfer Media Shuttle to transfer large media files between various sites and from field crews. The received files are automatically ingested into the main GV Stratus system, and the user is informed of the successful transfer by email.

Users can browse content at the Istanbul hub, allowing them to select media and edit it before sending it to playout. Remote users edit using proxies online on the Istanbul system, enabling an efficient system via the public internet using less than 5mbps. The channel also receives contributions using Aviwest 3G, Skype and other sources that come in handy, especially for breaking news.

Kazım Aktürk, Connectivity System Specialist, TRT World

"Any failure on the links would have a negative impact on live bulletins, which made it imperative for us to build a reliable back-up system. Traditional telecom costs for diverse circuits were prohibitive, which encouraged us to consider internet solutions."

"Virtualisation allows full functionality to our production teams around the world. Users can log into Istanbul or London and produce content remotely right from scripting and GFX to editing.”

Mohammed Akhlaq, Director of Technology and Operations, TRT World

Joining the dots

Globecast is providing TRT World with a global packaged service for the DTH distribution of the news platform.

Giorgio Giacomini, Managing Director MENA at Globecast, comments that Globecast "is providing connectivity through our fully redundant fibre network, which enables the uplinking of the channel to the various satellite platforms that we use to distribute the signals". He explains that the live, 24-hour feeds leave from the channel’s Istanbul facility and are received in two different ways. “One is via Turksat 3A’s European beam and we have worked very closely with Turkstat as a strategic partner. The second is a robust, managed service IP feed over the internet – we use Net Insight technology to provide GoS. Moreover, we are currently setting up a dedicated fibre line between TRT and Globecast into our core backbone network (GCBN). This will provide a third connection and additional level of reliability.”

He further adds that Globecast is using its global monitoring system to provide 24/365 monitoring of all signals, allowing it to quickly identify and rectify any service issues on the rare occasions that they occur. The global monitoring system is centralised in the company’s NOC in Paris, which acts as a single point of contact. TRT World has access via a web interface to real-time views of each service status across a range of crucial parameters.

“At this stage, it is essentially a single feed with small technical differences, different bit rates depending on the various platforms as well as some services being HD and some SD. There are also variations in the audio from a technical perspective, again to cater to individual platform requirements,” he explains.

"Error correcting delay was about 200ms, where RTT was about 2700ms, resulting in freeze-free video with negligible additional delay – two times RTT (roundtrip delay time).”

“Error correcting techniques like convolutional and block coding, any lost packages via the internet can be recovered with dedicated fibre and satellite links,” explains Aktürk.

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The internet, unlike traditional broadcast circuits, has negligible cost but comes with the disadvantage of shared bandwidths, thereby discouraging broadcasters who do not want to compromise fluency and quality of video transfer and live output. Conventional contribution and distribution circuits are used by a few broadcasters, but there is a steady move to IP via internet for broadcast circuits.

“We use business lease lines with guaranteed minimum bandwidth and use different providers to give a degree of resilience and circuit diversity, to make sure the security of our network is not compromised. This is more advantageous for distribution as compared to contribution links, as a couple of seconds’ delay can improve a video stream,” concludes Aktürk.
beIN Media Group recently launched its VOD platform and announced the addition of seven new channels to its entertainment bouquet. In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, Israel Esteban, Executive Director of Technology at beIN Media Group, speaks about the technical initiatives the network has undertaken to bring this service to fruition.

On March 1, beIN made more than 2,000 programmes, including 300 of the latest movies, available on its brand-new VOD platform. The on-demand products include a box office channel featuring the latest Hollywood movies, subscription and transactional VOD services, and the ability to catch up on any popular event, movie or series that beIN subscribers may have missed.

Israel Esteban, Executive Director of Technology at beIN Media Group, says the technical preparations to launch a VOD service have been ongoing since the launch of beIN’s entertainment bouquet in November 2016. “beIN has made significant investments into our technology platforms in recent years, which paved the way for our rapid expansion in entertainment and the delivery of content across multiple platforms,” he says, adding that at the core of the new infrastructure is a “file-based production and broadcasting platform that enables the creation and distribution of programming of all genres to beIN’s viewers on multiple devices.”

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“The VOD platform is a natural extension to this and enables our viewers to view what they want on-demand. In short, it gives more control to our viewers to choose what they want to view and when they want to view it,” he explains.

The mandate for the technical team was to create a delivery mechanism and system architecture allowing beIN to share its ever expanding content offering with its viewers on beIN set-top boxes and media servers as soon as it becomes available, at the highest picture and audio qualities for its DTH viewers.

The project was delivered in two phases, says Esteban. “We had a soft launch phase at the start of November 2016, where we worked with a small pilot group to fine tune the process and enhance our user interfaces. As part of the second phase, the service is being launched regionally with complete electronic sell-through (EST) functionality, beIN Store, catch-up, SVOD and TVOD services from March 1, 2017.”

He proudly points out that the main integration has been done cleverly and “ties in directly with our existing processes and applications … we are using the same broadcast management software to manage the VOD platform content offering, which has its own contracts and rights management module”.

“It is fully integrated with our MAM (media asset management system), which initiates and triggers the necessary content processes from acquisition, ingest, subtitling, transcoding, QC and distribution.”

“The entire deployment includes a fully scalable library capacity that currently offers more than 2,000 assets across all genres, including premium blockbuster movies from the major studios. “In short, the VOD system architecture is based on an infrastructure that offers rapid production and distribution processes, which offers the highest service standards and guarantees maximum availability for the on-demand and catch-up services,” Esteban explains, adding that the workflow for VOD is largely an extension of existing processes and automated workflows.

“Most of the development is centred on the handling of the rich metadata required for efficient processing, catalogue management and content offering in a timely fashion”

Israel Esteban, Executive Director of Technology, beIN Media Group

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beIN has partnered with Sony, Warner and Disney to acquire the most popular Hollywood movies and series. The latest titles, like Inferno, The Jungle Book, Finding Dory, Star Trek Beyond, Doctor Strange, Passengers and Jack Reacher: Never Go Back, are offered on the beIN bouquet. beIN is also making a number of classic matches, the most popular recent matches as well as a number of sports documentaries, available as part of its on-demand service. There is also a raft of content for children. In addition, beIN has launched an EST service, a common practice among global pay TV networks. Through this service, beIN subscribers can buy, watch and keep the content they would like to own. While movies may be rented for $4, they can be downloaded for the purpose of ownership for $20. To encourage subscribers to use the feature, beIN is offering an initial $20 credit to subscribers.

In addition to the on-demand service, beIN has also expanded its entertainment bouquet with a number of new launches. Expanding its deal with Fox International Company, beIN has added Fox Action Movies HD, Fox Family Movies HD and FX HD to its bouquet. It has also launched a new channel, beIN Gourmet, targeting women in the region. TRT and Euronews have also been added to the beIN network to further enrich its news channels line-up.

“2017 is already shaping up to be another innovative year for beIN, with the technology teams continuing to support the ever increasing channel expansions on all our platforms and even more devices. We’re also in the process of building on our initial 4K UHD offering from the summer of 2016 and look forward to offering even more services in 2017,” Esteban concludes.
Imagine if MENA viewers could have access to thousands of hours of premium first-run content from Hollywood, Bollywood and other worldwide studios at a monthly subscription fee that was approximately the price of a pirated DVD? Would that price point and first-run content be tempting enough to attract a segment of the MENA viewers that at present watch pirated content?

Mark Britt, co-founder and Group CEO of iflix, reckons that if the above conditions and more are met, many people who presently watch pirated content will migrate to a legal alternative such as iflix. That is the value proposition the Malaysian OTT platform has been offering to its customers, and says it is the reason iflix has been successful “in every single market it has entered so far.”

The streaming service has four million subscribers and is the newest entrant in the MENA TV space. Last month, the Malaysian OTT platform announced a joint venture with Kuwaiti telecommunications company Zain, which boasts 47m subscribers in this region. With iflix’s content and Zain’s huge penetration in the MENA mobile market, both parties are confident they will be able to attract subscribers to their OTT package. The JV, which has been called iflix Arabia, is scheduled for launch in Q2 of 2017 and is headquartered in Dubai. All of Zain’s territories of operation – Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Sudan – will be added to iflix’s global footprint. John-Paul McKerlie, who was previously with Zain, will head the joint venture as CEO, and will be based in Dubai.

While Britt did not divulge a price or a concrete launch date at the press conference, iflix subscription rates in markets in which the service is available are somewhere in the $2.50-4 range. “We have moved from a paid, physical piracy in the old world to free, digital piracy in the new one. Essentially, you are competing with free, particularly with the younger generation. So the product you offer has to be more convenient, better performing, offer a wider range of content, with celebrities present in the content suggesting and recommending new shows, and it has got to be a better platform from a social experience point of view. It has to be all the things that piracy cannot be at a price that is not an inhibitor and so that’s the thinking that goes into setting a price in each market,” Britt explains.

One of the big plus points when iflix enters any regional market is its commitment to investing in local content and local infrastructure, explains Britt. Zain and iflix are investing heavily in local productions and almost 40% to 50% of the content will be available in Arabic, he confirms.

Some significant announcements will be made prior to Ramadan, although both teams remain tight-lipped about further details. Britt makes it clear, however, that iflix is working with high-profile directors, creatives and production teams in the region to produce high-quality Arabic content. “In most cases, when people use the expression ‘original productions’, what they really mean is that they...
have worked with a production house and created something that is unique specifically for that format. One of the big challenges in traditional media is that it has to fit into the number of ad breaks and each has to be a specific period of time. The great thing about the internet is that it is entirely on demand, where you can have a very complex plot. As customers tend to watch episodes back-to-back, they no longer have to be of the same duration and you do not have to worry if the product appeals to advertisers. You merely have to create content that appeals to viewers. This means you have far more creative freedom in creating on-demand content than creators have ever had before, so when we commission original productions, it is always with high-profile creators, but we are often able to remove the constraints that traditional media have placed on them.

Again, although OTT offers much greater flexibility in terms of censorship, Britt says iflix has always been very respectful of cultural sensitivities in each market. "We believe it is the right of every sovereign country to establish its own community standards for content. I think this is very central to Asian communities, where entertainment plays a very influential role in culture. So if you want to be a part of the local community, you have to accept that in most countries, there are different forms and levels of censorship. Often, censorship for PTA is different to what the DVD-based model. We have worked proactively with governments in each country to find the right level of censorship," he explains.

"One of the good things about OTT is that we have better parental controls than any traditional experience. Every device can set to a different level and there are common censorship standards across Western, Arab, kids, families and so on. A parent, therefore, can just click the little kids or teenage kids option and the device sets the control across the product – so from a kids experience, they are still getting an on-demand product. From a parent’s point of view, that device is set to a certain censorship standard so you don’t have the challenge of PTA.

"Secondly, because that is a paid experience, we are catering to a slightly older demographic or parents control the experience. Thirdly, communities are managing this. In the case of piracy, it is completely uncensored, so younger viewers are at risk," he explains, adding that how each country manages the censorship issue changes constantly.

"Our commitment is to it be part of that conversation, which means, most of the global players are not, and secondly, it is to proactively work with local governments to set the levels and standards that are appropriate to each country."

Dubai will serve as the hub for the joint venture, although Zain is headquartered in Kuwait. The iflix Arabia Dubai office already employs around 50 employees in various roles including general management, content management, legal and marketing functions, as well as a design team that does all the Arabic creative, copyrighting and so on. A language centre in Jordan handles subtitling, censorship and content quality assurance for the entire region. What’smissing from the Dubai office are the tech development teams, who operate from Australia, Prague, Cape Town and Kuala Lampur.

Justifying the decision to make Dubai the hub for the JV despite Zain not having a presence in the emirate, Britt says: "We tend to operate in most of the time zones and so Dubai tends to be a fantastic central hub for HQ roles. Also, a significant number of the premium media is sold out of Dubai, so you need to be where your suppliers are and be part of that ecosystem." By the end of February, iflix Arabia will have around 72 staff across the region and by the end of March or early April, Britt reckons that number will rise to 100. Iflix Arabia is also in discussions with a number of telcos across the region to make its service available in those countries.

The market is not without its challenges. The fundamental challenge before all of the players presently operating in the MENA region is the rise of piracy.

"It is hard to beat free. To beat free, your service must be exceptional," explains Britt. "Secondly, internet connectivity within Zain network is exceptional. You need to do very significant technical work to maintain all your content infrastructure hosted in every single country. This is what I mean when I say we are passionately committed to localisation.

“A core part of our commitment to localisation is infrastructure, and a large part of the last six months has gone into technical testing with Zain and making sure we can confidently deliver a world-class service to every part of the region.” Britt is confident that iflix works "deeply with the content community on the one hand, the talent and the creative and the production community on the other, and the telco industry as well, it can hold a world-class service at a price that everyone can afford that is better than piracy. “That is the core vision.”

iflix will not just be available to Zain subscribers, it is in talks with a number of other telco operators in the region to bundle its services and will be available independently as well. “One thing that has made us successful is that we have been able to break many of the traditional rules that apply to media distribution. We are one of the first services in the world to have the download- and watch-offline feature. “When Patrick Grove [co-founder of iflix] and I went to the studios in the US three years ago, we presented the statistics and the piracy data. We told them that viewers have to be able to download because you can’t stream on a 25MB connection in Manila. We laughed out of the room, but over a period of 18 months, we convinced each of them to create a new set of rights, which was the ability to watch shows offline. And that is, by far, the number one feature on iflix.

“Our willingness to create a specific product for emerging markets is what has led to our success, and we have just got to keep on doing that,” he concludes.

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PROOTT
When it comes to owning cameras, a lot of boxes need to be ticked. Back in June 2016, when I was looking to purchase a camera to fulfill the role of high-end imagery and performance, there were a few familiar brands to choose from: ARRI, Blackmagic and RED. ARRI was a no-go for me, as even its Alexa Mini came in way over my budget. Blackmagic had launched its Ursa Mini 4.6k a few months earlier, and while the price tag was extremely tempting, I was put off going down this route, for my SCARLET-W, priced at just under $7,000 – to the new Brain. After re-reading some of the improvements which had been on my radar since the end of 2015.

Looking through the specs, I was instantly impressed. It had a brand-new HELIUM 8K sensor capable of capturing 8k at 30fps, with 16.5+ stops of dynamic range, 275MB/s data speeds and REDCODE RAW + Apple ProRes. Better still, RED was offering a very appealing upgrade path for those patiently waiting in line for a SCARLET-W – I couldn’t turn down the opportunity. I called up my dealer, Advanced Media, 

RED’s DRAGON line-up has both SDI and DP Power at the back of the camera, between the base plate and battery, which is difficult to work with. On the new DSMC2, everything is easily accessible on the back right of the camera. In addition, DSMC2 marks the arrival of a cable-less set-up with the new monitors and EVF featuring direct connections to the Brain.

RED has also finally managed to include scratch audio – the simplest additions are often the most satisfying to see. I rapidly came to the decision that with the new changes to RED’s ergonomics and an increased range of Brains offered by them, from the new entry level model – RED RAVEN, priced at just under $7,000 – to the new flagship RED WEAPON, priced just shy of $50,000. I went ahead and placed an order for the SCARLET-W, RED’s previous entry-level camera, at almost $10,000.

These prices only cover the cost of the Brain, and without the purchase of several key accessories, the camera will not run. RED’s website offers a few different packages that include all the essentials to turn the camera on and make changes to settings. I opted for the DSMC2 Basic IO package at $5,600, which includes the new DSMC2 – RED Touch 4.7" LCD, base expander, V-Lock battery module and RED Brick power pack. Still missing is media (cards), costing $850-3,000 per card depending on size.

I customised it from there, firstly with RED’s new DSMC2 side handle, which compared to the original model is a great ergonomic improvement. Along with a newly shaped grip, the handle also features a record button, a d-pad for menu navigation, four assignable function buttons, a scrollable focus control for motorised lenses and iris control. I also placed orders for some third-party accessories from Wooden Camera. On my list were a new base and top plate, a safety NATO arm for convenient mount points and the A-Box for a professional audio solution. All these accessories are modular, working across all of RED’s DSMC2 line-up.

Winding forward to September 2016, months after my order was placed, RED was experiencing issues with production for its DRAGON sensors, and there was no shipping date in sight for my SCARLET-W order.

That same month, RED announced its new EPIC-W, retailing at $30,000. Looking through the specs, I was instantly impressed. It had a brand-new HELIUM 8K sensor capable of capturing 8k at 30fps, with 16.5+ stops of dynamic range, 275MB/s data speeds and REDCODE RAW + Apple ProRes. Better still, RED was offering a very appealing upgrade path for those patiently waiting in line for a SCARLET-W – I couldn’t turn down the opportunity. I called up my dealer, Advanced Media,
and it arranged the upgrade.

Before getting into the less obvious improvements offered by the latest EPIC, I want to talk about 8K for a moment. RED has been at the forefront of pushing cinema cameras to reach higher resolutions for a while, and now with the introduction of 8K, you get video imagery with a pixel density equivalent of 31.4 megapixels – 17x more resolution than HD. There is some controversy concerning the value of 8K. Do we need an image with that amount of detail, and will 8K just add to both cost and time of projects?

Initially I had worries about the post process of 8K, but there are a couple of easy ways to tackle what at first glance could be seen as the downside of working with such a detailed image.

First, the camera offers an option to shoot ProRes, either alongside an R3D or as a standalone file. ProRes options range from 422 HQ down to 422 LT at 4K and 4444 XQ down to 422 LT at 2K. The higher end works well for low-budget shoots with no need for an R3D workflow, and the lower end is perfect for proxy work or any work with R3Ds. Having the option of both R3D and ProRes opens up so much versatility to the type of productions this camera is suitable for, as the proxies are available and ready to use straight from RedMag.

Popular editing software such as Adobe Premiere has added new options to help with the workflow of 8K, including a proxy option on import, using the media encoder to create proxy files to work from almost instantly. These proxy files are linked to the original R3Ds, and with the click of a button you can switch your timeline from proxy to source. That way, you can edit the entire project on an HD timeline and then switch to source for online delivery. When using 8K FF, you must use either

Snapshots of documentaries shot by Plummer on a previous model of the RED camera.

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the 512GB or 1TB cards if you want the lower compressions. These cards have a fast enough data rate, unlike the older 120GB and 240GB cards.

For those of you interested in media management, here are a few statistics. Shooting at 8K FF at 24fps with a compression of 6:1 will give you 79 minutes per TB of storage. At 10:1, it’s 132 minutes, and at the highest available compression of 22:1, it’s 289 minutes. Once you see the numbers, shooting 8K becomes much more appealing.

Enough about 8K workflow – what else does the camera offer?

For me, a real highlight has been the sensor’s ability to handle low light conditions. My past experiences with the RED MX and SCARLET DRAGON have been something of a love-hate situation, as my go-to look is making use of natural light and practicals on location. With RED's previous cameras, I often struggled in dimly-lit situations. This was particularly true with the documentary work I did with the SCARLET DRAGON. There was often no opportunity to stop and add additional light to the scene, and I was forced to compromise image quality by increasing the ISO upwards of 1250. The HELIUM sensor is rated at around 1280 ISO but can be pushed much higher with clean, deep blacks at 3200 ISO. I now have an extra stop, even two, to play with (when using the low light OLPF), complementing the way I enjoy working and giving me the visual look and feel I want.

Once again RED states that, as with the DRAGON sensor, the HELIUM has 16.5+ stops of dynamic range. Although the majority of professionals disagree on that figure, you can't deny that with its in-built HDR function and some magic in post, you have the ability to go above and beyond 16.5 stops if required. The high frame rate options on the camera unfortunately do not differ from the EPIC DRAGON, giving the same 70fps at 6K FF down to 300fps at 2K WS. Being a big fan of slow motion, it would have been nice to see some improvements in this department; however, RED has decided to make this a key area to differentiate between the EPIC-W and the WEAPON.

Lastly, the image the new sensor produces has a more natural, neutral feel to it, especially the colour rendition of skin tones. The new release of IPP2 helps with highlight roll-off and retains more accurate tones within the highlights. It’s worth noting that RED says IPP2 is a work in progress, meaning more improvements to come.

So is it the best camera for any owner operator? No. But for me, weighing up both price and performance, the EPIC-W stands out as the camera to own due to its quality and versatility.

Toby Plummer is a Dubai-based DoP. He works both as a freelancer and for his own indie production house, Capture Dxb.

**Pros**
- Resolution
- Low-light capabilities
- ProRes recording

**Cons**
- No improvement on frame rates from the EPIC DRAGON

**Wishlist**
- In-built NDs
- More frame rate options
- More improvements from the image processing pipeline (IPP2)
The Panasonic GH5 follows in the footsteps of the GH4, and while the overall design looks the same, the latest iteration comes with major upgrades aimed at both videographers and photographers. Renji Mathews and Yusuf Thakur give us their opinion.

When a camera survives the extreme heat of the UAE summer and the extreme cold (-20 Celsius) of Armenia and still works flawlessly, it’s likely to make heads turn. Having tested the Panasonic GH4 when it was first released and being a long-term user, I thought it punched way above its weight, putting much bigger and more expensive cameras to shame. Understandably, my expectations were pretty high when Panasonic sent me the new GH5 for a head-to-head test with its predecessor. With a focus on video-centric features, let’s take a look at the biggest differences I found, in no particular order.

**Pros**

- **Dual SD card slots**
- ** Unlimited recording, dependent only on the size of the memory card**
- **No 4K crop as the full width of the sensor is used**

**Cons**

- **Absence of a full-frame sensor**
- ** No 10-bit recording for 4:3 anamorphic modes**
- **Not a low-light beast like the Sony A7S-II**

There is, however, the welcome addition of a full-size HDMI slot on the GH5, in the same place as on the GH4 body. This means you don’t get full movement of the flip-out screen when you have an HDMI cable plugged in. I guess that’s the price you pay for a compact body.

10-bit internal recording

The GH5 can now record 10-bit 4:2:2 footage internally! That’s a big deal by any standard. This used to only be possible if you used an external recorder from Atomos or Odyssey. (Actually, you still need an external recorder if you want to use the camera’s highest frame rates at 10-bit quality.) The 10-bit quality video allows the capture of much more subtle gradations and holds up much better in the post-production process where further...
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PROREVIEW

The GH5 boasts the same batteries and media as the GH4.

grading or compositing is involved.

Panasonic has done a great job in creating a worthy successor to the GH4, with its long and solid reputation for being an outstanding camera that can effortlessly move from stills to 4K video. The GH5 truly pushes the boundaries, especially when it comes to video production, and bundles high-end video features that we just haven’t seen in a small mirrorless camera, all in a form factor that’s only slightly larger than the previous model. With the GH5 in a class of its own in the hybrid world, Panasonic has put the entire industry on notice. 

Renji Mathews is a filmmaker and a certified instructor in non-linear editing & motion graphics. He heads the Digital media Department at The College of Fine Arts & Design, University of Sharjah.

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Lumix GHS as a B-camera

Filmmaker Yusuf Thakur tests the GHS as a B-camera. The test unit came with a 12-35mm f2.8 and 35-100mm f2.8 lenses, and an audio module.

I have owned the GH series camera as a B-camera since the GH2 was released. Why is there a need for one? Well, those who use cameras such as the RED Epic as the main camera need to have a back-up, in case they are unable to use the main camera due to various scenarios filmmakers face on a daily basis in the field. As insurance, in case of camera failure, a B-camera comes in handy for interviews and so on.

To me personally, it is important to be able to grab a shot that would not be possible with the main camera due to weight or set-up time. Besides the obvious feature upgrade from the GH4, I was keen to test the GHS’s axis stabilisation both in camera and with native Panasonic lenses, the variable frame rate (ramp and slow-motion), the higher bit rate and, more importantly, the low-light performance. Like the GH4, the GHS camera ticks all the boxes for the features I was looking for. Its form factor is ideal, it is lightweight and allows quick set-up and boot time. What’s more, the camera is reasonably priced and enables the use of SD cards. It comes with a rotating LCD and an excellent viewfinder.

The first thing I wanted to test was axis stabilisation, as I have always used Nikon mount lenses with a Nikon to Micro Four Third adapter on previous versions of the GH series cameras. Though this worked on the GH5, I found the issue of noise in the highlight area made footage shot with the Nikon lenses unusable. I used the same lens on the previous GH4 camera and did not have any such issues. I don’t know if this problem is due to image stabilisation, or is only on the GHS we had.

I noticed the same problem to a lesser degree with the lenses provided by Panasonic. I switched on the in-camera stabilisation for both Nikon and Panasonic lenses, and the footage with the Panasonic lenses was usable after post correction. I have provided feedback to Panasonic ME, who have told me they will communicate with the engineers. This issue should be sorted out in the final shipped cameras.

I wanted to do an impartial test with people, skin tones, day night and fast action. Honestly, set-up shoots and trying to make things look pretty was not the intention. The aim was to conduct a real test in the field instead of in a controlled studio environment, which is why I took the camera for a shoot in the Meydan racecourse. This is a high-action environment, with both daylight and lit environment, multitudes of skin tones, different lighting scenarios, great architecture, challenging glass façade, green as well as striking colour variations, and very fast horse racing action.

I shot for more than three hours in standard profile, shooting both still and video, first only with the Panasonic lenses, in 4K DCI 24 frames, with 90% of the footage filmed with the 35-100 f2.8 Panasonic and 10% with the 12-35 f2.8 Panasonic lens. The camera and the resulting footage available via a YouTube link prove what a great improvement the GHS is over the GH4. I filmed all the footage using a Manfrotto Monopod 506B without a head, and the stabilisation is the best I have ever used on any camera.

The GHS camera is definitely a major step up from the GH4. It has got much better low light performance, with usable ISO in video up to 6400 and even 10000, though with noticeable but acceptable noise. The viewfinder and the LCD are a joy to use, and you can use them in tandem to focus and track a subject, by using the viewfinder to sight and the LCD for touch/track focus on the subject that you see in the viewfinder.

The new viewfinder and the LCD touch focus functions work well even in video mode, and auto focus with native Panasonic lenses was again good even in video mode. The auto focus works very well while tracking; at times, it does lose focus, but I doubt we can ever have a 100% accurate system.

The 150mbit higher bit-rate recordings of the GHS make footage from the GHS easier to grade and match with video footage from raw format cameras. Future firmware will open up the camera to even 400mbit in camera recording onto reasonably priced SD cards. The GHS has two SD card slots, and I used both. One can set up the cards in different combinations to record only video or stills or both. I used one slot to record only 4K DCI, and the other to record stills in both RAW and JPEG formats.

I also tested the slow motion capability of the GHS, and 4K video at 50p playback at 24p is smooth and sharp. The variable frame rate function in 4K mode and high bitrates in a DSLR form factor set the GHS apart from anything out there at the moment. Once the camera and lenses are available, I am sure it will surprise all of us.

The film I shot with the GHS at Meydan has footage from only the first shoot with native Panasonic lenses.
Anghami has won accolades for its pioneering music streaming service in the MENA region. Co-founders Eddy Maroun and Elie Habib speak exclusively to Vibhuti Arora about what drives their business and where the service is headed.

Beirut-headquartered music streaming service Anghami recently won the Arab Social Media Influencers Award for Arts. The awards were launched under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al. Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Anghami received the award for its focus on connectivity, creativity and impact.

Founded by Eddy Maroun and Elie Habib, Anghami was launched as the first legal music streaming service in the region in 2011. Since its launch, the on-demand music streaming service has grown its subscriber base eleven-fold to 33 million users with more than half a billion songs streamed each month from Anghami's multi-app platform. It also claims to have the largest catalogue of digital Arabic music globally while enjoying the biggest regional footprint.

Anghami, which translates as 'my tune', caters mostly to users based in the Middle East. Subscribers can download Arabic and international music on mobile devices, tablets and other smart devices.

"Our team has since grown from two to 65, and the service has been growing two-fold year-on-year across users, revenues and subscribers," says Eddy Maroun, co-founder and CEO of Anghami, which recently completed its third successful fundraise led by private equity firm Samena Capital with the participation from UAE mobile operator du.

Anghami is a label-led service with key partners including Rotana, Platinum Records, Universal, Sony Music and Mazika. The platform pays an annual fee to the labels for access to their respective libraries and an additional volume fee for every stream. The content rights are very well defined, and clear ownership of the labels is ensured. The brand also promotes young and upcoming artists.

Maroun says Anghami’s continued investment in intuitive technology, and in bringing talent and artists closer to regional audiences through innovation and unlimited on-the-go music streaming service has earned it a seat among top Arab social media influencers.

"Partnerships are at the core of Anghami’s strategy, with partners including more than 20 telcos such as du, Mobile, Morocel, Zain and Ooredoo, and many other brands such as MBC Group and DMS of Choueiri Group. We’re mostly focused on our strategic partnership with du in the UAE. Egypt and Saudi Arabia are also high-growth territories, where we are looking to expand our footprint," he says.

With its technology headquarters located in Beirut, Anghami operates between Lebanon and the UAE. The service is cloud-based with the entire technology and infrastructure built-in-house. CTO Elie Habib explains that Anghami's backend has been built from the ground up in a resilient fault-tolerant cloud environment.

"Our stack is quite complex, comprising PHP, MySQL, Redshift, OrientDB, Nginx, Varnish, Memcached and Redis. The mobile apps run native code written in Objective-C and Java for iOS and Android respectively, while the web app is built over Angular JS."

The format is based on a proprietary Dolby format called Pulse. Built on and compatible with the MPEG-4 HE-AAC open-standard audio codec, Dolby Pulse encompasses a bit stream format as well as dedicated encoder and decoder solutions to meet the varying needs of operators.

"It is a highly efficient format with a superior coding technology implementation of HE-AAC. This format ensures that the audio can be understood throughout the broadcast chain, ensuring that consumers receive the intended
“Our original tests were all done over 2G and not 3G, and the target was to be able to stream decent music over those particular networks”
Eddy Maroun, co-founder and CEO, Anghami

Platforms like Anghami can house various features such as videos and lyrics, and adjacent verticals. For instance, the recently launched Artist Booking feature gives users and artists additional opportunities to connect.

The ticketing and events calendar is among the features that can further connect artists with fans and grow its share in the entertainment pie. Anghami Expressions is another feature that allows users to create user-generated videos instantly by choosing any 15s extract for their favourite songs.

“We expect to see more convergence between offline and digital in the future,” Maroun says.

The service once again partnered with the Emirates Airlines Jazz Festival for the Anghami Sessions to introduce talent to the Dubai stage. As an official music partner, the service is well positioned to grow beyond just music streaming to more of a music entertainment platform,” claims Maroun.

The global music market achieved a key milestone in 2015 as digital became the primary revenue stream for recorded music, overtaking sales of physical formats. Digital revenues now account for 40% of the total revenues, compared to 39% for physical sales. The total industry revenue in 2015 was $13.6 billion, primarily driven by a sharp rise in streaming revenue, which now accounts for 43% of digital revenue and is close to overtaking downloads (45%).

Maroun says the MENA region is a high-growth market with a strong appetite for entertainment and music. “It’s a challenging market, being fragmented given the various countries and cultures. This means we need more resources to cover each and every territory – to add to that piracy, payments, fundraising and talent scarcity.”

“Anghami has opened the doors to a large number of international and regional artists, who are looking at exponential growth throughout the MENA region, by reaching cross-border music listeners”
Eli Habib, co-founder and CTO, Anghami

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*The Anghami offices and teams are based in Beirut and Dubai.

Anghami has focused on being localised and closer to the artist and fan community, nurturing the co-creation of content and engagement. In the six years that the service has been operating in the region, Maroun says users are getting more and more eclectic thanks to the streaming experience, which operates on the principle of bringing music discovery to the forefront. “Rising stars are gaining massive traction, while established artists still have loyal fan bases eager to taste every music or video release. Anghami has opened the doors to a large number of international and regional artists, who are looking at exponential growth throughout the MENA region, by reaching cross-border music listeners who have not been accessible before.”

audio with a higher audio quality, compatible with all devices and at the lowest data rates.

“Fortunately, we built everything in-house code-wise to reduce dependency on external parties. We ran 90% of our operation in the cloud with Amazon Web Service. We also rely on several services and vendors to power Anghami, such as NewFlic, Amplitude, Urban Airship, Malgun, Dufador, Algolia and Papiertrail. As our focus is mobile and we need to be available on any device, we made sure that our system can operate properly with just HTTP available; clearly for security reasons, the apps will upgrade to HTTPS if available,” explains Habib.

Is bandwidth in the region a challenge? Habib says the audio format for the service was designed to be adequate for the low-bandwidth in the Middle East.

“Our original tests were all done over 2G and not 3G, and the target was to be able to stream decent music over those particular networks. Our audio stream is adaptive and more compressed than any MP3 to be able to stream, play, interrupt and resume at any speed, without having to read any header,” he adds.

“Streaming is mainstream now, with mobile data becoming more and more accessible and smartphones booming. Anghami has revolutionised the digital music consumption in the region into a mobile one. As a market leader, our platform is well positioned to grow beyond just music streaming to more of a music entertainment platform,” claims Maroun.

The service once again partnered with the Emirates Airlines Jazz Festival for the Anghami Sessions to introduce talent to the Dubai stage. As an official music partner, the service is well positioned to grow beyond just music streaming to more of a music entertainment platform,” claims Maroun.

The global music market achieved a key milestone in 2015 as digital became the primary revenue stream for recorded music, overtaking sales of physical formats. Digital revenues now account for 40% of the total revenues, compared to 39% for physical sales. The total industry revenue in 2015 was $13.6 billion, primarily driven by a sharp rise in streaming revenue, which now accounts for 43% of digital revenue and is close to overtaking downloads (45%).

Maroun says the MENA region is a high-growth market with a strong appetite for entertainment and music. “It’s a challenging market, being fragmented given the various countries and cultures. This means we need more resources to cover each and every territory – to add to that piracy, payments, fundraising and talent scarcity.”
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A new Malayalam-language entertainment channel is gearing up for launch from Dubai this April. BroadcastPro ME takes a tour of the studios to find out how the channel was built from the ground up.

**NEW KID ON THE BLOCK**

Channel D, a new Malayalam lifestyle channel, is readying for launch from Dubai next month. With two production units in Dubai, the free-to-air, privately owned channel will feature original content produced in-house as well as films and music videos. Mainly covering entertainment content, plans are in place to have some slots for current affairs as well. In the UAE, Channel D will be available on Etisalat’s e-vision platform.

Girish Nair, Creative Director of Channel D, says the channel’s content and quality will be its key differentiators. “With Channel D, we plan to redefine the way Indian content is watched in the region. This is just the beginning, as after the UAE launch we plan to do a GCC-wide launch and also distribute in the UK, Europe and US. In addition to the Dubai-based studios, we have one studio in India and plan to launch more very soon,” he says.

Nair comes with extensive media experience and has worked at Asianet, Al Jazeera and the BBC. He launched Radio ME in the UAE before starting work on this TV channel. A gap in the market led to his decision to launch his own channel, one that would offer a diverse mix of entertainment and film shows targeting a younger audience. “Two years ago, I started the groundwork on Channel D. I wanted to tap into the market with original programming that appealed to the expat community. The existing channels offered either business news or series, but nothing in between. That’s where our channel fits in. I was supported in this venture by UAE-based investor Dr Shyam Shankar and two other investors who liked the proposal,” he says.

Dubai-based broadcast equipment supplier and systems integrator MediaCast was contracted to build Channel D from the ground up. MediaCast also undertook the conceptualisation of the channel and helped in improvement of the workflow and integration as well as provided support for continuity of operation. It offered a comprehensive training programme to empower the staff technically. Some of the equipment was also supplied by another Dubai-based distributor Advanced Media.

Bala Menon, Sales Manager at MediaCast, was in preliminary discussions with the channel management to work on the concept and design of the channel. “It began with the idea of building an independent TV channel with live and playout broadcast. The live broadcast was to be from the channel’s in-house studios, complete with a green screen and a live set. During non-live shows, they were to broadcast via their playout system with a storage server that is connected to every editing and live production equipment in the studios,” Menon says.

The test transmission of the channel has already begun on e-vision, with the launch date just a couple of weeks away. The channel is 4K-ready but not producing content in 4K yet. Nair says. Some promos, however, have been produced in 4K, which will be downconverted to HD and transmitted once the channel goes on-air.

The channel’s Dubai studios house a Canon C300, a Sony XDCAM and two Blackmagic Studio Cameras. In addition, the production team uses DJI Osmo, and two other investors who liked the proposal,” he says.
DSLR and GoPro cameras for outdoor shoots. The team also has two Sony Alpha A7 IIs.

“We plan to have eight hours of live content from the studios daily. We have the facility to connect to people around the world live with our studios to interact with the presenters,” Nair says.

The channel is fully digital and will have an online presence as well as linear transmission. The NewTek TriCaster 8800 and the Blackmagic ATEM are the backbone of the channel as the production media server and master control server, respectively. A NewTek LiveMedia server has been integrated with the servers for computer graphics. A NewTek Talkshow VS4000, a live text editor and a virtual set editor are other key solutions in the workflow.

TriCaster 8000 Advanced Edition is the main production switcher, used for the virtual set, clip playout, graphics design and live streaming to social media. LiveText is an external computer graphics engine used during live production, while the virtual set editor is used to create virtual studio sets.

The TriCaster 8000 with Advanced Edition connects its input and output to the Blackmagic Design Smart Videohub which, in turn, is connected to the Talkshow VS4000 as well. LiveText is connected to the system to send its output via network to the TriCaster. NewTek Talkshow VS4000 is used for Skype interviews, as an alternative SNG or remote studio.

A soundproof room has been built for recording and voice-overs, equipped with a professional Sennheiser microphone and ProTools software for editing.

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Workflow
The output from the TriCaster is sent to ATEM Production Studio’s 4K and live media server via the Blackmagic Design Smart Videohub. The channel uses Live CH Broadcast with the social hub to broadcast social media comments from viewers as graphics, which are then broadcast in real-time. The recorded videos are played out using the live media server and the clips are stored in ProMAX Online 2000. The video sources in the channel use the Blackmagic Design Smart Videohub for easy routing and distributing the signal.

The channel is presently ready with three months of programming, comprising 80% entertainment and 20% current affairs shows. Channel D has 15 in-house producers based in Dubai, and about 10 in India. In addition, the channel hires presenters and directors on a project basis. With all production in-house, the Dubai facility boasts two edit suites equipped with FCP and DaVinci as well as graphics and CGI. The channel boasts two servers with 120TB capacity, which Nair says will be expanded in due course.

"After broadcast, the files will be archived and the rest will be on the server. At any given time, we have 10-12TB in rushes."

The channel is connected to Etisalat’s IPTV platform through optic fibre, without loss. The management is presently in talks with distributors and telcos in other global territories to broadcast the channel.

“We have already signed a deal with Sky Network to distribute the channel in the UK and Europe. Other similar arrangements will follow in the run-up to its launch next month,” he says.

Most of the full HD Indian channels in the UAE are encrypted, according to Nair, and Channel D is one of the few free-to-air full HD channels catering to the Indian expat community in the UAE.

“We will be tapping into advertising from real estate companies both here and back in India, hospital chains, food and jewellery brands. We have put together a very robust programming grid which is sure to strike a chord with audiences,” he adds.

Kit list
- 2 x Blackmagic studio cameras used for live programmes
- Canon C300 Mark II 4k HD camera, used for recorded programmes
- Sony Alpha 7sII 4K camera, for recorded programmes
- Sony XD CAM PXW-X160, for recorded programmes
- Action cameras from DJI Osmo and GoPro
- Carl Zeiss compact prime lenses and Canon EF lenses
- TriCaster 8000 MS (M.BOM)
- Virtual Set Editor Advanced Edition
- LiveText 2.5 w/ DataLink 3 technology
- TriCaster Advanced Edition for TriCaster 8000 Multi-standard
- LiveMedia server 2-channel 1RU turnkey + controller ShuttlePro
- Blackmagic Smart Videohub 2Dx20
- ProMAX platform online 2000 – 12TB
- Kit w/3 x ID500-V2 LED studio light with touchscreen (M.BOM)
- Tarantax Mini + HDMI to SDI 12G
- Miller tripods
- Live CG Broadcast SDI with social hub & accessories/keyboard
- TalkShow VJ 4000 MultiStandard
- Blackmagic MultiView 4
- 6 x Fresnel lights
- 8 x in-studio LED panels
- 3 x outdoor light kits

The Dubai facility features two edit suites and a sound studio.
PROSPORT

Snapshot

- **Objective:** To cover badminton matches for live TV broadcast and OTT streaming
- **Location:** Dubai
- **End users:** Badminton World Federation
- **Producer:** Aurora Media
- **Distributor:** IMG Media
- **Host broadcaster:** Dubai Media Inc.
- **Local equipment provider:** 7 Production
- **Key equipment and solutions:** Sony HD cameras, EVS Servers, Namadi, Vort, Hawk-eye Innovations

The third instalment of the BWF Dubai World Superseries Finals in Dubai had a lot of action during the five-day event. BroadcastPro ME goes behind the scenes to see how the badminton matches were televised for a global audience.

The recently concluded Badminton World Federation (BWF) Dubai World Superseries Finals featured ace badminton players from around the world battling for top spots at the Hamdan Sports Complex in the emirate. The entire tournament was televised and live streamed to various linear and OTT channels globally.

State broadcaster Dubai Media Inc was the host broadcaster of the event, and telecast the series on Dubai Sports Channel. IMG Media, a major producer and distributor of sports and entertainment content globally, is BWF’s current media. The two entities have agreed on a four-year contract for the centralised media rights of BWF’s key events, the Dubai World Superseries Finals and the BWF Grand Prix Gold. Since 2014, the 12-stop BWF World Superseries, which culminates in the year-end Superseries Finals, has been centralised under IMG Media. The event is part of the aforementioned four-year contract, which runs until 2017.

BWF events are televised in more than 160 countries, with more than 5,000 hours of coverage yearly, and BWF’s online channel boasts 123m views with fans watching 70m minutes of badminton. The 12 legs of the series (eight in Asia, three in Europe and one in Oceania) lead to the finals, where the top eight in each discipline qualify to compete in the season finale – the Dubai World Superseries Finals.

IMG Media’s Executive Producer, John Adamson, was in the UAE for the Dubai World Superseries Finals, which took place over five days last December.

Adamson explains that IMG’s role is to ensure the tournament receives maximum exposure on various television and online platforms.

“The BWF World Superseries tournaments are produced for a global audience. I attend the tournaments to ensure there is...
“Sports broadcast has come a long way, and it is constantly evolving. It’s no longer about watching a match or game; the statistical data made available is ever increasing and needs to be presented in addition to the coverage. More sports are offering viewers access to different camera angles”

John Adamson, Executive Producer, IMG Media

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Consistency in the series’ coverage. Each tournament has a different host broadcaster and is covered by a different production team, so we bring consistency by assisting broadcasters with the World Superseries Broadcast guidelines to ensure certain standards are met, and the audio and video coverage maintains the same style and look throughout. IMG also coordinates the event’s distribution for the satellite space,” he says.

He further adds: “We stipulate a minimum of a 10-camera set-up for covering the events and also give guidelines for the graphics package. As much as we’d like to cover the events in 4K, it’s cost prohibitive at the moment, therefore all the content is in HD 1920 10 API.”

The matches are produced for live broadcast with one broadcast set-up, while another is used for players’ interviews. Then there are broadcasters from different countries that send reporters and a small crew to do the interviews.

Lawrence Duffy, Managing Director of UK-based Aurora Media, is in charge of the core production of the event. Aurora engaged local production company 7 Production to build broadcast infrastructure in the stadium, including the OB vans.

“Every year, the local teams are better equipped and have a better understanding of the event and its requirements,” comments Adamson, adding that most of the crew involved in the production had done badminton before. The Dubai event was covered using two OB vans on-site, a main truck and a support truck. Integrated wiring within Hamdan Stadium allowed cables to be routed from inside to outside through their

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own patch panels. An RNG vehicle was used to uplink the content to Etelsat from the stadium. This content was then downlinked at the Etelsat Media hub in London and sent through fibre to Singapore. The Singapore hub uplinked the content to AsiaSat for broadcasters in Asia to downlink to.

“Six matches per day are uplinked with ten matches for the semi-finals and all five matches on the final day. On an average, we have about six to eight hours of content in a day and a total of roughly 42 hours of content, which goes on TV as well as OTT platforms,” says Adamson.

For the World Superseries Finals in Dubai, 13 Sony 500 cameras were used to cover the matches from various angles. With one on a jib and two RF handheld cameras along with two super slomo camera placed on the corners, the entire court was covered. Camera placement can be a challenge, according to Adamson, and has to be done right to capture the most critical moments of the game. A handheld and jib camera was placed on the periphery of the court, with two relay cameras on the corners. “You cannot afford to miss even a single second of on-court activity. Cameras are placed in a way to ensure every moment of the game is covered,” he says. Also present were two ENG crews with Sony PMW 35 cameras and rigs. The IP streams were delivered on-site using local networks.

The footage from the on-court cameras was fed back into the UHD on-site using local networks. Two edit suites equipped with super slomo cameras placed on the corners. Camera placement can be a challenge, according to Adamson, and has to be done right to capture the most critical moments of the game. A handheld and jib camera was placed on the periphery of the court, with two relay cameras on the corners. “You cannot afford to miss even a single second of on-court activity. Cameras are placed in a way to ensure every moment of the game is covered,” he says. Also present were two ENG crews with Sony PMW 35 cameras and rigs. The IP streams were delivered on-site using local networks.

The MetLife BWF World Superseries is a circuit of 12 tournaments attracting the top 32 world-ranked players in singles (men’s and women’s) and doubles. BadmintonWorld TV is the official live channel of the Badminton World Federation (BWF), where live, catch-up and delayed streaming of major events such as the MetLife BWF World Superseries and the BWF World Championships are showcased. IMG manages the BadmintonWorld TV service, downloads and encodes the content, which is then sent to Google servers to publish on YouTube. BWF’s YouTube channel is populated in most territories for seven days to protect rights-holding broadcasters. The BWF World Superseries attracts all the star players on the international circuit and generates significant television coverage globally. From Sydney to Odense in Denmark, players compete for ranking points towards their Destination Dubai Ranking, which is used in the qualifications for the Dubai World Superseries Finals. The series is a two-for circuit. Six of the World Superseries events are Premier events with higher ranking points and more prize money. Powered by Viarit, Namadgi provides solutions and integration into third-party software for data and statistical collection to drive on-air graphics with live and up-to-date information. UK-headquartered sports technology provider Hawk-Eye Innovations provided the BWF Instant Review System for players to challenge decisions. Hawk-Eye Innovations has developed their tennis ball tracking system, to adapt to the behaviours of a badminton shuttlecock. 10 high-speed cameras were placed around the arena in order to have the best vantage points for shuttlecock tracking. During a game, challenges are referred to Hawk-Eye’s SMART Replay system, which helps officiate on a number of infringements including line calls and service faults. In addition, Hawk-Eye’s tracking cameras provide data on things such as shuttle speed, helping tell the story and enhance the broadcast. “Sports broadcast has come a long way, and it is constantly evolving. It’s no longer about watching a match or game; the statistical data made available is ever increasing and needs to be presented in addition to the coverage.”

“More sports are offering viewers access to different camera angles as well as additional footage, which may not be available on linear channels. Analytic data comes up in seconds on the screens with statistics, comparisons and so on. While it’s an advance in terms of providing the viewer with a lot of information, there are occasions when one wants to see the players’ reactions and not be overwhelmed by statistics. Balancing the two is key. “Social media engagement and digital coverage, as well as the way highlights packages are produced, have transformed sports coverage. Some things move a little too quickly, also you need time to familiarise yourself with new equipment in order to maximise performance. The broadcast world is transforming very quickly. Technology is a great tool as long as it’s used in the right amount,” Adamson points out.
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CABSAT is back to its traditional ‘L’ shape configuration much to the relief of most exhibitors. The show returns to halls 1-8 with the conference taking place at Al Multaqa hall. The satellite sector or ‘SATEXPO’ will be located in halls 6-8, while the broadcast solutions and content delivery sectors will occupy halls 1-5.

One of the key highlights of CABSAT this year is the 48-hour Hackathon, organised in partnership with Metrological. “This is a global first,” explains Syed Ali, Sales Manager, CABSAT.

“Centrally on the CABSAT exhibition floor, teams of developers will strive to create the best TV app with the Metrological SDK. Prizes are up for grabs and the winning team gets the chance to pitch their app to operators such as Ooredoo, Liberty Global and KPN.” The 2017 edition also marks the debut of e-vision, Dolby, Besat Broadcasting Systems, Videole, Witbe, Ideal Systems, SRTtv, Akamai, 4Mod Technology, TMI and Ultra Media as exhibitors. In addition, CABSAT and SATEXPO are aiming to enhance the visitor and exhibitor show experience by launching a new and improved Meetings Programme for all attendees of CABSAT & SATEXPO 2017, says Ali. The free matchmaking session allows users to search through thousands of CABSAT and SATEXPO contacts and book one-to-one meetings at the show. Once registered, both visitors and exhibitors will be able to log into an online matchmaking portal, build a personal profile and browse through the contacts by sectors and interests, and fill their schedule with meetings prior to the show. This feature will be hosted by a team of matchmaking experts, who will offer support leading up to the show.

For the first time, CABSAT will also feature the Singapore country pavilion. Martin Gaiser, SVP of Content from 20th Century Fox, will deliver the keynote speech on Next Generation TV; Personalised Content on Demand at CABSAT Content Congress. The conference will also showcase case studies from a number of key players in the industry including Netflix, Starzplay, Al Jazeera Media, Fox International as well as leading telcos, Etisalat and Du. In addition, there will be a special focus on Virtual Reality and OTT at this year’s event.
Lawa creates IP ecosystem

Lawa will present IP video and audio processing and routing tools as well as IP-based digital audio mixing consoles and audio routers at CABSAT.

Lawa will also showcase its VSM control system, currently used in some of the most complex production scenarios around the world including Al Jazeera Media Network, Al-Hikmah Sports playout centre and Al Jazeera’s latest OB van. On show will be Lawa’s IP-based V__remote4 video interface, processing and routing devices. The V__remote4 is a bi-directional multichannel video/audio to IP interface for remote production.

It is designed to provide a one-box solution for all the requirements of video and audio signal transport and processing in WAN-based remote productions, including everything from video-over-IP coding, and various monitoring and processing tools to bridging audio between video and audio.

Broadpeak streamlines OTT delivery

Broadpeak will demonstrate OTT video delivery optimisation solutions for content providers. Its stand will showcase umbrell@CON with CDN diversity. Broadpeak’s umbrell@CON allows content providers to always choose the best content delivery network for delivering video content. A key highlight at CABSAT 2017 will be CDN diversity: an advanced capability of umbrell@CON, which enables content providers to dynamically take account of the instantaneous quality of several CDNs as a service, to combine their contributions and deliver content with a quality exceeding what would be achievable with the best CDN alone. Broadpeak will demonstrate its new standalone video analytics solution for displaying key video parameters. Using this solution, content providers can gain insight into the GoS perceived by end users, leveraging critical information.

Yahlive offers tailored content

At CABSAT this year, Yahlive will showcase how viewers can now enjoy a wide range of news, entertainment and lifestyle TV channels, including Fashion 4K, the region’s first free-to-air 4K channel, MasterChef, BBC, Showroom TV and many more. Yahlive will present its capabilities as a popular satellite broadcast provider for Farsi-speaking viewers across the Middle East and southwest Asia, reaching millions of Farsi, Kurdish and Afghan-speaking families. Yahlive CEO Sam Boustany commented: “CABSAT is a critical platform for the growth and development of the region’s broadcast, satellite and connected digital media community. This year, Yahlive will focus on outlining the growing importance of creating and providing tailored content for niche communities.”

Tercue transitions to IP

Tercue’s new ENC-400 streaming encoder accommodates dual H.265 or HDMI loop through inputs with redundancy switching. Combined with multi-latitude RTMP and/or HLS streaming, low-latency, DVB-compliant transport stream and Pro-MPEG FEC, the ENC-400 delivers streaming solutions regardless of the specific use case.

This H.265-based video encoder is able to deliver multiple streams in multiple bitrates and protocols to multiple destinations. The built-in frame synchroniser guarantees stable signal processing. Both inputs provide loop-through outputs and can be used for redundancy switching or as sources for two individual encodings. Besides the latest in H.264 encoding technology, the ENC-400 features MPEG-4 video and off-line recording to USB memory. Also showcased at CABSAT will be ICEE-GRID, a flexible multi-room IP video presenter and video wall. It allows complete on-the-fly control over the visualised live and/or on-demand content in any resolution on any screen in any room. Through web-based access, users can access and display PTZ signals, security cameras, broadcast contribution streams, in-house video studio signals, PC presentations, weather radar signals or live events. The ICEE GRID also recognises NDI (by NewTek) sources for display.

Aret shines in North Africa

Aret Video and Audio Engineering will be presenting a redesigned CABSAT stand this year.

Al Boustany, Sales Director at the Middle East and Africa, Umberto Alj, Vice President, International Sales, said: “Aret has just delivered a 10 HD camera OB van specifically designed for shooting sports, horse races to be specific. The truck, delivered to a client in North Africa, is equipped with a new-generation video mixer and a powerful and flexible management and supervision system that controls all the variables inside the OB van. The 10 HD cameras, including a wireless and an ultra-slow motion camera, are completely integrated with two slow motion servers. This OB van features a layout that enables to maximise the internal space, allowing interoperability among the different production areas.”

DMG Lumière makes CABSAT debut

French lighting manufacturer DMG Lumière is exhibiting at CABSAT for the first time. On display will be the MINI Switch, 85W, 58x22x2cm, weighing 1.7kg. The SL1 Switch is 71W with dimensions of 13x20x3cm and a weight of 3.4kg. Complementing the Switch series is the MAXI Switch, a much wider and brighter source of 500W with light surface and dimensions of 120x75x2cm. It weighs 10.5kg. The MAXI Switch is a bi-folding fixture, which makes it very easy to transport. It also has the option to be split into two separate panels, which can then be controlled independently from each other. DMG Lumière lights are bi-colour, ranging from 3,000 to 5,600K with a high CRI rating (>94). They run on both AC and DC power sources, as well as Wi-Fi DMG remote control software, and accessories are designed and engineered by the manufacturer’s in-house engineering team in Lyon.

SAMI gets ready to play

Small Advanced Media (SAM) will be highlighting its IP and 4K live sports production and replay workflows, IP routing system, multiviewers and playout solutions.

Commenting on the company’s CABSAT showcase, Naresh Subherwal, Managing Director, SAM Middle East, said: “Following LiveTouch’s incredibly successful launch at IBC 2016, we’re looking forward to showing our customers in the Middle East the huge potential the solution can bring to their live sports production workforce. We’ve invested heavily in the region and see the Middle East as an important part of SAM’s strategic growth. We’re looking forward to not just showing our range of new products at CABSAT, but also preventing to our customers the full end-to-end SAM solutions on offer.”

LiveTouch is tightly integrated with SAM editors, enabling instant collaboration between replay and production. Users can also instantly publish highlights and replays straight to social media by using SAM’s Momentum workflow technology. SAM’s Kula multi-format production switcher supports live streaming with ICE channel-in-a-box solution and Morphesis playlist automation will also be on show. Available as a 1 M/E and 1 M/E 4K versions, Kula can handle multiple formats making it both future-proof and adaptable for today’s production environment. The 2M/E H.265 version can be switched to 4K I/O allowing users to benefit from higher production values.

ICE incorporates all the operational, technical, regulatory and commercial functionality required for broadcast playout. SAM will also demonstrate its IP routing system, which is ready to support the new SMPTE 2110 suite of standards as adopted by AIMS.
NETIA takes radio to new level

NETIA will be exhibiting at CABSAT 2017 for the first time under its new owners – French media entrepreneurs Anthony Savelli and Vincent Bernевise. NETIA provides a range of solutions to radio stations, from production to broadcast, each step is covered – acquisition, sound file editing, delivery, advertising, music scheduling, multichannel broadcasting, archiving, data security and administration. The software also lets users optionally implement a semantic search, thus offering a broadly optimised media search function. “NETIA proposes end-to-end packages that cover the entire production workflow. Synchronisation and automation of radio workflow enable users to free themselves from technical tasks and focus on more value-creating activities,” said Isabelle Sost, Director of Communications. “NETIA has worked with prestigious broadcasters such as SBC Radio in Saudi Arabia, Qatar Radio, Oman Radio and recently JRTV in Jordan, in partnership with many system integrators in the Middle East.”

Rohde & Schwarz brings VENICE to us

Rohde & Schwarz is showcasing the expanded VENICE ingest and playout platform to include the R&S VENICE Control application.

VENICE

VENICE is a classic video server and ingest platform that offers native support for a variety of storage connections and file systems. R&S VENICE Control ingest software for controlling complex multi-camera recordings makes it possible to record up to 16 independent channels in all conventional production and broadcast formats.

Rohde & Schwarz developed R&S VENICE Control in close cooperation with studio operators to meet the demanding requirements associated with multi-camera recordings. All settings required for recording can be saved and then applied to individual channels or to channel groups. The new client server architecture of R&S VENICE Control offers complete redundancy for reliable, interruption-free operation.

ROHDE & SCHWARZ

As a provider of systems for all stages of the media value chain, Rohde & Schwarz offers innovative, reliable and cost-effective solutions. Rohde & Schwarz brings VENICE to us.

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Irdeto challenges pirates

Irdeto will focus on anti-piracy at CABSAT. Some of the highlights of the Irdeto stand at CABSAT 2017 will be multi-DRM, watermarking and online piracy detection. Irdeto Rights (multi-DRM, Media Manager), CA, Cloud CA and Home Networking helps operators and content rights holders protect and manage media (Irdeto Media Manager) on broadcast, OTT and home networks.

With renewable security technologies, a content preparation platform and a fully-integrated CA and multi-DRM management solution across network types, Irdeto customers can easily roll out new services to the widest possible range of end-user devices.

Commenting on trends of Sales MENA at Irdeto. Khaled Al-Jamal, Director of Sales MENA at Irdeto, said: “In the past year, we have seen a major shift in how MENA pay-TV operators are combating piracy. They have started to significantly increase their investment in anti-piracy technology, as they realise that it is no longer enough to just secure the content pipe from screen to screen. The piracy control solutions and services that local operators are now looking to deploy include video watermarking, advanced crawling and monitoring technologies that monitor and then identify the source of the illegally redistributed content.

We are also witnessing another trend emerge in the region. OTT is creating a new form of competition for pay TV operators. MENA has long been dominated by Satellite DTH as the TV service provider in the majority of TV households. But the growing competition from OTT-only offerings is forcing down satellite TV ARPUs. One way the pay TV operators are combating this OTT threat is by developing their linear and mobile content strategy for kids and educational programming to bring in new revenues by up-selling and attracting these new customers.”
**Axon celebrates 30th anniversary**

Broadcast infrastructure specialist Axon Digital Design, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, is bringing a range of IP products and production tools to CABSAT.

Axon will unveil the NIO440 at the show. A new eight-channel bi-directional Ethernet/SDI bridge, for the Middle East market. Due to its highly flexible architecture, the NIO440 can help customers move to an IP-based infrastructure with support for all possible current and future standards. At present, the card is compatible with both AVB/TSN and s2022. Future standards like VSF/TR682/306 and SMPTE-2059 – are also within its capability and compatibility will be achieved by future software upgrades.

The NIO440 provides the bridge from 3G/HD-SDI to uncompressed Ethernet video transport and de-centralised routing. Axon will also showcase its new SynView Multiuser solution, which is capable of handling both 4K and any IP video formats. SynView is used for a wide range of applications and from small to extremely large monitoring walls, and is ready for the future because it can support whatever video transport mechanism the industry chooses to adopt.

The Axon stand will also showcase the ongoing work on 4K and IP by representing Utah Scientific.

**Sigma releases new cine lenses**

Sigma Corporation is releasing new line of cine lenses designed specifically for cinematography. Sigma has developed its own production system by establishing the required technology for massive production of high-performance lenses for ultra mega pixel shooting.

In the first phase, Sigma will release two zoom lenses in Japan and the US for EF and PL mount camera systems. Furthermore, another zoom lens and five prime lenses will be released to the market in 2017. Sigma plans to develop additional zoom and prime lenses as well as add support for PL mount camera systems. Its high speed zoom line offers the constant aperture of T2 throughout the zoom range, and the optical performance is ready for high resolution shooting such as 4K and 8K. Its FT zoom line is compatible with a full frame image circle, and the optical performance is ready for high resolution shooting such as 6K-8K. The line-up ranges from 20mm to 88mm, and all five lenses are T1.5. They are compatible with full frame sensors, and while being more compact, can offer superior resolution than other high- end prime sets. With the five prime lenses from FT High Speed Prime Line, there is no need to change the lighting to shoot a variety of cuts.
Better radio with RCS

At CABSAT, RCS will be showcasing its latest product suite including Zetta automation, OSelecter software and Aquila commercial traffic and RCS News. Baher Al Zaher of RCS MENA explained: “RCS has had clients in the MENA region for several years and by opening our new base here in Dubai, we are even closer to our esteemed customers.” RCS deployed the broadcast software and radio automation at the newly launched big FM by Zee Network.

Senior Vice President International Operations, Mike Powell, added: “Our new base in Dubai marks our twentieth wholly-owned office outside the United States. Together with our four offices in the US, we now serve customers in 114 countries. We are working with some of the most advanced radio companies in the world.”

WorldCast Systems connects the globe

WorldCast Systems is showcasing its new WorldCast MANAGER server software at CABSAT. WorldCast’s multi-vendor NMS and OSS software have been designed as a global network solution specifically for the broadcast, satellite, cable and telecoms industries.

At a basic level, it provides the ability to link a wide network of SNMP-enabled devices from any manufacturer across multiple locations and displays the real-time status of them all in a single interface.

“Through WorldCast MANAGER server’s single interface, the user can efficiently and intelligently manage the operational ecosystem with comprehensive alarm management, detailed measurement logs and other advanced features.”

In addition to the WorldCast MANAGER Server, WorldCast Systems will also be displaying its range of hardware equipment for the broadcast industry at CABSAT 2017.

Qarva returns to CABSAT with OTT power

Qarva is showcasing Qarva MultiPipe, the world’s first OTT streaming service. Qarva MultiPipe enables the subscriber to use the whole bandwidth of the local internet connection for accessing video even from another continent, even in HD.

The solution is based on TCP/IP protocol. The proprietary protocol divides the stream into multiple sub-streams, then uses persistent connections to multiple streaming servers around the world to deliver a subscriber’s chosen content. The MultiPipe client then aggregates those connections to deliver a stream at the maximum capacity of the local bandwidth. Up to 32 sub-streams can be concurrently connected. For example, an average limitation derived from a distance of 0.3Mb/s, with this persistent connection means an improvement of delivery speed of up to 35Mb/s. So, no matter the distance, Qarva claims that content will be delivered at best available quality to the user from one CDN server. Qarva MultiPipe can be integrated as a proxy agent on older platforms on the end user device. The aggregated video stream is output to the device’s legacy player as HTTP video.

More TV! More OTT with Metrological

Metrological enables operators to integrate their TV and OTT content into a single viewer experience. The cloud-based application platform delivers a complete product suite to launch, manage and monetise branded TV app stores on any device.

The back-end system provides full lifecycle support for TV apps, along with real-time business intelligence dashboards and marketing analytics. Operators have access to more than 300 apps in the app store library or can build their own apps with an open software development kit.

Content providers benefit as well, since they can reach more than 60 million households simply by publishing a single app to Metrological’s app library, reaching leading operators with no operator-specific customisations needed. Metrological has supplied solutions for Ooredoo in the region and worldwide for KPN, Liberty Global, Comcast and Telecolumbus. Using Metrological’s cloud-based TV app platform, Ooredoo is able to offer customers a wider selection of apps than ever before.

The Ooredoo-branded TV app store is integrated into the Ooredoo TV user experience, which combines existing native apps with an expanded app library of premium and local apps and OTT content.

The service is offered to customers in Qatar via the Ooredoo TV app store. Ooredoo, which combines existing native apps with an expanded app store on any device.

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Coemar brightens up CABSAT

Headquartered in Milan, Coemar is known for its high-end projectors among other products. Coemar’s product range focuses on the broadcasting and theatrical markets. The company’s CABSAT line-up of products includes LEDkio as well as the Solfito, a smooth RGBW light. Both products are available in different versions in terms of LED array, controlling possibilities and optical options.

Interra Systems offers quality control

At CABSAT, Interra Systems is demonstrating QC/monitoring solutions for adaptive bitrate (ABR) content. ORION real-time content monitoring and video analysis systems, BATOM automated, file-based QC, and VEGA media analysers. Interra Systems’ quality control and monitoring solutions will be on display at CABSAT. During live demonstrations, attendees can learn how to check and assure the integrity of 4K UHD, HEVC, HDR, DPX and IMF content.

A key highlight at CABSAT will be Interra Systems’ ORION-DT. It enables OTT service/sequence and CDN providers to seamlessly monitor online video delivery for quality and compliance.

Lights! Demos! Action at Oasis stand

At CABSAT, Oasis Enterprises Professional Projects Division (Oasis PPD) is showcasing lighting, broadcast and AV solutions at CABSAT. The stand at the show will focus on broadcast, studio lighting and communications technology. ETC, Rossco, Devisil, Ayrton and Brother & Sons (BiBAS), Datavision, Egressim, ACV, Dynamix and Tprimital are some of the brands on show. Oasis PPD and ETC are organising a separate space for demonstrations. This space is for demos of ETC products such as ColorSource AV and SDI BS, with interaction and learning about ETC products as the highlight.

FOR-A makes the switch

FOR-A will demonstrate its live production solution consisting of the HVS-2000 video production switcher and introduce the HVS-490 and the MV-1200 at the show. The HVS-490 4K 30 production switcher is the newest member of the Hanabi Switcher family, featuring up to 60 inputs, up to 22 outputs and up to 32 channels of 2.5D EVE. Making its CABSAT debut is the MV-1200 multi viewer, which supports 3G-SDI, HD-SDI, SD-SDI, Composite, HDMI, DVI sources and UHD. Furthermore, a new release of FA-505 will also be displayed. In addition to its use as a general frame sync, it is equipped with an array of essential functions used in video production that allow multichannel routing – live inputs and live outputs.

Many brands in focus at Advanced Media stand

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At this year’s CABSAT, Qvest Media is presenting upcoming global technology trends such as artificial intelligence for media analysis and cloud-based broadcast solutions. The Qvest Media stand also features Arvato Systems and MediaGenix as co-exhibitors. Visitors can discover the full potential of artificial intelligence in the analysis of media content and learn about the extensive impact of digital transformation. Further, the company will talk about its practical experiences and future challenges in building IP-based media infrastructures. Another key will be the shift from CAPEX- to OPEX-based business models using Qvest Media’s new managed technology approach. At Qvest Media’s stand, selected partners will also showcase their latest digital products and technology solutions. Arvato Systems will present its range of solutions for the broadcasting and media industry. Its portfolio addresses a wide range of challenges for usage, management, production distribution and monetisation of content across different media channels. MediaGenix will introduce MAHSAOn – an integrated software suite for enterprise-wide broadcast management processes.

Pebble will also announce new partnerships at the show, which enable the company to extend the scope of its automation and content management engine for FTP ingest, file-based QC and transcoding. Regional Manager for the Middle East and India, Samir Isbaih, commented: “With more than 70 customers across the MENA region using our playout solutions, it is now delivering more than 600 channels to air. Pebble Beach Systems is committed to meeting the needs of this market. We have strengthened the regional team by adding more technical staff.”

Sea of change with Pebble Beach Systems

Pebble Beach Systems will showcase virtualised playout at CABSAT with Ocean. Once leverages the power of the company’s Marina automation and the software-defined pipeline used with Dolphin, enabling broadcasters and service providers to migrate to an IP and virtualised environment without compromising channel design or operation. The ability to deploy new channels in a matter of minutes at low cost makes Ocean particularly suited to pop-up, event-based channels, and to disaster recovery applications. Pebble will also announce new partnerships at the show with SRG SSR and Skysports.

Broadcast Solutions goes wireless

Broadcast Solutions is introducing a new brand, Broadcast Wireless, at CABSAT 2017. Broadcast Wireless video link systems use IP-based video content from professional camera and production teams to OB vans, SNLs or broadcast stations using a new technology with 7ms latency – the lowest in the market worldwide. Customers can access the only solution available in the market, the Broadcast Wireless system supports integrated intercom for communication between a cameraman and a director on the same RF channel as the video content. Built on a full-duplex data channel between camera transmitters/receivers, the system acknowledges the correct acceptance of each packet of pixels. As a result, the system enables continuous and reliable content.
IHSE promises long-distance support

At CABSAT this year, IHSE USA will be focusing on live product presentations of KVM matrix switch and extender solutions that support long-distance distribution and computer access for systems supporting HD video such as HDMI and DisplayPort 4K. IHSE will be promoting the new line of Draco ultra-extenders for display port 4K resolutions up to 4096x2160p60Hz and full 4:4:4 colour support. Real-time switching will be demonstrated through Draco tera enterprise and the compact series of KVM.

Sound offers from BW Broadcast

BW Broadcast is showcasing FM transmitters and translators, alongside the latest products from its Encore range. Visitors to the company’s CABSAT stand will have a chance to experience the DSPXmini Encore audio processor, ModMon Encore modulation monitor, Ariane Encore audio leveller and RBRX Encore rebroadcast receiver. DSPXmini Encore is selectable as an FM, AM or HD processor, which makes a station’s audio stand out against the competition. A four-band AGC corrects and equalises input levels, and the four-band limiter section tightly controls peak levels to optimise sound quality. Ariane Encore is an audio leveller for anyone who wants to pre-process to send correct matrix switching.

Better cinema experience with Canon EOS C700

Canon will launch its next generation EOS C700 Digital Cinema Camera at CABSAT this year. With an all-new modular design aimed at high-end cinema production, the C700 promises to bring the power and flexibility for the A-camera market. Featuring a Super35mm sensor that shoots up to 6K, numerous recording options and an upcoming RAW update, the C700 claims to offer high-quality images. Canon will also launch its XC15 4K UHD camcorder that incorporates a Canon 4K video lens that leverages proprietary Canon optical technologies derived from years of experience in developing cinema, broadcast and EF series lenses. “Using CABSAT as a platform, Canon gives the opportunity for consumers to see premium portfolio of imaging solutions, ranging from cinema cameras to lenses including 4K technology, workflow solutions and even post production,” said Verkakasubramanian Harharan, Regional Sales Director at Canon Middle East.

NOA brings storage expertise to MENA show

AV digitising and archiving specialist NOA GmbH will exhibit at CABSAT 2017. “Our presence at CABSAT 2017 coincides with some important large-scale projects in the region that will be completed this year,” said Christophe Kummer, Managing Partner at NOA. NOA has developed tools to automate and simplify the process of digitisation, storage and retrieval of media content, as well as appropriate metadata annotation and management. The mediaPAC system includes the three fundamental areas of an archive project: metadata (description of the media content), media storage and conversion, and workflows (controlling, creating and processing information). Open Archival Information System (OASIS), a framework designed to future-proof archives, is at the core of NOA’s database design. Part of its application is the use of open source resources, especially in video encoding, to ensure that archival content remains accessible for decades.

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With the goal of bringing viewers closer to the action, sports video production has led the transition from standard definition to high definition to the latest trend, 4K. As a result, major sporting events such as the Olympics and the UEFA European Championship have influenced the decisions of millions of home viewers. In fact, a quick look at 4K TV shipments versus HD TV shipments reveals that this has been a growing trend for at least the past three years.

Although 4K direct broadcasts are still rare, there is a desire to archive material at a higher resolution than it’s broadcast at. This is for reruns and other future uses when 4K is likely to be the norm for broadcast. In fact, this is how HD/1080p began. For example, the BBC was filming and archiving material in HD many years before they broadcast in HD. This was done so that content could be rebroadcast in HD when adoption of HD became widespread.

There are significant barriers to 4K adoption. These challenges include bandwidth requirements, standards and reliability, which leads to bigger questions. Is 4K production currently a commercially viable proposition? Where’s the ROI? Is 4K enough? After all, the film industry is already shooting its first 8K feature film, Guardians of the Galaxy 2, and some networks are already working towards an 8K infrastructure for the Winter Olympics.

To understand this, we must first examine the 4K workflow. For 4K, four SDI cables are required for distribution, quartering the existing infrastructure capacity. That means every 4K production run needs four cables, four patch panel connections, four video switcher inputs/outputs and so on. Logistically and practically, this is not sustainable.

The answer to these concerns interest internet protocol (IP) adoption. In fact, the increase in 4K production is influencing production equipment purchases by studios and technology development by manufacturers towards IP distribution.

IP infrastructure offers a high number of benefits. The most obvious are greater flexibility and a decrease in capital cost expenditures. For live events, you get the freedom to eliminate excessive cabling, decrease the costs associated with OB trucks at live events and locate your crews wherever the action is – a massive improvement over current conditions. The technology is also reliable, as it has been around for years. Additionally, IP adoption also answers the scalability issues now troubling studios and networks. For studios wondering if 4K is enough, an IP infrastructure offers a scalable solution that gives you the ability to broadcast 4K and beyond.

Finally, IP offers greater efficiency. It is format agnostic and makes remote production possible. Due to increased creative collaboration, efficient use of resources and the ability to deliver a measurable ROI, IP adoption is the answer for studios looking to adopt 4K and beyond.

Despite the continual rise of IP, SDI architectures will be around for a long time yet. Since IP networks deliver real benefits outside the 4K workflow, hybrid facilities will become increasingly common, with every facility managing the transition to IP at a speed that fits the individual circumstances. And while mainstream adoption of IP does not depend on 4K, widespread adoption of 4K for live production largely depends on IP. In other words, IP has been around for a while in studios, but its universal implementation is going to be driven by – and is pretty much a prerequisite for – 4K production.

As a result, the perception of IP-centric technology needs to evolve within production. IP workflow represents an essential yet revolutionary step forward for modern broadcasting, enabling networks to work responsively and securely in a flexible environment.

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