Al Jazeera Media Network celebrates tech innovation and workplace transformation at 20th anniversary celebrations
The last time I went to Al Jazeera was four years ago. The people at the top were different and the workplace had a different ambience to it. Two years ago, when I met Mohamed Abuagla, Executive Director and CIO/CTO of Al Jazeera in Dubai, he had promised a transformation at the workplace and that’s exactly what greeted me when I went over last month to Qatar. The physical transformation was fascinating but the vision the team espoused has been just as awe inspiring. The whole place was abuzz with activity as everyone was in full gear to announce some new launches at the network’s 20th anniversary celebrations. I’m not questioning the challenges that systems integrators have had to face in dealing with an organisation the size of AJMN. That’s meat for another story. I’m just astounded by the very ambitious vision that nobody thought was ever going to be realised and how various champions across the network have sacrificed so much to bring some of these projects to fruition. I think this makes for a fitting cover story for the ASBU BroadcastPro Sellevision Summit and Awards of 2016, where we don’t just celebrate excellence and acknowledge frontrunners in the industry but also try to bring them all together, so we can share each other’s experiences and recommend advice to others starting on similar journeys at their own offices. This is a beautiful opportunity as some of them will be at the event to share their experiences and what they are doing in terms of a cloud newsroom, artificial intelligence and more. If you haven’t registered yet to attend the ASBU BroadcastPro Sellevision Summit and Awards on November 15 at Habtoor Grand, Dubai Marina, I encourage you to visit www.broadcastpromeawards.com and do it right away. See you on the 15th.
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Making the IP switch
Zee Entertainment has acquired the UAE’s Hindi-language radio station Hum 106.2 FM. This is Zee’s first foray into the radio business across all markets. With the acquisition of Hum FM, Zee becomes the only entertainment network in the region to provide an extensive media solution to any partner through television, radio and digital.

Commenting on the move, Mukund Cairae, CEO, Zee Network (MENA and APAC), said: “This move is a diversification to our entertainment business portfolio, adding to the numero uno position we possess in television among South Asians in the Middle East. Now we can offer media across television, radio and digital platforms. This investment also shows our commitment to the region and its business landscape.

“There can be a great synergy between content and mediums that will now be possible. A common initiative can now have a 360-degree audio visual exchange through platforms owned by Zee.”

Hum FM is a part of Umm Al Quwain Broadcasting Network (UBN) and was previously owned and operated by Shamal Media Services.

His Excellency Ali Jasim Ahmed, General Manager of UBN added: “We will give all the facilities to Zee in order to help the station achieve its strategic goals and work together to support the qualitative superiority of the programmes to meet the wishes of the listeners of Hum FM.”

In what appears to be the beginning of many first-run deals, BeIN Media Group has entered into a long-term partnership with Warner Bros. International Television Distribution to acquire premium content from the Hollywood studio. For now, beIN will have access to second pay window rights to Warner Bros. theatrical features. From 2019, however, beIN will become the exclusive home of Warner Bros. first-run programming, series and first pay window feature films.

Movies and series from Warner Bros. will be featured on beIN Movies and beIN Series channels from November in the MENA region. Commenting on the deal, Youssef Al-Obeidly, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of beIN Media Group said: “I am thrilled that we will be able to feature amazing super hero movies and franchises on beIN Movies. Starting this year, beIN will have access to series such as Arrow, Gotham and Originals, and will acquire the exclusive second pay window rights to its feature films.”

BeIN signs multi-year content deal with Warner Bros., promises first-run programming from 2019

AT&T to buy Time Warner for nearly $86bn

US telecoms giant AT&T has announced that it will buy entertainment group Time Warner for nearly $86bn. AT&T and Time Warner said both of their boards unanimously approved the deal but the deal – one of the biggest this year – still needs approval from regulators. If the takeover goes through, it will combine AT&T’s distribution network with content from the Warner Brothers film studios and cable TV channels HBO and CNN.

AT&T’s Chairman described it as “a perfect match”, but critics say it concentrates too much media power.

“‘This is a perfect match of two companies with complimentary strengths who can bring a fresh approach to how the media and communications industry works for customers, content creators, distributors and advertisers,” said Randall Stephenson, Chairman and CEO of AT&T.

An AT&T statement said the aim of the deal was to give customers “unmatched choice, quality, value and experiences that will define the future of media and communications”, and that the new company would “lead the next wave of innovation in the converging media and communications industry”. AT&T will pay €107.50 for each Time Warner share, in a combination of cash and stock worth €85.4bn overall, according to a statement.

News flash: Börje Ekholm has been appointed President and CEO of Ericsson.
VSN deploys VOD solution at Jordan’s Roya TV

VSN has deployed a new VSNWEBTV solution at the Roya TV facility in Jordan. The system provides the channel with a new video-on-demand (VOD) service on its website and allows it to carry out TV and live event broadcast from virtually any device available in the market.

The channel’s primary requirement was to go beyond the traditional linear TV business and acquire technology that could deliver video through the internet, in order to head into the digital world. Therefore, Roya TV needed to find a solution for multiplatform content creation and delivery, comprising video streaming capability that can target simultaneously large and small screens, while being able to fit the different format requirements associated with each consumption platform. Furthermore, the solution had to be scalable, in order to meet the future needs of the TV channel. The VSN solution caters to all of these requirements of the TV channel.

Roya TV now delivers content in a multiplatform work environment, including video on demand and live streaming. The channel has several VSN solutions at its facility right from ingest and media asset management (MAM), to archive and storage, news system and MCR automation.

United Talent Agency and DFTC partner on executive programme

The Dubai Film and Television Commission (DFTC) and United Talent Agency (UTA) have formed a partnership to create a new executive immersion programme to support the next generation of executives from Dubai. The partnership’s goal is to generate more opportunities for film and television production in Dubai and the UAE.

The alliance will provide resources to a select group of emerging media and entertainment professionals, who will travel to UTA’s Beverly Hills headquarters to develop new expertise. Participants will conduct in-depth research and meet with UTA agents across multiple practice areas with the goal of learning industry best practices, enhancing knowledge and identifying opportunities for future collaborations.

The programme’s first participant is Razan Al Marzouqi, a media executive with Dubai Studio City. As part of the programme, UTA agents and executives will travel to Dubai to work with DFTC to identify and execute various ventures related to local and global media businesses.
BeIN Media Group joins cloud provider Magine’s TV Superhighway

Egyptian pay-TV network BeIN Media Group, Yaddo, a new documentary streaming service, Africa XP and a Chinese digital TV distributor have activated Magine’s TV Superhighway in more than 35 markets. Magine’s TV Superhighway aims to fully democratise content distribution, providing a global network of content providers and distributors liberated from geographical limitations, enabling ambitious content owners to quickly access and monetise new markets and audiences anywhere in the world.

The TV Superhighway empowers content creators to use Magine’s cloud technology, distribution network and industry expertise, to choose which market to enter, when and how. This new approach to content distribution opens up channels for broadcast producers, giving them the opportunity to tap into Magine’s technology and distribution network and decide where, when and which content is available in each market, with real-time data analytics available throughout the process.

Ambuj Goyal, CEO of Magine, commented: “Our recently announced partnerships with beIN and Yaddo mark significant proof points in Magine’s development of the TV Superhighway, and we’re looking forward to introducing an opportunity to new content partners with global ambitions.”

Office Dufour, Director of Digital at beIN, added: “Magine serves our premium content to hundreds of thousands of customers each day in 16 countries. They supported the launch of beIN’s digital on-demand service securely, delivering our premium content on a reliable and proven platform.”

In addition to servicing established and multinational blue-chip companies like beIN Media Group, Magine also provides end-to-end services for new content providers across the world.

OSN launches Syfy in MENA, extends partnership with 20th Century Fox

NBCUniversal International Networks and OSN officially celebrated the arrival of Syfy to the region at an exclusive launch event in Dubai. Syfy is claimed to be the only sci-fi focused TV channel in the Middle East. The event also showcased Halcyon, a short-form linear virtual reality hybrid series available exclusively on OSN’s Syfy channel in the region, as well as compelling content including cult classics and genre-defining programming.

Syfy brings a year-round formula of success to launch the first season of Bab Al Hara and the critically acclaimed folklore tales Taraef Al Arab which we achieved through our outstanding cooperation with the YouTube Team in the region,” said Bassel Fawaz, Founder, Watan Network.

YouTube launches Arabic TV hub

YouTube has revealed a new digital hub called Mosailasat, which brings together more than 50 iconic Arabic television series dating back to 1942. The shows, gathered from across the Middle East and North Africa, include archive content such as the 1962 historical comic anthology of folklore tales Taraf Al Arab and the critically acclaimed first season of Bab Al Hara from broadcaster Al Watan TV Network in Syria.

As Watan Network, we believe that Arabic users have the right to access premium content without paying for subscriptions or additional costs. That is why we cooperated with YouTube to form the optimal formula of success to launch Mosailasat. We are proud of what we have done so far, which we achieved through our outstanding cooperation with the YouTube Team in the region,” said Bassel Fawaz, Founder, Watan Network.

ADM broadcasts channel on du media cloud

Abu Dhabi Media Company (ADM) has commenced live broadcast of media business continuity on du media cloud services. UAE operator du has created an ecosystem of cloud hardware and software partners specialising in the media industry, to become the first operator in the MENA region and beyond to host a complete media cloud solutions offering. ADM Live HD channel broadcast the solution end-to-end, and replicated the Live HD channel through the cloud to deliver business continuity, essentially running the entire broadcast operations in the cloud from ingest to playout and live transcoding for broadcast and OTT (over-the-top) services.

“We would like to congratulate ADM for being so quick to act and broadcast on our media cloud solution for the first time in the region,” said Hany Fahmy Aly, Executive Vice President Enterprise Business, du and Peter Van Dam, Director of Technology at Live HD.
DIFF Launches Dubai Investors Club

The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) will be launching The Dubai Investors Club at the festival’s 13th edition. The Dubai Investors Club will provide an opportunity for investors from the region to learn first-hand about the essentials of successful international film financing with internationally renowned experts and film leaders from around the world.

The programme is designed to offer up to 15 top-level investors the opportunity to gain the knowledge, tools and access required to invest in international films that can lead to both financial and critical success in this global and dynamic business.

Key topics will include film financing, distribution and risk mitigation strategies through a series of short presentations, case studies, breakout group discussions and one-to-one meetings. In addition, a series of events will give investors the opportunity to network with industry practitioners in this exciting field as well as the opportunity to forge new business relations with fellow investors, key industry influencers and top producers.

Abdulhamid Juma, DIFF’s Chairman commented on the inaugural event: “The Dubai Investors Club is an opportunity for investors to understand the film industry and successful film financing. The delegates will get access to industry leaders, decision makers and experts who will be in a position to share tremendous knowledge about the future of independent film financing and emerging trends on global film finance.”

Starz Play, STC join for mobile streaming in KSA

Starz Play has teamed up with mobile operator STC to offer digital film and television content to its customers across Saudi Arabia. The subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service offers more than 5,000 hours of entertainment in full HD, and is available for STC users on a trial basis for 60 days without charge.

Over the past 12 months Starz Play has been syndicating access to the entire catalogue of content is available for $1 a week. STC subscribers can use pre-paid credit, or charge their post-paid STC mobile bill through a monthly billing integration feature facilitated by Intigral.

Starz Play has also recently acquired the Middle East rights to stream the latest series of crime drama Luther, as the opportunity to forge new relationships with fellow investors, key industry influencers and top producers.

Canon launches EOS 5D Mark IV in MENA

Canon Middle East recently showcased the EOS 5D Mark IV, the newest addition to the EOS 5D family, at an exclusive distributor function held for UAE and the wider MENA region in Dubai. The launch, held in partnership with Canon’s long-standing local distributor, National Stores and managed by Advanced Media, was attended by photographers and filmmakers.

Speaking about the event, Kesh Parmar, CEO, Advanced Media said: “Canon is a leader in the imaging and business solutions category in terms of technology performance and range and we are extremely delighted to take this partnership a notch higher with the new EOS 5D Mark IV.”

Hendrik Verbrugghe, Marketing Director, Canon Middle East and Canon Central and North Africa, added: “As successor to the EOS 5D Mark III, the EOS 5D Mark IV has been designed using first-hand feedback from the photography community to create the most versatile EOS model yet. We are extremely excited to bring this technological revolution to the region and cannot wait to see the magic that photographers will create with it.”

Canon Middle East

khan said: “I am delighted to be joining Yahsat at such an exciting time. Yahsat’s achievements in less than five years of operations, with the launch of two satellites and serving many communities across the Middle East, Africa, Central and South West Asia, has been nothing short of remarkable. During this next critical growth phase, I will concentrate on establishing new partnerships.”

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Yahsat has appointed Farhad Khan as its Chief Commercial Officer (CCO). Khan will be responsible for the overall customer operations, marketing and sales management activities of Yahsat.

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No counterbalance needed*

Significantly reduces camera support payload

*some camera/lens configurations may require counterbalance

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Scripps strengthens MENA presence with HGTV launch

A scene from the launch of HGTV in the Middle East

Scripps Networks Interactive’s home and lifestyle channel HGTV launched on November 1 for the first time in the MENA region. The channel is aired through beIN and broadcast in more than 40 countries around the world.

Phillip Luff, Managing Director, UK & EMEA Scripps Networks Interactive, believes it will be hugely popular in the region, due to the nature of the programmes.

“There is a huge global appetite. Scripps Networks Interactive has had a presence in the Middle East for many years, with Travel Channel having been broadcast on OSN since 2007, and Food Network and Fine Living since 2010 and 2013, respectively.”

Commenting on the deal with beIN, he said: “We are launching a dedicated HGTV feed, sourcing world-class content from our library in the US and acquiring content specifically for the MENA region. We are thrilled to be partnering with beIN to launch HGTV, and are confident that our investment in this endeavour will be worthwhile.”

Regarding what is commonly perceived as a bidding war between beIN and OSN, Luff said: “Although understandably our business terms are commercially sensitive and subject to confidentiality provisions, there was no ‘bidding war’ between beIN and OSN. beIN approached Scripps Networks directly about the opportunity to develop a lifestyle entertainment channel on the platform and discussions on a deal for HGTV progressed from that point. We are happy to be in a position to supply Scripps channels to both beIN and OSN in MENA. Both are great partners to work with.”

In the November launch episodes, the channel will broadcast House Hunters Middle East, which features buyers relocating to the Middle East. They must pick one of three properties to make their home.

“The show has 27 episodes in total, and from Doha to Marrakesh, each episode is a wonderful journey that showcases the region in the best possible light,” noted Luff.

He further added that the MENA region cannot be branded as a single entity, due to its dynamism and diversity.

“There are some distinct differences between broadcasting in Europe as opposed to broadcasting in the Middle East. The most challenging aspect of working in this market would be ensuring that we are respectful of cultural sensitivities, whilst delivering great internationally sourced content. As the majority of Scripps Networks’ content is family friendly, this is not something that is too resource-intensive for us,” he said.

“The company plans to host several marketing activities across the region in March next year.”

Sharjah International Children’s Film Fest hosts tech workshops

Sharjah International Children’s Film Festival hosted a string of technology workshops last month during the festival that ran from October 23 to October 28.

The workshops introduced the audience to cutting-edge technologies including filmmaking with smart devices and 3D technology. Designed for the youth, the workshops provided insight into established and upcoming technologies for aspiring filmmakers.

The workshop on 3D Scenes from Game of Thrones by Sebastian Reichhold, a key member of the German VFX Giant Pixomondo, provided renderings and performance-enhancing technology from the series. From life-like effects to the design phases, simulation, animation, green-screen scenes and motion-captured creatures, the workshop featured an entire gamut of 3D effects that run through the series.

“3D has become an important element in filmmaking. Whether it’s a static object or a life-like moving body, it takes us months in advance to research, detail, surface and composite the final structure,” said Reichhold.

The visual effects (VFX) workshop on Game of Thrones introduced the audience to a seamless blend of real and fantasy worlds through the use of 3D technology. Tarun Edernadsh, Trainer of the workshop from Sharjah Media Corporation, said: “Smart devices are the future of filmmaking. Through this workshop, we’ve tried our best to share some practical techniques that will certainly improve the experience of shooting and editing a movie on a smart device.”
NewTek launched its new NewTek IP Series products in the Middle East at an event hosted in Dubai in partnership with NewTek’s regional distributor MediaCast. First unveiled at IBC2016, NewTek IP Series products combine SDI compatibility with IP flexibility, enabling them to integrate with the current broadcast and video production infrastructure while also priming today’s facility for the future. Commenting on the regional launch, Peyman Dadpanah, Business Director at MediaCast, said that the IP Series product presentations were held on the final day of the three-day event that hosted NewTek’s resellers and channel partners from across the Middle East.

“Broadcast technology is increasingly moving towards IP and open standards, which is the way forward. Through this event, we are giving our customers a first-hand feel of NewTek IP Series and how these products can transform broadcast operations,” he said.

NewTek IP Series is a software-driven, modular video production system with access to video sources and video mixing options. Designed to work cohesively in an ecosystem, the NewTek IP Series is the first large production system designed for IP video while also being fully backwards compatible with SDI, using separate scalable high-performance components for the mixing and control, input and output of sources, allowing virtually unlimited scalability.

Chris Waddington, Director of Sales at NewTek, offered presentations and demonstrations covering the end-to-end working of the IP Series. He introduced the IP Series products to the audience and also spoke extensively about NDI version 2.

Video, audio and control signals from these components are transferred digitally using NewTek’s Network Device Interface (NDI) technology, allowing multiple video systems to identify and communicate with any other system over a standard computer network. The result is a fully customisable IP workflow solution with the flexibility to handle the most demanding production needs.

MediaCast appointed Focusrite distributor in the UAE
UK-based professional audio products manufacturer Focusrite has appointed MediaCast as the regional distributor for its professional audio products in the UAE. Some of the key Focusrite products are displayed at MediaCast’s Dubai office and are available for demonstration.

Rohde and Schwarz successfully hosts first technology day in Dubai
Rohde and Schwarz hosted a technology day in Dubai last month to discuss how the broadcast industry can keep up with the fast-paced changes in technology. David Smith, Chief Technology Officer at Media, Rohde and Schwarz addressed a gathering of more than 80 industry professionals covering various facets of the broadcast technological revolution. The pace of change in broadcast technology has accelerated significantly over the past decade. From HD to HD and now UHD, the demand for higher resolutions is constantly rising.

The drive for more and better picture quality requires fundamental changes in studio technologies as legacy SDI systems are replaced by all-IP systems and file-based workflows. The first session was about the constant quest for higher resolutions and how the industry was preparing for that. While better picture quality is the key driver for higher resolutions, resolution is not the only factor that impacts picture quality. Other key elements of a good quality, immersive viewing experience comes from high dynamic range, higher frame rates and field of view to name a few. An increased colour depth and a wider colour gamut enhance the picture quality significantly and can’t be ignored.

He concluded the session with the future prospects of UHD and how these can be transmitted over different platforms from DTH to OTT.

The next session was about codecs and how the next generation codecs can be best applied. HEVC for broadcast and AV1 for IP were also discussed in detail along with Google’s VP9. In the following session, Smith spoke about IP and its advantages and gave an overview of a studio IP network. He compared the various competing IP- and file-based content creation and distribution paradigms that can enable content producers to maximise the availability of valuable content across all display platforms at minimum cost.

IP setup and interoperability were touched upon leading to a full-blown discussion on IP formats and protocols. Smith spoke at length about the key video and audio over IP standards.

The final session examined how viewers currently expect to consume content and the potential to attract new viewers through social media and by deploying innovative content presentation techniques such as virtual reality. Smith spoke about the advantages of DVB-T2 over DVB-T such as increased bit rate and better performance. He also gave an overview of the latest DVB-T2 deployments and then moved on to DVB-T2 Lite which he called a limited and simplified subset of DVB-T2.

The other topics included virtual reality and 3D and their future outcomes. The second technology day will be hosted in Qatar on November 17 from 8.30am to 6pm at City Centre Rotana in Doha.

David Smith will be conducting the Doha seminar as well and will cover the same topics. The seminar is of particular interest to satellite, terrestrial and IP broadcasters looking to gain a better understanding of the commercial opportunities and technical issues arising from the deployment of IP-based studio, file-based workflows, and software-based encoding and multiplexing systems.

In addition, attendees will gain an understanding of the application of modern codecs and transmission systems and how this will affect the design and deployment of studio, contribution, distribution and monitoring systems.
Ikegami and FOR-A host 4K roadshow in Dubai

Ikegami and FOR-A joined hands for a 4K product demonstration at an event held in Dubai last week. The two manufacturers showcased their latest solutions and capabilities for end-to-end 4K production.

Commenting on the roadshow, Abdul Ghani, GM of the Middle East division at Ikegami, said: “There is a lot of interest in our 4K products in the UAE, which was the reason we decided to organise this particular event. It was the perfect platform for us to showcase our capabilities. The show was very successful and we hope to host more such shows in the future in Kuwait, Qatar and other GCC countries.”

FOR-A also will be conducting a series of roadshows across the GCC and the MENA region showcasing its latest product releases.

4K acquisitions and assets are on the rise in the UAE, according to Mohammed Eid Abujarad, Sales Manager, FOR-A Middle East – Africa. He said this was the main reason for showcasing 4K solutions in Dubai.

“The UAE is leading in 4K productions in the region, which is why we decided to showcase our latest products catering to the growing demand. The idea was to bring our clients and dealers together and engage with them. We also want to encourage our clients to have a first-hand experience of our entire range of broadcast and production solutions,” he added.

The Dubai roadshow included a demonstration of the 4K setup with acquisition based on two 4K Ikegami UHK-430 and HDK-97A cameras and a compact 4K FOR-A HVS-110 video switcher. Also showcased was a complete HD/SD setup with FOR-A HVS-3800 S/E (4K/HD/SD) video switcher.

The final presentation was with Fujitsu for video processing based on a FOR-A FA-505 video processor, archiving based on LTR-100HS and LTS-70 with MARK MAM installed, a Fujitsu IP-920 encoder/decoder and a BLT slow-motion server.
In the weeks leading up to November 1, 2016, preparations were rife at Al Jazeera Media Network for its 20th anniversary celebrations. Vijaya Cherian goes on a tour of AJMN’s Doha HQ and discovers that the network is not just all about content but is also tirelessly working to push the envelope in terms of technology, human resources and best practices, putting it on the cutting edge of innovation. We talk to some of AJMN’s champions of change.

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

In the last two decades, Al Jazeera has been as much in the news as it has covered news. Although riddled with controversy and having faced much opposition at the hands of international players, the Qatar-based network has resolutely stood its ground, overcome many challenges and today, it has earned its reputation as one of the heavyweights in the TV business.

On November 1, the network is gearing up to make some technological announcements that will streamline its operations further and ensure that its workforce can maximise the potential of the repository of content available across the network. Several champions have emerged in Al Jazeera Media Network (AJMN) as each of its projects come to fruition. Some, like Mohamed Abuagla, Executive Director and CIO/CTO of AJMN stand out for espousing a futuristic vision. Others like Ali Elhusseini, Head of Network Operations Standards; Miljenko Logozar, Director of Technology Solutions; Firas Al Rafei, Director of Network Operations and Hussam Abdel Majed, Director of Projects, have been lauded for their teamwork and ability to see extremely challenging projects through to completion.

Al Jazeera first made headlines with its Arabic news channel. November 1 will see the relaunch of this channel from a brand new facility with workflows and technologies that will make the news and programme production cycle more efficient and user friendly across the network.

The new building, in the making for the last three years, will house all of AJA’s operations including a large 1500 sqm open newsroom that is also the main studio (Studio 5) and two smaller studios. The main studio, which will house 250 journalists, is based on a 3G broadcast infrastructure, including a network wide-broadcast IT project, providing unified file-based workflows for news, programme planning, production, transmission and archiving.

“This is not just about moving to Studio 5 or refreshing the technology,” clarifies Mohamed Abuagla, Executive Director and CIO/CTO of AJMN.

“Al Jazeera Arabic will have a completely new look and new programmes as well.”

Almost 30 new cameras have been installed across the facility, of which 25 will go on air on November 1.

One of the big reveals at the AJA facility will be Studio 5 and the first thing that catches your...
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eye as you walk in is the large, interconnected two-piece 9x3 cubes and 7x3 cubes Eyevision video wall that curves across the front of the entire newsroom. Each cube is 65 inches. This news studio includes three types of conventional sets and has 16 Sony HDC-2500 cameras with Sony HDCU-2500 CCUs connected with angle-mode fibre lines to the CAR room, which is 500m away from the studio.

“This studio and newsroom is covered with more than 30 motion analysis tracking sensors to use Vizrt immersive graphics and the usage of such technologies will be part of our daily operational routine,” explains Ali Elhusseini, Head of Network Operations Standards.

“Studio 5 has been designed as a template to be used across the whole of the AJWT facility, to enable a coherent design across all the networks. This will enable ease of operations and maintenance for personnel who work cross-site,” he adds.

A second circular glass studio, fitted with the latest technologies to control incoming day light, will be used to produce a daily three-hour morning show among other new flagship programmes. The design and technical fit-out in this studio is claimed to be cutting edge. It will also host the first interactive show, which will actually see the convergence between conventional TV, digital platforms and the web in two languages between Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English.

A third studio, built for programmes, is also fitted with the latest motion tracking technologies for programme production, visual effects and promo production.

The new facility is scheduled to go on air on November 1, 2016.

Feras Al Suliti, Director of Network Operations explains that “from ingest to archive, every operational workflow will change.”

“This is not just about moving to Studio 5 or refreshing the technology. Al Jazeera Arabic will have a completely new look and new programmes as well”

Mohamed Abuagla, Executive Director and CIO/CTO, Al Jazeera Media Network
“Operational staff will get to grips with new ways of working, utilising state-of-the-art technology and best practices. Newsroom journalists and remote journalists will have access to video and text content across the network. Journalists will be able to edit and share video content at their desktops by using easy-to-use video editing tools. With a clever backbone fully based on software controls where all of the production backend is centralised, the network operators can now control any studio from any control room in seconds, making business continuity and shows progression seamless,” he points out.

Besides the launch of the brand-new facility for AJA, several other technical upgrades will be announced at the anniversary, including the completion of large parts of the Al Jazeera Workplace Transformation Project, which has been several years in the making; the deployment of the media entity’s media asset management system and a digitisation project to archive all of the media entity’s assets, points out Elhusseini.

“With a clever backbone fully based on software controls where all of the production backend is centralised, the network operators can now control any studio from any control room in seconds, making business continuity and shows progression seamless.”

Feras Al Suliti, Director of Network Operations, Al Jazeera Media Network

“The team completed the project in record time. That part of the Avid base included iNews and Media Central in its place now, network wide, which means Al Jazeera English, Balkans, Mubasher, America and London are using the same solution,” he explains.

The technology upgrade is in various stages of progress with significant completion milestones set between the end of this year and the next.

For instance, the broadcast upgrade at Al Jazeera Arabic is mostly complete while the one on the English channel will be completed next year.

The broadcast part of AJA has been mostly done and the next in line is the OSS (operational support services) tier. The Central MCR and Teleport unit will be completed in Q1 or Q2 of 2017. “AIA is not moving to Central MCR just yet, as the MCR should be ready by mid next year with a brand new teleport facility,” explains Elhusseini.

Work on the Central Transmission at the Doha facility is also under way and scheduled for completion in Q1 or Q2 of next year. AJA, however, will operate from this area come November 1.

In the last four years since BroadcastPro’s last visit to the facility, everything has changed including buildings and workflows.

“We have started from scratch by installing new equipment, brand new technologies, new data centres, CAR rooms, laying out fresh fibre, building baseband connectivity and providing continuous training. By the end of this year, 70-75% of a DWT will be complete and mid next year to the end of 2017, we will be finalising the entire DWT,” explains Logozar.

In parallel, Al Jazeera has a team working on digitising its tapes.

“By November 1, we are going to be digitising 90% of our tapes and moving into a file-based workflow,” adds Al Suliti.

“We are working with Microsoft on an AI (artificial intelligence) solution, we have a number of college graduates who have joined us as part of our Media Experience programme. We are training them on the job and ensuring they move around and undertake various functions in the organisation.

“We want to take some IT fresh graduates and give them the media experience. This enables us to get the digitisation done while also enabling us to train the next generation of talent in the country. We are, in essence, growing our next generation talent if you will,” Al Suliti elaborates.

Al Jazeera is working with Microsoft to take files and use AI tools to auto summarise the tapes and add rich metadata. Facial recognition, voice recognition and speech translation for Arabic are part of the solution. Once ready, these assets will be
AJMN’s content will be launched on close to 40 new digital platforms on Nov 1. Al Jazeera will be available on most mobile devices, gaming consoles and TVs as well as connected cars and new smart homes.

“We will be out there on 99.2% of the world’s platforms,” Abuagla says. “AJWT for us was always workplace transformation but for me, T stands for technology refresh and that’s basically what we have done. Now, we have to get into transformation mode for next year. With all this in place, we can actually improve daily workflows and work collaboratively with the editorial teams so we can be faster and more efficient and find more integrated ways of telling stories. We already have budgeted other initiatives that will build on the back of this transformation. We have always talked about the cloud. We are actually moving a lot of our production assets to the cloud and we are going to be continuing to push for that, thereby, ensuring we have enough collaboration and quick access for tools and tech to shorten the production cycle as much as we can. So we can get from event to screen in the fastest possible time. We have a long road ahead of us. This is just the beginning as the baseline that we need to have for technology refresh as well as software and services is being developed. Once we have that, we can start working with people in trying to evolve the production cycle, processes, thinking and integration with all the social media aspects and the metadata enhancement that we need to do. We have got several initiatives that we are working on at the same time. The CAR rooms are also a big element of the upgrade. Al Jazeera aims to centralise all the CAR equipment within a couple of such rooms and we are building those now. Our CAR centres will look like today’s data centres,” says Logozar.

While the previous CAR facilities at the network are full of cables, Logozar shows a futuristic CAR that has an Azure private cloud solution and includes only fibre and power supply cables. “This is the future,” he points out, speaking about seeing a full IP solution in place at some point. “Right now, if you want to move anything within a room, you have to get an engineer to come in and rewire everything. In an IP world, we will be able to configure everything virtually. We dream of such a time and it’s not far,” he says.

The last part of our tour takes us to the new central NOC for teleport. “The complete monitoring of all our video signals around the world, all teleports, uplinks, downlinks, including our fibre lines and QC of all the signals, will happen here including also monitoring streams on the internet. It will be operational in November,” Logozar confirms. There are close to 2000 people at Al Jazeera working on various technological developments. More than a 100 contracts, including sub contracts and supporting contracts, have been awarded to ensure project completion. The good thing is that the whole media entity is involved and engaged. “We don’t have anyone here whose job is not to work on this project,” explains Elhusseini. “Every single person on tech and ops are involved, likewise, we are working very closely with the editorial team so they are a part of this at different levels.”
The benefit for us that helped ease the transition into this Nov 1 deadline, was the fact that when we implemented the Avid solution last year for AJA, we trained almost 500 people by default so staff don’t need to be trained again.”

Ahuga adds that, adding that staff are “now confidently moving into the next phase”.

Managing all of the projects all the way from civil, MEP, electrical and technology to coordinating between the different departments in the project management team headed by Hossam Abdel Majeed, Director of Projects for the network.

“My role is to ensure that all the stakeholders in technology, operations, marketing, creative and editorial are involved in the projects and their inputs are taken into account. The challenges have been many because we have to interface with the existing framework while also upgrading the existing solutions to interface with the new equipment. As the media market does not have one integrated contractor who does everything, we have had to coordinate everything on our end. “Three years is not a long period to execute such a large-scale project. Within three years, we have undertaken everything from scratch, right from the power supply to the UPS and feeds, redundancies, building, site interconnections with main hubs as well as the bureaus outside. Administering a project of this size, and dealing with different mindsets, stakeholders and people from different backgrounds has been challenging,” be adds.

As we go to press, the final touches are being put to the new facility and Studio 5, as well as several other areas that are meant to go live. Al Jazeera’s 20th anniversary celebrations will indeed reflect the futuristic vision of the company, and its tech heads are at the forefront of that change.

Al Jazeera aims to centralise all the CAR equipment within a couple of such rooms and we are building those now. Our CAR centres will look like today’s data centres”

Miljenko Logozar, Director of Technology Solutions, Al Jazeera Media Network

Many of Al Jazeera’s employees have been working on the new systems for almost a year making them ready for the transition to the new level of technology to achieve greater operational efficiencies.
Studio 5 is a closer look

Studio 5 is the biggest showcase in the 20th anniversary celebrations. The video system in Studio 5 comprises 14 Sony HDC-2500 cameras with Sony HDCU-2500 CCUs. 13 Autoscript Promters, 19 inch HD-SDI, are provided for talent, with a hand control panel, located in PCR desk. Out of the 14 Sony cameras in Studio 5, 11 cameras in pedestal are equipped with Vinten Robotics, while these have immersive graphics and there are two cameras on jib. The studio’s audio design comprises three major components – Calrec consoles and core routers, Riedel Artist frames and the Grass Valley hybrid router, all of which provide various audio routing functions under VSM control. The audio design utilises MADI (Multichannel Audio Digital Interface) to interconnect the three components, thereby maximising flexibility while minimising cable requirements. However, Calrec is the only component which connects to the other two, as Riedel and Grass Valley are not directly connected to each other in order to minimise any risk of intercom signals being transmitted. Furthermore, the vast majority of programme audio routing (under VSM control) is done in the hybrid router, and IFB routing in the Riedel frames, which will be controlled by Dataminor,” notes Elhusseini. The design for the intercom system for AJA Studio 5 and other studios is part of the centralised Riedel Artist Frame. The core of Studio 5 is based on four Grass Valley NV 8576 routers. These are independent routers in CAR 11, all connected via tie lines. Each router is capable of 576 inputs and 1152 outputs and the entire facility can accept embedded audio in and out. The routers are connected to the Calrec outputs to the Calrec audio console, for sources which normally contain audio, for example, OS lines and server playback while the switcher primary inputs are from router outputs to enable VSM boxing control for studios that will use this facility. Six Vizrt engines for immersive graphics are connected both to/from the router. These “are immersive graphics engines and run on their own Neveon routers. The immersive graphics solution is part of GMMS (Global Media Management System). All the sources are distributed across the four routers, except studio camera sources, and from there they connect to the vision mixer inputs. The vision mixer is a Sony MVS-8000X, with 32 cross point button panels and four full ME banks with an external Aux panel. Each of the three Avid Airspeed 5000 servers in the studio has four playback channels, distributed equally across the routers. “Since the sources are distributed, any router failure will not affect the complete studio-operation. As we consider camera source as main/critical, all the cameras will be available in all routers,” says Elhusseini. The cameras are controlled by Sony HDCU-2500. The SMPTE signal from camera is converted to two single mode fibres through Sony HDOCE-100. Single mode fibres then transport the signals from CAR 5 to CAR 11, where they are converted back to SMPTE through Telecast SHD3 units. All CCUs have three HD-SDI return feeds and an HD-SDI prompt feed. All the three return feeds come from the router while the prompter inputs are through auto changeover, which switches between two routers outputs, in case of any router failure,” he adds. Studio 5 has two fibre outputs from XVP synchroniser to connect to CAR-11 in two different routes. The XVP-3901-FS is a highly integrated, 30 HD/SD frame synchroniser/aspect ratio converter and optional video/audio signal processor, which is designed to synchronise and process HD and SD signals for 3G/HD/SD hybrid plants. The main transmission path consists of an embedded router output fed into a Grass Valley HDC1910 and to DSK-3901 downstream keyer and then to Grass Valley XVP 3911 for fibre transmission to central transmission. Should the vision mixer fail, the VSM emergency cut bus panel will be activated. This enables normal transmission workflow to proceed by cutting sources directly from the four routers. The emergency cut bus panel is always selected to main programme, which will be embedded with audio in the XVP card in the programme chain. Should there be any delay in audio, this will be corrected in the XVP card. The Grass Valley NV 5128, a multi-format router, takes time code in from VTR and routes to the ingest server port during the automated ingest process. The R5422, high speed data transmission, from all the VFRs is connected to the NV 5128, so that the VDMS software client can have simultaneous control. The router fibre outputs are converted to SDI for monitoring positions in the ingest desks for waveform and audio monitors. The time code from the TC/data router carries the signal through fibre using Evertz LTC to Optical converter to reach Harmonic servers. Similarly, LTC output from Harmonic playout servers is connected back to TCData router through fibre converters. A dedicated Kaleido multiviewer frame takes care of ingest monitoring. The Grass Valley K2 Summit servers are also deployed in Studio 5 for emergency playout as well as for Dyno playout. The VSMS servers are connected to controlled devices including the router, switcher and mixer via a network consisting of distributed network switches to provide redundancy. The VSM controls the Grass Valley hybrid router directly using their native router control protocol, and the Calrec audio router uses Probel SWP8 protocol for cross point control. The studio hosts two video wall screens, powered by two video wall engines. Two 90” touchscreens carry Vizrt overlays, and are powered by two Vizrt Engines. The touchscreens are not compatible with SDI but only accept DVI and USB inputs. However, the video wall is provisioned to take HD-SDI inputs. The PCI monitor stack consists of three 65 inch LEDS, fed from the Kalado-X. – Vibhuti Arora
KUWAIT TV
ON THE MOVE

Lithuanian systems integrator TVC worked with Cogent Technologies to build two DSNG trucks for Kuwait TV to strengthen the broadcaster’s newsgathering facilities. BroadcastPro ME takes a closer look at the vehicles.

KTV wanted to modernise its fleet of DSNG vehicles and infrastructure so that it could migrate its live broadcast operations to HD. Lithuanian systems integrator TVC won the bid for the project and was contracted to deliver a turnkey project that involved building two DSNG trucks for the broadcaster.

The contract covered the design, manufacture and integration of DSNG terminals onto two vehicles, plus a complete range of engineering, training and operator support services. The vehicles that were integrated in the TVC headquarters in Lithuania boast supply microwave link systems, vehicle mounted satellite systems and fly-away satellite systems.

The two products within the “SatLinks” range used for these vehicles included a 1.2 metre antenna fitted on a GMC Sprinter van and a 1.5 metre antenna fitted on a Mercedes Sprinter 4x4 truck. Both vehicles were configured with fully integrated uplink chains and automatic satellite acquisition was provided via CogentTRAC control systems. Cogent Technologies, a UK-based suppliers of microwave, satellite and cellular transmission solutions, worked with TVC exclusively to provide all RF uplink equipment and microwave relay equipment for the two vehicles. It supplied an ‘ExpresSat’ flyaway terminal and a large number of microwave relay equipment for the two vehicles. It supplied in the UK.

Both the satellite vehicles have been cabled for future expansion. The relays can feed HD signals into the vehicles and also from the vehicles back to the studio. “All the links are fully redundant CogentLink 2HD and utilise the latest transmission technology, DVT T2 COFDM modulation, allowing resilience to interference,” he adds. Mindaugas Kryžanauskas, Sales and Project Manager at TVC says that building the vehicles to operate in the GCC environment was of utmost importance.

“The main challenge was to deliver the trucks in a short period of time. We have previously worked on similar projects in Lebanon, Qatar, Algeria and Morocco in the MENA region. So our previous experience helped us in implementing this project efficiently. We also worked very closely with our local partner in Kuwait, Al Rashed to deliver the project within the stipulated time.”

“The coach modifications by TVC also include the installation of on-board diesel generator Fischer Panda 11kVA and UPS 10kVA, enabling the truck to work anywhere in the Arabian Gulf,” says Kryžanauskas.

The sprinter design includes a customised roof to accommodate generator radiator, three air-conditioning units and the antenna. The bigger truck is fitted with an on-board 15kVA Fischer Panda generator, comprising a compact and super silent three-cylinder diesel engine, which powers the vehicle for all its broadcast operations. In addition, there was a requirement to have a fully redundant configuration for both trucks. The satellite feed from the van is via a 1.5 meter Cogent sat dish, with Ericsson encoding and two rack mounted 400W high-power amplifiers with 1:1 redundancy. The vehicle is equipped with an auto-deploy satellite antenna customised to operate with specific Middle East-targeted satellites Arabsat, Eutelsat, Inmarsat and others.

For RF spectrum analysis, a Rohde & Schwarz FSL18 9KHz-20 GHz has been deployed. Other key equipment in the trucks include two Rx/S200 IRDs and two Ericsson AVP9000 decoders.

Features list

Main features:

- 5.7 ton wheelbase Mercedes
- 3 full height racks
- Super-silenced 15kVA Fischer Panda Generator
- Custom power distribution system with 10kVA UPS
- Custom roof-mounted three 13,500BTU air-conditioning systems
- Cogent 1.5 m Ku-band automatic antenna system
- Fully redundant HPA/SSPA transmission chain
- 2x Xicom HPA 600W
- 4 jack hydraulic levelling system
- Preparation for GCC (Arab Gulf) region
- 4WD (4x4 drive running gear)

The vehicles have enabled Kuwait TV to add more live broadcasts into the daily news programming. The second DSNG unit is built on 4x4 Mercedes Sprinter 515 van. A long wheelbase van offers enough space for three complete workplaces. There is more room in the rear cargo section for additional mobile equipment. The truck body is specially suited to the GCC climatic conditions with extra body insulation and it also carries fully redundant equipment built on a four-wheel drive chassis. The van is modified by adding levelling jacks, roof mount tropicalised air-conditioning system up to 52°C (1,3000 Btu) plus external lighting system.

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Dubai Channels Network has recently revamped its MCR with state-of-the-art equipment that offers expanded capabilities and greater control. Vibhuti Arora goes on site for more details.

Dubai Channels Network recently unveiled its Master Control Room refurbished with state-of-the-art equipment and enhanced capabilities. Located at the DMI headquarters in Oud Metha, Dubai, the new facility has been effectively built from scratch, replacing most of the old equipment with the latest upgraded tools. It features new antennas and IRDs as well as a new L-band/RF matrix from ETL, in addition to new routers, multiviewers and monitors.

The switch from the old to the new was seamless with zero downtime, as the new machines were deployed while the old systems were still operational. Saleh Lootah, Head of TV & Radio Engineering at Dubai Media Inc., says the MCR revamp is the first step towards speeding up DMI’s response time to issues. “We are now better equipped and can be more proactive to any kind of issues affecting the broadcast of our channels. Our MCR has enhanced capability and will have more responsibility as we continue to upgrade our systems.”

The entire DMI bouquet, comprising 13 channels, is monitored in the MCR, explains Lootah. This is the first point of contact where signals via microwave, fibre and satellite sources come into DMI, are checked for quality and routed to the studios or the transmission room. The output from the transmission room is routed back to the MCR for further checks and then sent to Samacom for broadcast.

“A big advantage from the previous system is that the number of incoming feeds from external sources through a fibre connection. Then there are a number of satellite as well as studio feeds coming into the MCR to be sent to transmission, deep archive or on air,” he adds.

The monitor wall has been built from scratch in the new facility. The previous facility had six Sharp monitors, now replaced by 20 new Samsung monitors. Having centralised the operations also enables the broadcaster to monitor its FM channels from the same room. The old Evertz multiviewers have been replaced by the latest ones from the same vendor.

“For me personally, any major event, be it New Year’s Eve, the horse races or any big events in Dubai, I operate from this room to monitor them. It gives us better visibility and improved communication. We can keep close tabs on emergencies should they arise, and are better equipped to handle them,” says Lootah.

Afzal Lakdawala, Head of Technology Planning and Projects at DMI, says that with the new MCR, monitoring and control have been made easy via a new user interface and control panels on the operator’s desk that are capable of monitoring an increased number of ingest feeds. This also enables the monitoring of several incoming and outgoing feeds, off-air as well as to the teleport, across 20 ultra-high definition screens. The routing of RF signals from any antenna to any IRD is simpler now.

The motorised antenna, installed as part of the project, cover a wide range of satellites thereby ensuring the operators easily tune into the desired frequencies as and when required.

“A big advantage from the previous system is that the number of incoming feeds from external sources...
PROCASESTUDY

for monitoring and routing requirements has significantly increased. This offers the MCR operator more flexibility in choosing from different sources right from his desk. We have also factored in the future expansion and a lot of emphasis has been laid on installing the technology, which is future proof,” Lakdawala explains.

Omar Alzoubi, Senior Manager – Engineering Systems at DMI, adds that the increased capability of the new MCR means it covers more sources to be viewed at one time. The router is hybrid, which means it can be run on the existing SDI infrastructure in the facility as well as on IP technology in the future. “DMI is on the road to unifying and centralising its file-based systems and the related workflow by deploying operational flexibility, scalability and the most sophisticated trends,” Alzoubi says.

“The L-band /RF matrix router, baseband multiviewer and router, A/V QC, signal monitoring and measurement equipment deployed in this project future-proofs the operations of the MCR.

The newly installed Ericsson and Ateme IRDs adhere to the latest industry standard codec HEVC (H.265) thereby making the systems future-ready for production, contribution and distribution.

“We are now better equipped and can be more proactive to any kind of issues affecting the broadcast of our channels. Our MCR has enhanced capability and will have more responsibility as we continue to upgrade our systems.”

Saleh Lootah, Head of TV & Radio Engineering, Dubai Media Inc.

RED introduces the highly-anticipated WEAPON 8K S35 and new RED EPIC-W 8K S35 cameras to content creators everywhere. Each camera combines the compact and intuitive design of the DSMC2 form factor with RED’s latest sensor technology, HELIUM 8K S35. The HELIUM sensor maintains RED DRAGON’s reputation of delivering superior image quality and massive dynamic range, all while incorporating groundbreaking 8K resolution in an S35 frame.

*RED in MENA with Advanced Media support*
Alzoubi further adds that the HEVC codec reduces bandwidth requirement by 40-50% compared to the previously used H.264 or MPEG-4 codec, thereby reducing cost. In comparison, HEVC offers about double the data compression ratio at the same level of video quality, or substantially improved video quality at the same bit rate and paves the way to support UHDTV and higher resolutions for enhanced user experience.

“We selected equipment, we have also considered introducing hybrid infrastructure which was compatible with both baseband and IP,” says Alzoubi.

The MCR upgrade is the answer to the broadcaster’s growing demand for more capacity and better connectivity. The upgraded facility can handle up to 36 concurrent satellite feeds and 25 feeds via fibre. “The MCR was last upgraded in 2005, which fulfilled our requirement at that time. However, now with our HD channels and expanded network, we need a more robust facility, hence the recent upgrade this year. The previous equipment had several limitations, which posed a challenge. Some of our new equipment is from the same vendors, but we have the latest models now, which are more suited to our needs in the present scenario," Yusuf Al Dahel, MCR Manager at DMI, explains.

The analogue fibre interface has been replaced with a digital one, and the entire network is now capable of handling HD. “We worked with Etisalat to upgrade the fibre infrastructure and the interface at the DMI headquarters, which has given us better coverage and increased capacity. We can launch more channels and handle many more feeds from various sources now.”

The new system is tapeless and everything that comes into the MCR is recorded. The quality check for incoming content is conducted on the side. QC is also conducted on off-air content. The content is then sent for editing or archiving. The MCR can record 20 channels at the same time, which means 20 inputs and feeds can be recorded simultaneously. Monitoring of all incoming and outgoing signals takes place here.

Commenting on the smooth transition from the old system to the new one, MCR Project Manager Mohammad Rajha says: “We achieved the quality and appropriate development of MCR equipment as per DMI’s requirements. The migration to the new system in the same premises involved seamless coordination between various departments such as engineering, operations and the systems integrator for the project, Tek Signals. The LNB router matrix is now 32 by 32 – the previous one was 16 by 16. The motorized dish downloads feeds from new satellites directly. They only had fixed dishes earlier, which are still used – each dedicated to a satellite – but the motorized one is remote controlled to access a particular satellite.

“We had to use Samacom to download feeds for us previously, which was an added cost,” says Yamen Ali Laila, MCR Engineer. The ASI router is very useful in receiving multiservice signals, according to Laila. In the previous system, all IRDs received only dedicated feeds from a particular source. The ASI routers lend more flexibility and the IRDs can handle multiservice feeds from multiple sources now. The latest NS3 demodulator receives DVB and DVB-S2, which was not there previously. The upgraded MCR has been future-proofed and capable of adding more channels quickly.

“We worked with Etisalat to upgrade the fibre infrastructure and the interface at the DMI headquarters, which has given us better coverage and increased capacity. We can launch more channels and handle many more feeds from various sources now”

Yusuf Al Dahel, MCR Manager, DMI
Jonathan Ali Khan, well-known natural history filmmaker, is presently filming a brand new series on the UAE’s wildlife. He speaks exclusively to Vibhuti Arora on using new technology to capture rare moments in the wild.

Jonathan Ali Khan’s new three-part film series promises a brand new perspective on the UAE’s wildlife as well as footage of animals rarely seen on the desert landscape. In addition to capturing footage with his 4K camera kit, Khan uses drones to bring a new dimension to this series. Khan says a well-rounded story was waiting to be told, and the film covers aspects right from awareness to conservation and the need to research wildlife.

“In the last five years or so, there has been a lot of development in terms of conservation work from the government and authorities. We have explored the Arabian desert quite extensively and it was about time we looked into our own backyard and created something locally in the UAE,” notes Khan.

The authorities are proactively supporting the conservation efforts in the UAE, but there is not enough awareness about these efforts. It was the idea of highlighting the conservation efforts of the UAE government and the authorities that formed the basis of Khan’s latest project titled The Last Wilderness of the UAE. It covers some of the indigenous desert species found in the UAE.

The next step was to find funding for this rather long-drawn project, which is typical of natural history films. “We didn’t want to approach the government authorities for funding because many of them were working with tight budgets. Emirates Airlines came on board and Patrick Brannelly was quick to accept the films for Emirates’ inflight entertainment platform, ICE. Discovery MENA is also supporting the films and will have the first rights to them, following which the content will go on ICE. We are currently in discussion with international channels but too early to mention any names,” says Khan.

More than 60 hours of filming have already been completed. The three films trace the animals and birds living in the desert, sea and mountains of the UAE. The filmmaker is also creating fillers for social media to keep the momentum for the films going.

“Filming began last year and we have now been working on the project for around 13 months. We need to do another seven months in the field to complete the film,” he adds.

Most of the wildlife are in remote areas in the desert, and a lot of these animals have adapted for survival to become nocturnal. Many of them come out at twilight hours and are very elusive creatures.

“We work with all the footage we have to make the story as close to the real story as possible, but also have to leave out a lot of it. Finding wildlife is the main challenge here, and it’s hard in such harsh weather conditions. When dealing with wildlife in Africa, there is so much happening, whereas in the desert we have to find them by long and hard searches,” he notes.

Every film begins with a treatment that Khan calls his wish list and includes subjects he would like to film. Then he goes and finds them, but what’s caught on camera may turn out to be completely different, and the film is given a final shape only in post.
Experience goes a long way and technology also comes in handy when filming animals in the wild. With films such as "Arabian's Cycle of Life" to his credit, Khan says a wildlife filmmaker must have the ability to look for a good story spontaneously, as things never go according to script.

"The moment you come across something unexpected, it may take the story in a different direction. You have to be quick to alter the script accordingly," he adds.

Khan’s three-part UAE wildlife series is being shot in 4K using four Panasonic Lumix GH4 cameras, with a whole range of lenses with variable focal lengths including macro and telephoto lenses. This is also the first project where Khan has used drones to shoot some aerial footage. "DJI provided us with Phantom 4, which we have used extensively to film the Oryx, gazelles and several bird species in the desert. We also used DJI Inspire 1 Pro with gimbal on some locations. These drones are a great fit for wildlife filming and photography. They are an inexpensive alternative to using helicopters, which involve a lot more logistics and cost several times more."

Drones are helpful in studying the topography of the land and are a great tool to film areas out of bounds for humans. Filming with drones is an effective, non-invasive way to capture some of the most elusive creatures.

"When working on a budget, nothing rivals DJI," comments Khan. He likens the effects of filming with drones to Steadicam, but says fluidity and smoothness comes with drones.

"We were told at the outset: don’t go chasing the oryx, or you will scare them. But their tolerance was much greater than what we thought."

From top: Jonathan Ali Khan and his production crew set out to film in a wadi; John Pereira, Ecologist at Environment & Protected Areas Authority - Sharjah operating a drone in Kalba.
The UAE’s first national park, Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve stretches across 225 sq km. Khan’s film covers the efforts of the conservation team in rehabilitating the flora and fauna of the reserve with footage of the desert and the ecosystem there. Drones are extensively used for detailed mapping of the area. The conservation team has been using the DJI S100 to identify different plant species, and Khan’s film highlights how that’s being done.

Yet another protected area Khan’s film covers is the Kalba coast on the Indian Ocean. It’s under the Environmental Protection Authority in Sharjah and has been quite aggressive in its conservation efforts since 2012, when the coast was closed to the public and declared a protected area. For the first time in about four decades, sea turtles returned to the mangroves in the area and have been thriving alongside a robust population of indigenous crabs and birds such as the Arabian collared kingfisher. The authority uses DJI drones to count the turtle population, which Khan’s film showcases in great detail.

On most shooting days, Khan sets out with his team early around 4am, when it’s still dark in the desert. He goes out with minimal lighting and uses Starlight thermal cameras, but the rental fees for these are very high. We go out with minimal lighting and use video light to illuminate the area in focus and make it look natural. Khan says there is a lot of local support in the UAE, but riddled with challenges. “All of our acquisition for this project is in 4K, including our footage captured using drones. The post-production, however, will be done in HD, as we will be delivering the film in HD. We have used Adobe Premiere Pro for editing.”

“Natural history is traditionally a genre of programming produced by national broadcasters. These projects should be supported more. However, regional broadcasters have not yet understood the importance of natural history content. They find it expensive and very niche or technically demanding, requiring expertise which they lack. The focus for such projects lies on the state broadcasters, who should support independent filmmakers working in the field.”

Producing natural history content has been highly satisfying but riddled with challenges. “It’s an emotional journey and a learning experience. I hope when viewers see our films they will realise the labour of love that goes into creating each frame,” he says.

Kit list

Cameras

- Lumix GH4 x 3
- GoPro Hero 4 x 3

Underwater housings

- Isotta for GH4
- Gates for Sony Z100

Sigma lenses

- Macro
- APO Macro 180mm F2.8 EX DG OSM HSM macro
- 7-17mm F2.8-4
- 17.70mm F2.8-4
- DV macro (OS1)

Super zooms

- 150-600mm F5.6-6.3 sports
- 50-500mm F4.5-6.3 APO DO HSM
- 120-300mm F2.8 DO HSM | S
- 2.0X teleconverter EX APO DG
- 1.4X teleconverter EX APO DG

Wide zooms

- 8-16mm F4.5-5.6 DC HSM
- 24-35mm F2 DG HSM | A

Panasonic lenses

- 12mm F2.8-4 24-35mm F2.8-4
- 24-70mm F2.8
- Lumix G Vario 7-14mm F4 ASPH
- Lumix G Vario 12-32mm F3.5-5.6 MEGA optical IS
- Lumix G Vario 100-300mm F4.0-5.6 MEGA optical IS

DJI drones

- Phantom 4 Pro
- Inspire 1 with
- ZenMuse X5 gimbal
- Gopro Pro x 2

Audio recording

- Zoom H4 handy recorder
- Rode VideoMic GO en-camera shotgun x 3
- Sony wireless Lavialier mikes x 2
- Sennheiser MKH 50 P48 Mike + Rycote blimp & boom

“Filming with drones adds a new dimension to the footage and at times is helpful in capturing rare shots that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise.”

Drones give Khan a very different perspective to filming from the ground, he says: “Filming with drones adds a new perspective to filming and it’s hard in such harsh weather conditions. When dealing with wildlife in Africa, there is so much happening, whereas in the desert we have to find them by long and hard searches.”

“When filming from the ground, the opened world that you see is quite aggressive in its conservation efforts.

Finding wildlife in the Kalba coast on the Indian Ocean is the main challenge here, whereas in the desert we have to find them by long and hard searches.”

Jonathan Ali Khan’s three-part UAE wildlife series is being shot using four Phantom 4 Pro drones. The GH4 cameras, 4K, with a whole range of lenses with variable focal lengths including macro and telephoto lenses.
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How did you come to be at Turner?
I have been in the media industry for quite some time now. I started off as a TV presenter, did talk shows and presented series and pageants for leading channels at the time. I started getting involved in the behind-the-scenes working of shows and gradually stepped into production and started producing shows and TV commercials. Then I moved into animation and joined Blink Studios in Dubai. We were, at that time, catering to the big companies and trying to work with international companies such as Turner, Viacom and Disney. I also had the opportunity to work on a joint production between twofour54 and the BBC, which was a milestone for the regional animation industry from a production perspective.

In 2010, when Turner first set up base in the Middle East, I was the first employee in its Dubai office. I gradually built the team here and expanded operations.

How has Turner developed in the years you have been here, and where do you see it heading in the future?
Turner was being played out of London on Orbit and Showtime until 2010, when they first set up a base in Dubai. Cartoon Network English, Boomerang and TCM were some of the pay channels that Turner provided in their original format in the Middle East. These were not localised.

We launched Cartoon Network Arabic with Ben10 on October 10, 2010. I’m happy to say that since then Cartoon Network Arabic has become a household name. The idea was to localise the channel by offering dubbed programmes and also create local content. Our studios in Abu Dhabi are dedicated to production of local content.

Over the years, we have made sure that all of our English brands are subtitled or dubbed. In the region, we have been quite focused on Cartoon Network Arabic and have built the brand on many levels since its launch six years ago. We have a dedicated team to handle the licensing and merchandising for these brands, which I feel is very important.

The IMG theme park will further enhance the value of our brands, adding yet another experiential dimension to our offerings.

The free-to-air model that we are operating in the region is also thriving, and advertising has become a big part of our business. With the launch of general entertainment offering on beIN in 2015, we moved our encrypted feeds on beIN. These include CNN HD, HLN, Cartoon Network English and Hindi, Boomerang and TCM.

What is the secret to penetrating different markets and which of your markets offer strong growth?
The performance in international markets depend on when you enter those territories. Turner has a very strong presence in Latin America, which almost mirrors the network’s US presence. Its offerings in those markets include sports and general entertainment, and of course kids and news.

In other markets, Turner is strongly associated with news and kids’ content, thanks to strong brands such as CNN and Cartoon Network. We were kind of late in the Middle East. We focused on the niche market, which was free-to-air for kids. The Middle East had primarily turned
PROINTERVIEW

into an FTA market, even now, free-to-air is very strong in the region. It doesn’t mean we have to put aside our encrypted channels. We have seen the dynamics of the market change with telcos becoming very involved in pay TV and asking for premium channels. The key to winning over audiences is no secret – it’s your ability to deliver relevant and engaging content. Our dubbed content is not limited to dubbing the language but it also takes into account the cultural nuances of people. It’s always adapted to regional requirements. We have a separate department handling adaptation where we have writers who understand English and Arabic very well. They rewrite the stories of our shows to make them relevant to the Arab market in order to make the content more relatable to the local audience.

It’s an expensive layer, but we see it as an investment to make our channels more relatable. Our content speaks to the kids in the context that they can easily relate to. We have a global partnership with Arabia, who manages all of our commercial broadcasts from QC to playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and playout.

Other key findings from the research:
• 25% of respondents in the UAE and 25% in KSA voted that their character should be kind.
• 75% of people surveyed that humour is a trait that they would like their characters to embody, a quality they also seek in their friends.
• 43% of respondents preferred that their characters speak classical Arabic.

In March 2016, Turner had released a comprehensive research on key insights about the entertainment behaviours, spend, attitudes and purchasing power of kids in the Middle East in a study titled Kids Compass.

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www.broadcastprime.com | November 2016

Turner announces findings of recent research on kids’ entertainment in Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Turner has announced findings about kids’ value systems and preferred character traits from a recent study conducted in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The study was released in conjunction with the launch of Cartoon Network Arabic’s Imagination Studios campaign, a new online creative competition for animation, script-writing and drawing, aimed at children across the MENA region. The research revealed that kids in the two countries preferred writing to drawing; they placed grave importance on the personality of their imaginary hero and what they symbolise as opposed to what they look like. Kindness, inventiveness and adventurousness emerged as key traits that they’d like to see in entertainment characters. It was also discovered that parents and teachers in the survey markets believe that cartoons and animation series have a positive influence on children’s development today, and help build confidence for the future when children step into the real world.

Other key findings from the research:
• 23% of children in the UAE and 25% in KSA voted that their character should be kind.
• 75% of respondents in the UAE agreed that their imaginary heroes should be inventive, while 22% in KSA stated this was important.
• 75% of people surveyed acknowledged that humour is a trait that they would like their characters to embody, a quality they also seek in their friends.
• 43% of respondents preferred that their characters speak classical Arabic.

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Brand and is a leading news channel in the region. The media business in general is changing quite drastically. Having said that, the linear channels still remain most highly consumed, but you see trends in OTT and on demand changing quickly.

As we grow our business in any market, Middle East included, we do think how the consumers are evolving, what type of devices are they watching the content on, and so on. Although our business model is more B2B than B2C, we do think of our consumers when working on deals with partners. We are one of the most invested international networks in the region.

Turner’s playout provider is Arqiva, and channel creation is managed by the London office. All of the channels are then fibred from London playout to Madrid Overon and uplinked to Es’hailSat. The network plans to uplink the channels to Eutelsat as well. The channels are redistributed via du and Etisalat’s IPTV distribution in the UAE.

Our playout will continue from London. There are many other reasons why we haven’t moved playout to Dubai.

Where is Turner headed from here?
News and kids will always be the main pillars of our content. Turner worldwide is getting into general entertainment more aggressively and investing in drama series and comedy. Turner will be announcing a new slate at the end of the year, and the content will be rolled out across the Middle East as well. There is a rather large South Asian community here in the region, which is the reason we are considering introducing other regional languages as well, in addition to Hindi for Cartoon Network.

‘Turner is the biggest contributor into an FTA market, even now, free-to-air is very strong in the region. It doesn’t mean we have to put aside our encrypted channels. We have seen the dynamics of the market change with telcos becoming very involved in pay TV and asking for premium channels.

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We have a global partnership with Arabia, who manages all of our commercial broadcasts from QC to playout. As for digital, we rely on Adtech for material broadcast and various reporting tools to monitor and measure campaign success.

What is your business model for the region? How do you choose the platforms for your channels?
We have one free-to-air channel, Cartoon Network Arabic, and have outsourced the ad sales for it to ATL, which is a part of the Zee Group. Cartoon Network Arabic is the only kids’ channel in the ATL bouquet, and we don’t need to build an ad sales team to handle just one channel. We did build an in-house licensing and merchandising team.

CNN remains our strongest brand and is a leading news channel in the region. The media business in general is changing quite drastically. Having said that, the linear channels still remain most highly consumed, but you see trends in OTT and on demand changing quickly.

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Tarok Mounir, VP and GM, Turner, MENAT

GCC. Having said that, other markets are important too. Levant and North Africa are challenging markets because of the political instability, but we have teams travelling to those regions to explore commercial opportunities. Through Turner’s studios, we are able to create bespoke and unique ads for our partners which not only reflect the local culture but also create brand association between our top-rating characters and the advertisers’ brands.

Furthermore, Turner’s 360-degree ad sales approach allows us to create tailor-made campaigns across multiple touchpoints ranging from web, mobile, TV, sponsorships, branded content and even reaching point of sale.

We treat each partner campaign as its own brief and ensure that in an ad-saturated market, we deliver one-of-a-kind experiences for our audiences, even during ad breaks.

With more pay TV operators entering the fray, are the dynamics of the Middle East TV industry set to change? The MENA region is still dominated by free-to-air. The pay TV platforms have been very aggressive in investment and marketing plans in the region. Piracy remains a big challenge for pay TV operators. The fundamental idea is to offer quality and affordability, and beTV has achieved that to a large extent by giving a good mix of content at a good price point.

Sports is a massive pillar for pay TV, while general entertainment keeps the subscriber numbers in. There was an over-saturation in the free-to-air space in the region and very few companies were profitable in that space.

The key is to have a healthy balance between pay TV and free-to-air. By bypassing the pay TV window makes the market lopsided; as a free-to-air supplier, you can’t invest ahead of pay TV. The windowing has to be organic.

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PRO50 has all you need to know about the top players in the region’s broadcast and satellite market. A compilation of profiles of 50 broadcast and satellite companies in the GCC, the hardback coffee table book is a valuable resource for not only business entities but also customers looking for a ready reckoner of key industry players.
A dynamic user experience can increase conversion, engage the user, reduce churn and ultimately increase revenue, says Adam Nightingale.

Having a dynamic UX can increase conversion, engage the user, reduce churn and ultimately increase revenue. It will have a massive impact on how users experience and interact with your service, and will be the advantage your service needs in order to stand out in the increasingly fragmented and competitive OTT market. In a few years, dynamic UX will become the norm and consumer demand for that level of personalisation will increase dramatically.

In its simplest form, dynamic UX is about presenting the user with the best targeted content, like a recommended search.

At the other end of the scale, it is the possibility of presenting a completely different UX and UI depending on time of day, location, customer type and current events. This is analogous with what we see on the Amazon home page.

This really sounds fairly obvious of course. If there is the possibility to be dynamic and have a personalised service, then of course that will always be preferable. Ahead of IBC, we conducted some research into different user behaviours. The results were interesting, though probably not that surprising.

We defined three different user groups, all looking for a very different experience from the UX. For example, the digital newcomer, who is around 50 years old, will want the OTT UX to be very simple and similar to the linear TV experience. The young child will have a limit on time using a tablet, but will want to have a huge selection of videos to choose from. The young adult wants to be able to access content with limited concentration and is offers multitasking while watching.

These are just three very general examples, but it shows how even when we are talking about the user interface, one size does not fit all.

Changing that interface according to the profile of your users can enable you to create a much more compelling service for a wide section of the population. If you change it dynamically, you can also try different combinations and see which prove most popular with each audience by measuring the interaction.

There is an extra opportunity for dynamic UX, however, which aren’t necessarily about personalisation for the user, but about changing and adapting on what is happening on a bigger scale. For example, you may want to change the UX depending on recent news and events, such as changing the UX on the film sections of a VOD app depending on the Oscars, or in the same way, in the TV section, pushing your expensive content to the top with a new landing page during the Emmys. This means not only creating a new carousel with Oscar movies or Emmy winners, but also adding new micro-sites with new editorial content or changing the layout of your app in order to engage the user.

A dynamic UX can also be used to support complex linear planning. This allows you to make UX updates based on season finales or sporting events, or to create specific pushes of licensed content nearing its end date without the need to plan ahead, and also be able to react fast, to change UX/UI if games have been delayed or postponed.

Hopefully your analytics department is constantly analysing viewer habits, looking at what assets are trending, which are falling in ratings and what ads (if applicable) are your highest grossing (if not… we should have another type of discussion right now). The ability to repackaging that trending content, to put it front and centre in order to both drive traffic and to enhance user experience, is something that you wouldn’t have thought of before.

A dynamic UX also makes it easy for providers streaming content across the globe to regionalise the experience for each country.

In the early days of OTT applications, a change in UX had to be deployed in a new app release, with all the complexity, time and cost of that new release. Applications tended to look the same for a long time, and fixed to user experience – for example a sign-up form with sub-par
performance, sometimes even ordinary typos - needed weeks of development and testing before being rolled out.

A quick jump to today. Now, with modern application management software, updates can be pushed out to applications with almost no effort. Experienced and talented OTT application teams also pack a lot of different UI and logic into each application with new releases, so the user can experience dynamic changes during application usage.

True dynamic UX, which is still not common, offers the possibility for an OTT service provider to continuously change UX and UI on the fly, in a way that was not predicted at the time of last release. Applications can be updated in real-time across platforms and controlled per application, platform, country or time of day, without redeploying your applications. Imagine a data-driven UX which takes the results of A-B (or even A-B-C and so on) to automatically revise the UX based on changes which yield even minor upticks in consumption, transaction, ad views and so on.

As mentioned above, the OTT market has for a long time favored algorithmic personalisation over editorial content. Editorial content has been pushed back, often due to the cost of editorial staff, but also due to the cumbersome effort needed to update apps. Why have editorial staff if the update cycles are weeks long? Another hurdle has been the need for double, triple or quadruple work of the editorial staff in order to update different CMS for web, phone apps or smart TVs.

But with the advent of combined CMS and app management systems, the possibility for editorial staff to quickly and efficiently publish content to all touchpoints at the same time, to choose which customer segment – and when – to publish for, editorial content is making a comeback. Both Netflix and Spotify are increasing their editorial and curated material in order to reach a high-quality user experience.

Creating a compelling personalised service that suits customer demand, recent events and your content goals is easily achievable, but requires dynamic UX to be an integral part of your video service strategy.

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Adam Nightingale is VP EMEA, Accedo.
BroadcastPro ME hosted its third BroadcastPro Masters Cup at the Emirates Golf Club in Dubai on October 27, 2016. Industry specialists spent the afternoon on the course playing an 18-hole round. The event culminated in an after-game party with networking and dinner as well as lots of prizes for the winners. Some snapshots from the game.

It was an afternoon of camaraderie, fun and some serious golf at BroadcastPro ME’s third annual Golf Day. The event brought together professionals from the regional broadcast arena to tee off with industry peers. Manufacturers, technology heads and systems integrators were joined by end users and media agencies for an 18-hole round of golf.

The day began with registrations of the players where FOX Networks Group held a raffle draw to give away a golf bag. Tony Hasek of Real Treuhand Development won a Fox-branded golf bag as his prize.

Selevision sponsored the first prize for the winners of the BroadcastPro Masters Cup. A complimentary 18-hole round of golf was awarded to Graham Lay, Argosy Cables Middle East LLC; Paul Wallis, Imagine Communications; Matthew Perman, Sony Mobile; and Hassan Ghoul, IABM for their award-winning performance at the event.

The second prize sponsored, by The Meat Company at Souk Al Bahar, went to Thomas Delden, Net Insight; Jose Halago, Global Cloud Xchange; and Dipesh Makwana, SAM.

In the third position were Andy Jackson, Delta Sound; Stefan Cebula, SIZ; and Mohammed Ghaafari, Digital Planet. They walked away with a Callaway shoe bag each.

There were several other prizes to give away. Sony offered two exciting prizes to the winners, of which one has not been released in the UAE yet. Matthew Perman, GM – Finance at Sony Professional Solutions MEA presented a Sony MP-CL1 mobile laser projector to the Nearest to the Pin winner Chris Darnley of Fujinon.

Graham Lay of Argosy Cables Middle East LLC became one of the first to own a Sony 4K PS4 Pro by winning the Longest Drive competition. The console will be released in the Middle East mid next month.

Other raffle prizes included two sets of Sennheiser Toro Rosso headphones that went to Dorothy Dumsian of MBC and David Minchin of AVE-Audio Visual Entertainment.

Two complimentary Friday brunches for two from Le Classique Restaurant went to Mohammed Ghaafari of Digital Planet and Hassan Ghaafari of IABM.

The BroadcastPro Masters Cup was supported by Selevision as lead sponsor as well as FOX Networks Group, Fujinon, Sennheiser and Sony. We thank The Meat Company and Le Classique Restaurant for providing additional prizes for the golf day.

Thank you to all our sponsors.
“Very well-organised event. Good sun and good game...it was fun. I look forward to playing next year.”

Dave Mace, Sky News Arabia

“It was a very enjoyable day; we had a good game and a great time. Being a part of a strong team was very rewarding. Very well-organised event and we look forward to participating every year”

Hassan Ghoul, IABM
Artel Video Systems has announced two new members of its InfinityLink broadcast media transport solution. These include the ILCC50 100 HD/SD-SDI, ASI, Gateway and ILC450 Data Transport module and the ILCC50 SDI/ASI or ASI Twin-Channel Bidirectional IP Gateway. The ILCC50 and ILCC10 add seamless IP capability to Artel’s InfinityLink platform. Integrated seamlessly within the InfinityLink platform, the ILCC50 and ILCC10 address the industry’s growing requirements as they migrate from direct fibre to IP networks. The ILCC50 supports the same input/output standards and formats as previous members of the Artel Portfolio—HD/SD-SDI, 3G, 6G, HDMI, and ASI. The ILCC50 can transport high-quality 4K video over IP networks as well as in single-server play-in and playout applications.

CreateCtrl scores a 10

CreateCtrl AG has released the new CreateCtrl Suite 10. The latest generation in Windows 10 look and feel has been comprehensively redesigned with ergonomic user interfaces. Content metadata and related contrast data can be retrieved intuitively and more quickly than ever before. This means that customers can keep a constant overview of related titles and planning data. Optimised workflows for managing licensing rights provide greater speed and higher quality in planning.

Shogun Inferno starts shipping

Shogun Inferno is a new portable monitoring solution throughout the Atomos global network now. The initial launch firmware will have most of the announced functionality, however there are some features that will be implemented in the weeks to come. Shogun Inferno features 4Kp60 video recording over HDMI and 120 SDI in pristine Apple ProRes and Avid DNxHR. Perfect for the ever increasing Apple ProRes and Avid DNxHR. HDMI and 12G-SDI in pristine 4K60p video recording over IP networks. The ILC450 launch.

Sommer Cable releases Mariner LED

Sommer Cable, a manufacturer of professional cable and connector technology, has released a new SC-Aqua Mariner LED control cable. It’s a professional RGBW control cable. The SC-Aqua Mariner LED control cable features a five-wire design, it is completely halogen-free and transverse water proof. Due to its tight braiding, the new cable is also suited for mobile use. Sommer Cable recommends the Aqua cable both for indoor and outdoor use, in particular for extending RGR strips, as RGB signal supply line or also for medical and electrotechnical applications.

Wirecast Gear, a portable computer workstation fully configured for live event production and streaming.

The system allows anyone to broadcast professional live productions in a matter of minutes with a fully configured system built for live event streaming. Wirecast Gear comes with four professional video input ports with options for either HDMI or SDI.
Transitioning from conventional signal transport to an all-IP environment in broadcast or content production operations seems to be a matter of when rather than if, as it has a number of advantages. IP is touted as offering numerous benefits, including lowered capital and installation costs, large weight reductions of mobile production vehicles, and the use of easily replaceable and upgradable off-the-shelf generic equipment from the computer network sector.

While broadcasters may harbour some concerns about IP, it’s important to note that there is nothing new or untried about the concept of moving packets of data containing built-in addressing information or datagrams from multiple sources to multiple destinations through a common network.

IP brings many real and tangible benefits. One is the use of low-cost and lightweight CAT data cables instead of conventional coaxial and shielded twisted-pair cabling. This can greatly reduce fixed facility construction costs, and in the case of a large mobile production truck, substantially reduce curb weight, increasing allowable payloads and potentially reducing operating costs over the lifetime of the vehicle.

Another advantage is in the substitution of off-the-shelf IP data switches for massive and typically expensive conventional audio and video routing systems, leading to cost savings. An IP switching system and infrastructure is totally agnostic when it comes to signal format, as an SDI router with SD inputs bails when confronted with HD video or discrete AES/EBU audio signals; but this is not the case with IP: SD, HD, 3G and UHD packets are all accommodated, as are different audio flavours (mono, stereo, 5.1, 9.1, etc) in varying sampling rates.

Other big advantages that come from transporting audio and video signals on an IP network include the capability to remotely monitor signal flow and the health of signals from virtually anywhere in the world, as well as the ability to easily and speedily reconfigure a single piece of equipment connected to the network, or simultaneously make changes to any number of network-connected devices. A network environment like this lends itself to dynamic reconfiguration to accommodate special routing and/or processing requirements during certain portions of the broadcast day, or for the origination of special events outside the studio environment. These SDN and IP-connected systems could eventually lead to the abandonment of conventional outside broadcast practices, with little more than direct-to-cloud cameras deployed at the sports centre or other remote venue, and switching, DVE, monitoring, intercom and other equipment remaining behind at the studio facility and repurposed as required.

Established broadcast manufacturers are jumping on the IP bandwagon by offering gear to create IP infrastructures, but it’s important to identify those solutions, which offer user-friendly switching and monitoring.

In planning and implementing an audio IP ‘island’, a number of broadcast audio monitor manufacturers would offer control system interfacing to make the new way of doing business operationally transparent to control room personnel and alleviate any angst associated with it. Similarly, audio signal monitoring within a hybrid environment should be equally transparent to operators, as long as appropriate monitoring gear is installed. Ideally, a single monitoring instrument should be sufficient for observing both legacy and IP-networked audio. In selecting a suitable monitor, you also need to consider its ability to work with a variety of protocols.

There is still some industry uncertainty about which is the best networking system, since multiple, not necessarily compatible, and sometimes proprietary protocols like Ravenna, Dante, AES67 and others exist at the present time.
From a Single Channel Playout Server to a Multi Channel Turnkey Broadcast Centre

CloudAir Next Generation Ecosystem for IP Channel Playout
This highly innovative Cloud Solution is all about speed of channel set up and management, with unlimited scalability, affordability and easy to use.

PlayBox Neo Channel-in-a-Box & Workflow platform
A powerful evolutionary new version with plenty of new features, ensuring you will continue to enjoy using the world’s best-selling playout & channel branding product line.

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