Amanda Turnbull discloses upcoming launches and Discovery's ambitious MENA strategy

CASE STUDIES
• Starz Play begins 4K streaming
• MBC migrates playout
• DCN launches OTT platform
• Turkish firm upgrades OB van

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DISCOVERING NEW FRONTIERS

Amanda Turnbull discloses upcoming launches and Discovery's ambitious MENA strategy
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I was going to write an editorial about how the MENA pay-TV drama scene is unfolding before our eyes in slow motion, but Karim Sarkis has written such an impressive analytical piece on it on page 96 that I thought it would be a crime to dwell any further on it.

Instead, let me draw your attention to some of the other players who have been standing on the periphery thus far and are now slowly moving to centre stage, as the strategies they are implementing are having a significant impact on pay TV in the region.

This time, therefore, we have covered two players who have had a significant role in raising the profile of pay TV by moving some of their coveted channels out of the free-to-air spectrum.

You have Fox, which moved Fox and Fox Movies exclusively to beIN and made some of their other channels available across a number of pay platforms. Then you have Discovery, whose popular Fatafeat channel is now a proud addition to the beIN portfolio along with some others that have recently joined the network.

Their justification is reasonable. Trying to fill your bucket from a drying well of ad sales is not just a lot of hard work but unrewarding as well. Pay at least guarantees monthly revenues, and this in turn helps the channels to invest more in their content. Fox’s bold strategy has helped it step out into the sunshine and breathe again, but this is also a telling comment that those who have been relying entirely on FTA ad sales will have to revisit their strategies if they want to increase their revenue.

We hear MBC is getting ready for a major rollout soon. In the meantime, if you thought we live in the backwoods, think again. We already have 4K streaming in the region with Starz Play, and OSN is gearing up for a 4K rollout as well.

Our IBC issue, as usual, is packed with so many exclusive stories, all the way from news to regional case studies and interviews. I won’t divulge more. We’ll be in Amsterdam in full force. See you there!
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OSN undertakes parallel upgrades for 4K, cloud and platform development

OSN is on its next leg of technical upgrades following the successful completion of its Network Operations Centre (NOC) late last year. The pay-TV operator is presently working on multiple projects in parallel to further enhance its customer offering and embrace new emerging technology, including a next-generation platform to bolster its position as a premier broadcaster in the region.

“Now that the NOC upgrade is complete, our focus is on other new technology initiatives, which will ensure that we’re fit for the future,” commented Mark Billinge, CTO of OSN.

“The platform project is a work in progress and consuming a lot of our resources at present. We are also evaluating our infrastructure and operations all the way from acquisition to ingest, through to edit and transmission, to ensure we’re taking advantage of emerging opportunities to enhance our resilience and efficiency. One of these areas of interest is working with cloud service providers.”

“We are close to agreeing a partnership, but it’s still too early to confirm anything. There are many opportunities to work with cloud. Transcode, for instance, is something we are looking to move to the cloud as our VOD offerings continue to grow across platforms, and we seek opportunities to enhance our resilience.”

On the platform side, the development has been ongoing. OSN plans to roll out a new set-top-box that supports 4K into the regional market, although Billinge declined to mention a time frame.

“We believe the new platform will be a differentiator and a game changer for the region, something that has not been seen before. It won’t be just another PVR,” Billinge claimed.

“As well as the DTH platform, we’re also focusing on enhancing the digital platform offering. So far this year, we’ve released major upgrades to Go Online TV as well as OSN Play, introducing a far improved user experience, greater flexibility and velocity of development going forward.”

The platform projects and cloud are parallel activities and each of them has its own challenges, Billinge added.

“In some ways they cohabit the same space, while in other ways they have different challenges and requirements. Both are equally important and we are advancing both, and hope to make considerable progress in the next six to twelve months.”

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MBC and Ooredoo sign exclusive seven-year partnership

Ooredoo and MBC Group have signed a seven-year partnership granting Ooredoo exclusive rights in Qatar to some of the most popular HD channels from the MBC bouquet.

Following the partnership agreement, Ooredoo tv customers in Qatar will be able to access a range of MBC premium content such as Bab Al-Hara, Omar, Arab Idol, The Voice, Arabs Got Talent and others.

Ooredoo tv will now hold exclusive rights to all MBC HD channels including MBC1, MBC2, MBC3, MBC4, MBC Drama, MBC MAX, MBC Action, as well as any future HD additions.

MBC Group channels are currently in the “most-watched” list on Ooredoo services, and with this partnership, Ooredoo will become the sole distributor for MBC HD in Qatar. This agreement is the latest in a series of announcements for Ooredoo tv, as the company continues to invest in providing entertainment for its diverse customer base.

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IN FIGURES

854

Number of free-to-air satellite channels in the MENA region in May 2016.

Arab Advisors Group
MBC moves sports channels to Arabsat

Arabsat will now host MBC Group’s Gulf channels and MBC Pro Sports channels, following a strategic partnership between Arabsat and MBC.

Khalid Bin Ahmed Balkheyour, CEO of Arabsat, commented: “We are pleased with this partnership between Arabsat and MBC Group. It is proof that the media industry is progressing in the right direction.”

Balkheyour reiterated the benefits of this collaboration: “Most important is the protection of intellectual property rights in the region through our commitment to prohibiting any channel from broadcasting pirated content, and thereby protecting and serving the Arab viewers’ interests.”

Arabsat initiated new HD technology several years ago in collaboration with ASBU (Arab States Broadcasting Union), with the aim of improving HD quality content and growing it in the Arab world.

Speaking about the partnership, Sam Barnett, MBC Group CEO said: “We are delighted to be partnering with Arabsat and progressively, we will be moving our Gulf focused channels exclusively onto Arabsat.

“Arabsat enjoys high viewership, in general, and in the GCC, in particular, and we’re sure that the addition of more exclusive MBC channels will boost Arabsat’s penetration in the region further.”

This partnership sees the return of the Saudi Football League to Arabsat. MBC Pro Sports started broadcasting on Arabsat last month during the live broadcast of the Saudi Super Cup between Al Ahli Club and Al Hilal Club in London.

BeIN Sports wins exclusive MENA rights to Olympics from 2018-2024

BeIN Media Group has signed a multi-territory deal with International Olympics Committee (IOC) for the official media rights to the next four Olympic Games for the MENA region. The network will broadcast both summer and winter Olympics, starting with the XXIII Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang in 2018.

The deal confirms that beIN Sports will become the exclusive official broadcaster of the Olympic Games across its territories in the MENA region. This long-term agreement provides beIN Sports with the rights to broadcast the Olympics from 2018 to 2024. The partnership also includes beIN and IOC working closely together on the IOC’s Olympic Channel.

BeIN Sports owns and distributes 18 linear sports channels across 24 territories in the region, including FTA and pay TV channels along with a 24/7 sports news channel.

For Rio 2016 Olympic Games, beIN Sports broadcast more than 160 hours of live content each day across 15 linear channels, all delivered in Arabic and English. The broadcast presentation included 45 analysts, 54 commentators and 12 presenters in four dedicated Olympic studios.

BeIN Sports created 50 exclusive documentaries leading up to and during the Rio Games. In line with IOC and requirements, beIN has committed to broadcasting a minimum number of hours of the Olympic Games on FTA television during the Olympics.
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Bahrain Information Affairs Authority opts for TVU Networks

Bahrain’s Information Affairs Authority (IAA) has recently expanded its investment in fixed and mobile transmitters from TVU Networks. It plans to invest in two additional TVU One portable transmitters as well as the manufacturer’s M-Link fixed transmitters.

With satellite and microwave technologies being more expensive and Bahrain having good 3G as well as 4G infrastructure in the Kingdom, the Authority has chosen to capitalise on the portability and cost-effective nature of the transmitters, Abdullah Al Balooshi, General Director of Technical and Technology Affairs for Bahrain’s Information Affairs Authority said.

Awad Mousa, Regional Director MEA of TVU Networks, added: “It’s becoming a trend for people to cut down on satellite and microwave use where possible, because it is expensive and usually these technologies require additional resources like a van or a technical person on-site to set everything up. These transmitters, by comparison, can be used by just about anybody, and their portability makes them really useful in several live applications, whether it is a mall or disaster areas and war zones, where it’s difficult to carry too many things.

“ The 3G and 4G infrastructure in Bahrain is very good, which makes it easy to use these technologies there efficiently for the live transmission of events,” Al Balooshi explained.

The M-Link is a fixed transmitter that can be used in OB vans and studios, while TVU One is a portable solution. Both are designed to be used for different applications including sports and web streaming. Both support full HD, 3G, 4G and Wi-Fi, as well as WiMax. They can also be used with Ku- and Ka-band satellite, he added.

In addition, the Ministry has released several tenders while many others are still in the pipeline, including a much-needed upgrade for its radio studios.
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Advanced Media secures deal with Angola TV

Dubai distributor Advanced Media recently supplied a number of broadcast and SNG products to Angola TV in addition to providing on-site support for system installation and training. Angola TV invested in a number of products including 12 Sony PMW-300K camcorders, four Sony shoulder-mount PXW-X320 camcorders, a Sony MCS-8M switcher, 16 Sony UHF wireless microphones and related accessories.

“Angola TV’s initial inquiry was only about Sony camcorders, video switchers and accessories. However, after doing a tour of our showroom and seeing the vast range of products we had within both broadcast and SNG, they shared their other requirements as well and we were able to make specific recommendations that catered to their technical specs and budget needs,” commented Alaa Rantisi, Managing Director at Advanced Media LLC.

“Eventually, we also undertook the antenna installation and training for the end user on-site.”

The end user invested in an SNG uplink system that comprises a complete 1.2m KU-band vehicle mount antenna with system electronics including an HD/SD MPEG-2/H.264 encoder, a DVBS-2 modulator and IRD and 100W KU-band HPA solutions.

“One of our core strengths has been the ability to keep a fairly adequate inventory and showcase the vast number of brands we represent at our showroom. This makes it easy for us to demonstrate and supply products immediately to walk-in customers. This is especially true for our customers from Africa, who walk in to the showroom and expect to purchase their equipment within a couple of days and leave. Having products in stock has also helped us to secure a number of regional projects, where tight deadlines could be met only because we had the products in stock,” Rantisi continued.

Fahad Hasan, who manages Technical Sales at Advanced Media and concluded this deal, added: “In many cases, end users only have a rough idea of their requirements and come to us for guidance, as did Angola TV. We attempt to educate and present a solution to the client rather than making a quick box sale.”
IMAX launches private theatre line for MENA

IMAX Corporation has launched its IMAX Private Theatre business in the Middle East, with David Hanson heading the unit as General Manager. The regional office is based in Dubai’s Jebel Ali Free Zone.

The new line offers three fully integrated home theatre systems – Prestige, Palais and the highest-end system, Platinum – that allow customers to enjoy premium entertainment experience from their homes.

The move follows the successful introduction of the entertainment technology company’s product line in China. Typical customers of these solutions include real estate developers, dealers and high net-worth individuals.

“There is a huge demand in this region as well amongst wealthy clientele for private screening rooms that can mirror the IMAX theatrical experience,” commented Hanson.

“Saudi Arabia, especially, has a big market for IMAX private theatres, because there are no theatres there,” said Hanson. Hanson added that his team is in talks with global and local content owners to ensure more content is available for IMAX screens.

“We also have a commitment to provide as much 4K content as possible on our screens. HD also looks very good on our screens,” Hanson added.

The private theatre is bundled with a variety of content options including an exclusive IMAX movie system, which provides films optimised for viewing in the IMAX Private Theatre environment. The theatres also allow consumers to enjoy the IMAX-grade cinematic effect through other types of media formats including Blu-ray discs, HD or UHD television and gaming.

He is also in the process of securing space at a prime location in Dubai to install a private IMAX screen that will serve as a showcase for the company’s offerings.

Canon breaks into African market with Kenyan deal

Kenya’s Riverwood Ensemble recently announced a tie-up with Canon Africa to source EOS C100 MK1 cameras.

Riverwood Ensemble is an umbrella organisation, which consists of 200 professional and amateur film producers from all over Kenya. The association churns out 14 films every week; however, most of the members have been making films by renting DSLR cameras, and paying up to US$60 a day.

“We were looking for a way to secure professional equipment without having to rely on rentals. We had a long-term objective of investing in good resources when Canon made the offer,” said Ezekiel Mutua, CEO of Kenya Film Classification Board, and a member of Riverwood Ensemble. Canon, as part of its product awareness and consumer outreach efforts, held a workshop for filmmakers at Riverwood Ensemble, showcasing the EOS C100 MK1 camera and its workflow. This was followed up with a series of product awareness workshops as well as continued skill development sessions.

The workshop introduced filmmakers to the latest cameras and EOS technology.

“The C100 Mark I proved to be a big draw for the attendees and that’s when we decided to buy these cameras for our members,” said Mutua. It seemed like a good fit for young filmmakers with limited resources, professionals who shoot without a crew, or EOS videographers entering the Cinema EOS System for the first time.

Canon earlier this year announced the establishment of a new Africa business division to enhance its business on the continent. Canon Central and North Africa (CCNA) covers 44 African countries, with local offices in four countries – Kenya, Morocco, Egypt and Ghana.

Hendrik Verbrugghe, Marketing Directors, MENA at Canon Middle East, said the Riverwood Ensemble deal was a good breakthrough for Canon’s Africa operations.
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Low-cost apartments and hotels at Dubai Studio City to attract more production crew

Dubai Studio City will be home to a number of low-cost residential apartments and hotels by 2018 as part of its efforts to further lower the cost of filming in Dubai, Jamal Al Sharif, Chairman of Dubai Film and TV Commission told BroadcastPro ME.

“Dubai Production Zone already has three-star hotels but we will now have low-cost residential accommodation as well as budget hotels in Studio City by 2018,” commented Al Sharif, adding that the Film Commission is exploring every possible avenue to reduce production costs in the emirate.

“Dubai has offered USD 6.6m worth of soft incentives to projects shot in the emirate between 2013 and 2015,” the Chairman of DFTC confirmed.

“We don’t offer fixed incentives but customise them according to the needs of the filmmakers. These come in the form of fee waivers and discounts on the cost of filming and so on.”

Previously, the Dubai Film and TV Commission had reduced the number of days for approval to shoot in the emirate from seven to three. Al Sharif is hoping to bring that time down even further. DFTC also assists filmmakers and crew to fast track their visa processing as well as airline and hotel bookings.

After the release of Star Trek Beyond, which was filmed in Dubai for 13 days and features the emirate’s futuristic buildings, Al Sharif has confirmed that DFTC is in talks with a number of producers about shooting in Dubai.

“We are negotiating on various projects both from Hollywood and Bollywood at the moment. It may be a big film or two TV projects,” confirmed Al Sharif.

While Dubai is ready on the infrastructural front, Al Sharif laments the lack of sufficient freelance talent.

“These projects mainly employ freelancers who move out once the project is completed. We need a continuous stream of productions in the emirate to attract talent to have a permanent base here. The more projects we do, the better it is for local talent. Star Trek Beyond is a good example how a foreign project helped us nurture local talent. We selected 11 interns to work on Star Trek Beyond during the shoot and more than 350 local crew were involved in its filming here.

“When a project comes to Dubai and if we feel this city is not what they are looking for, we refer it to one of the other emirates. This ensures that the project stays in the UAE. All the emirates are jointly involved in these projects and we work with the common goal of giving a boost to filming in the UAE,” Al Sharif noted.

Rohde and Schwarz to host technology day in Dubai and Doha

Rohde and Schwarz will be hosting a technology day in Dubai and Doha on October 6 and November 17, 2016, respectively. The event is designed for satellite, terrestrial and IP broadcasters, and will look at the technological changes leading to new ways of transmission and delivery within broadcast.

The day-long sessions will cover several topics ranging from resolution, codecs, the move to IP and the latest developments in content distribution. The morning session will cover the core enabling technologies of resolution and compression, and how and where to deploy them to retain the highest image quality throughout the production process.

The first afternoon session will compare and contrast the various competing IP and file-based content creation and distribution paradigms that enable content producers to maximise the availability of valuable content across all display platforms at minimum cost.

The final session will examine 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.

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UTURN to set up digital incubator, studio in Dubai

Saudi Arabian digital production and media company UTURN is launching an incubation programme to support young and upcoming digital content initiatives. Kaswara Al Khatib, CEO and Founder of UTURN, said his company is in the process of setting up a production studio in Dubai to give a head start to the incubator. The company has already taken up space in Dubai Production City to build a studio with an end-to-end production infrastructure. The studio will be used for productions for digital platforms and will be open to independent filmmakers. “It’s a small studio, about 400-500sqm, and we plan to begin work on fitting out the facility this month. A full production chain will be established at the studio. We will rent the space to digital start-ups and content creators working on projects for online portals. Depending on the type of content, we may also run it on our platform.” UTURN will also be launching an application for Samsung smart TVs, Android and iOS. The company has its own platform now, and through the app viewers will be able to search for relevant content easily. It’s a free application that offers free subscription for UTURN content. “Users will be able to access UTURN content directly through the app. The idea is to engage with our users in a better way. Whenever we launch something new, our subscribers will get a notification,” he added. Kaswara Al Khatib has been invited to speak at Harvard Arab Week to showcase UTURN. Once a year, Harvard University hosts Arab Week to focus on Arab entrepreneurs and their initiatives.

Sky News Arabia selects Net Insight for global news network

Sky News Arabia is building a new global content contribution platform connecting 10 global news bureaus with its main hub in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The broadcaster turned to Net Insight for the company’s cost-effective media contribution over internet solution, the Nimbra VA series with MPEG-4 encoding. The Arabic news and current affairs channel will also use Net Insight’s service-centric network management system, Nimbra Vision, for easy at-a-glance overview of the network, service health and performance.

Live transport of broadcast quality video over the internet has long been considered impossible. And while the internet was never designed to handle the demands of broadcast services, new solutions have emerged that bridges the gap between the best-effort nature of the internet and the high reliability and quality requirements of high quality broadcasting. Now broadcasters can enjoy the same benefits offered by the internet, such as vast reach and cost-effective price models, as the consumer market has done for years. The Nimbra VA enables broadcasters to use internet grade transport while maintaining the same strict broadcast quality standards they have become accustomed to.

“One of our reasons for choosing Net Insight’s solution is a flexible and dynamic tool to interconnect our wide spread international sites. “This Middle East is an important territory for Net Insight and we are steadily growing in this market,” added Fredrik Tumegård, CEO of Net Insight. “Our increased attention and efforts in the Middle East will continue to strengthen our local position and this project represents a significant step forward for our award-winning Nimbra VA platform in this region.” Net Insight delivered the equipment during the first quarter and the installation is now in its final stage.
Yahlive and BBC extend partnership

Yahlive has renewed its contract with BBC World Service. As part of the ongoing agreement, the BBC will continue the broadcast of its Persian and Arabic television channels as well as radio programming from its Arabic and Afghan services to audiences across Yahlive’s wide and culturally diverse footprint.

Commenting on the strength of the partnership and its relevance to the region, Yahlive CEO Sami Boustany said: “Yahlive is one of the fastest-growing regional satellite broadcasters in the region. Working closely with partners such as the BBC is core to our mission to bring viewers a mix of culturally relevant programming. The continuation of our partnership with the BBC is reflective of this and is a significant component of our growing channel portfolio.”

Ikegami uses 8K OB van to cover Rio Olympics

Ikegami was on-site throughout the Summer Olympics with the world’s first 8K Outside Broadcast (OB) production vehicle, completed in September 2015. This mobile unit is designed to operate as a complete mobile 8K broadcast production facility, capable of producing unsurpassed picture quality complete with 22.2 channel surround sound.

The OB vehicle supports Ikegami’s fourth-generation UHDTV camera, the SHK-810, developed in cooperation with Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). The SHK-810 is the world’s first 8K ultra HD field camera system and employs a single 33 million-pixel Super 35 CMOS sensor, achieving 4,000TVL horizontal and vertical resolution.

The SHK-810 is 90% smaller in size and weight compared with the first-generation camera, with significantly improved operability. Ikegami 8K coverage included several ceremonies and popular athletic events. A dedicated crew of Ikegami engineers accompanied the OB vehicle and cameras to ensure maximum performance throughout the Games.

“The Olympics represent the ultimate in passion, excellence and achievement,” said Hiroshi Akiyama, Marketing Division Deputy Director. “Ikegami’s commitment to these principles is highlighted by our extensive 8K coverage of the Rio Olympics. This gave many global viewers their first experience of 8K technology.”
BeIN Media Group launches AMC and Scripps channels

BeIN and AMC Networks International (AMCNI) launched five channels last month. The partnership will see entertainment channel AMC become exclusively available to beIN subscribers in the Middle East and North Africa in HD. Four other newly localised premium AMCNI channels will also launch on the platform: CBS Reality, Extreme Sports Channel, Outdoor Channel and pre-school channel JimJam.

AMCNI also announced the acquisition of AMC Studios’ upcoming anthology drama series *The Terror*, an adaption of the bestselling novel by Dan Simmons, to premiere exclusively on AMC in territories worldwide, including the MENA region in 2017.

Yousef Al-Obaidly, Deputy CEO of beIN Media Group, stated: “beIN’s foray into entertainment content has been extremely successful, as the platform has been able to attract a number of high-quality global and premium content partners during the course of the last few months. “Partnering with AMCNI is yet an important milestone for beIN. This new offering from AMCNI brings diverse content for beIN subscribers. This partnership helps us further consolidate beIN’s position as the leading pay-TV network in MENA.”

Ed Palluth, Executive Vice President of Global Distribution, AMC Networks International, commented on the new partnership: “We are very excited to launch five of our premium channels on the beIN platform in the Middle East. This agreement allows AMCNI to further expand our footprint and strengthen many of our international brands.”

BeIN Media Group is also launching two new channels from Scripps Networks Interactive. Scripps’ HGTV will be made available to the MENA audience for the first time from November 2 this year, and its Travel Channel will expand distribution in the region.

Phillip Luff, Managing Director, UK & EMEA, Scripps Networks Interactive, commented: “Since its launch in 1994, HGTV has established itself as a top 10 network in all of cable in the US. We are thrilled to bring HGTV’s high-quality content to audiences in the Middle East and North Africa in partnership with beIN. “When you are looking for inspiration, it is the premiere destination for home improvement, DIY, design, real estate and landscaping content.”

Icflix partners with Asiacell in Iraq

Icflix has signed a strategic partnership with Asiacell, a provider of mobile telecommunications services in Iraq. It will give Asiacell customers access to Jazwood (Arabic), Hollywood and Bollywood content, including movies, TV shows, cartoons and documentaries. Both prepaid and postpaid Asiacell customers will be able to enjoy the Icflix library of content for a monthly fee of $8.56, a weekly fee of $3.42 or a daily subscription for $1 only.

“We are glad to have partnered with Asiacell, who will ensure their subscribers receive the best of Icflix content with ease and uncompromising quality,” said Carlos Tibi, Founder and CEO, Icflix.
Abu Dhabi Media tests 4K cameras for live events

Abu Dhabi Media’s production arm, LIVE HD, invited five 4K camera manufacturers to demonstrate their latest camera releases at the company’s premises, last month. The camera showcase included Sony, Grass Valley, Hitachi, Ikegami and Panasonic. Also on display were lenses from Canon and Fujinon to be tested with these cameras.

The test was a first-of-a-kind event where LIVE HD’s DoPs and producers had a chance to test and compare the different cameras under one roof. The first day entailed studio testing of these cameras. Engineers, cameramen as well as CCU operators from LIVE HD shot using the demo cameras to test their various features and how the cameras fared in studio conditions. On the second, the LIVE HD staff had a chance to test the cameras outdoors in natural light and heat conditions. The participating vendors held a presentation for each of the displayed cameras, which was followed by question and answer sessions.

Commenting on the event, Hamad Abdelrazaq, Head of Broadcast Engineering at LIVE HD said: “The idea behind this event was to test the reliability and operability of the equipment under the existing UAE environment conditions. Our team got hands-on experience with these cameras and could compare the features of all of them.”

The LIVE HD team then drew out comparison charts for each of the cameras stating their features, performance and workflow.

“The outdoor test was critical to know if these cameras were suitable for our use. We placed these cameras outdoors for at least five hours to test how well they performed under high temperature and humidity conditions. The outside temperature at the time of the test was 43 Degree-Celsius. Although the temperature of the outside body of the cameras and lenses reached touched 85 to 100°C, all of the cameras kept running normally,” he added.

The comparison sheets will be useful in making the next camera purchase for the company, he said.

“We have recorded all the data from these tests, which will come in handy when we decide to buy cameras in the future.”
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Audiovisual infrastructure for the ‘Creative Mine’

Arenberg, a prestigious UNESCO World Heritage mining site, began its conversion into a cinema and audiovisual site where science, economy and culture would meet. This future centre of excellence in image and digital media set out to further enhance the reputation and professionalism of the regional sector for teachers/researchers and professionals from the University of Valenciennes and Hainaut - Cambrésis (UVHC). To do this, Norpac (a subsidiary of Bouygues Construction) asked BCE to integrate the audiovisual infrastructure of the site.

Dedicated to cinema

Since 2001, the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais has been carrying out a project to convert the mining site into a leading European cinema platform. Over time, the project has evolved by creating a genuine synergy between science, economy and culture in the field of cinema and audiovisual media.

At the end of 2013 the project was entrusted to Norpac, which then began a tender procedure to select technology partners with higher expertise in today’s multimedia technology.

In 2014, BCE was selected for the integration of:

- The DEVISU (Design Visuel et Urbain) laboratory, including post-production facilities.
- The ANNAUD (Appareillages Numériques Novateurs pour les Audiences et Usages de Demain) platform, including a test hall with Motion Control equipment, a TV studio in high definition and all the means necessary to achieve quality productions.
- The LEAUD (Laboratoire Expérimental pour les Audiences et les Usages de Demain), a multi-purpose theatre with 4K projector and a smaller projection room for research.
- The storage area, with workshops and maintenance facilities.

State-of-the-art technology for development

The old buildings host the DEVISU laboratory and the ANNAUD platform as well as the storage areas, workshops etc. The LEAUD is a new building with the capacity to transform from a multi-purpose room into a theatre.

In this modern framework BCE was in charge of the installation and interconnection of the computer, TV production, screening, dressing and meeting rooms, as well as the test hall and the mobile control room (Régie Fly).

IT and post-production

The computer rooms include post-production rooms equipped with workstations which cover all the needs of the users and the production viewing rooms.

These rooms are connected to an IT nodal where all the projects are stored and loaded. This nodal centralises the data from the entire broadcast infrastructure.

Professional production

In order to give students and teachers...
professional quality productions, BCE also installed a production platform.

It includes a TV studio in high definition with motorised and manual cameras (which can be controlled from the control room) as well as all the necessary equipment to record the sound.

The TV control room allows the production of a programme with only three operators. It includes five workstations:
1. Filmmaking and special effects.
2. Server management, graphics and recorders.
3. Camera control and studio lights.
4. Audio mixing.
5. Script coordination.

The TV production infrastructure is linked to a broadcast nodal, directly connected to the IT nodal, the test hall and the mobile control room.

For any outdoor production or a project requiring fewer resources, a mobile control room (Régie Fly) has also been created by BCE.

This system is equipped with a complete HD production system with connectivity to the nodal, the theatre and the projection room.

**Cinema at the heart of the site**

The multi-purpose theatre of 528 m², can be used as an event room, but also as a movie theatre.

Thanks to an ingenious row system, the hall has 300 seats with professional audio and video systems.

To achieve the integration of this hall, BCE teamed up with a company specialising in cinema installation.

The second projection room, whose purpose is to be a room of reduced size (43 m²) to carry out experiments and tests, has been installed by BCE teams. It is equipped with a video projector and six seats.

Both projection rooms have their own control room and are connected to the mobile control room.

**Multimedia technology for the cinema industry**

In addition, BCE installed the audio and video equipment of the lodges and the meeting rooms, installed the audio interfaces and network of the test hall and the connectivity between the various rooms, the IT nodal, the broadcast nodal and the audio nodal.

BCE was in charge of the integration of a motion capture system. This allows the recording of movements via reflective markers placed on the body. The Mocaplab Eyetracker system, in conjunction with 12 cameras, allows the translation and calculation of the trajectory of each point in time and space. Motion capture has many applications, such as scientific research, cinema or video games.

Finally, BCE also provided equipment for the producers, such as shoulder HD cameras, a 4K camera, audio recording systems, miniature cameras, etc.

The conversion of the site of Wallers Arenberg began on June 19, 2014, and opened on the 25 September 2015.

A complete success of industrial rehabilitation, an emblem of the Unesco World Heritage mining area, Arenberg “Creative Mine” is unique in Europe, a centre of excellence in image and digital media.

The potential of Arenberg “Creative Mine” is still very wide, with the possibility to evolve in multiple activities.

The site can accommodate many types of events in addition to filmmaking. Indeed, the 34 acres lend themselves to many activities such as fairs, cultural projects, sporting events and business seminars.

**For more info: www.bce.lu**
Amanda Turnbull, Vice President and Country Manager at Discovery Networks MENA.
In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Amanda Turnbull, Vice President and Country Manager of Discovery Networks MENA, discloses news about the company’s impending launches in the region and what being an independent entity means for the local office.

How did you come to be at Discovery?
I started in print and was based in Hong Kong until 2007, when I joined Discovery Communications Europe as Director, Advertising Sales for Emerging Markets. I have been handling emerging markets for many years now. I joined the Discovery Networks CEEMEA team in 2010 and then came to Dubai in 2014 in the role of Vice President and Country Manager of Discovery Communications, UAE.

That’s when we moved Fatafeat to Dubai Studio City. Initially, my role involved developing Fatafeat and creating more value for the brand. It was a loved and trusted brand but needed a bit of a boost. It needed a policy to develop it on-screen, off-screen and build more traction for its digital offerings. I am super proud of the way it has shaped up. I have a lot of people to thank for sharing their knowledge and experience with me, and helping me establish a strong foothold in broadcast.

Was buying Fatafeat the first of Discovery’s ambitious moves to this region?
Discovery has been operating in the Middle East for 17 years, but we were not physically present on the ground until quite recently. Having a local team in Dubai Studio City has enabled us to build relationships, find partnerships and be extremely collaborative.

Discovery bought over Takhayal Entertainment and its flagship channel Fatafeat in 2013. We bought their production business in Cairo and Dubai, along with the TV channel and the website. This was a big move that went on to show how important the Middle East market was for us. There has been substantial investment in setting up a local base in Dubai, again showing our commitment towards the region. Our team here has grown from 20 to 35 and we are still expanding.

What did Fatafeat’s move from FTA to pay entail? What challenges did you face in the process?
Yes, we moved Fatafeat from free-to-air to beIN’s pay platform on April 1 this year. There was a reason to take Fatafeat out of FTA to pay. It’s very difficult with only one FTA channel and not a portfolio to generate ad sales.

I am pleased that we have changed the model on Fatafeat. Now we have a more stable structure. As a result of that, we can now invest more in the brand and the viewer gets a better deal. The viewers get more content, more consistently. It was a difficult decision but the right one.

FTA ad sales is a high-pressure, stressful business model. Pay has its own set of challenges. Digital, on the other hand, is more transparent and more accountable.

We hear there’s a lot of expansion happening in Discovery’s regional office at the moment?
Yes, the good news is that our region is now independent, which is exciting. We were part of the emerging business previously; now we are an independent hub, reporting directly to Kasia Kieli, President and Managing Director at Discovery Networks CEEMEA, based in Discovery’s CEEMEA headquarters in Warsaw. CEEMEA is a huge
“There was a reason to take Fatafeat out of FTA to pay. It’s very difficult with only one FTA channel and not a portfolio to generate ad sales. I am pleased that we have changed the model on Fatafeat, and now have a more stable structure”

Amanda Turnbull, Vice President and Country Manager, Discovery Networks MENA

region with multiple markets also covering the Middle East. We have essentially stabilised the business in the Middle East and developed pay, digital as well as free-to-air products. We can stand on our own feet in this region.

As a result, we have also decided to move the playout of all our MENA channels to Dubai. The channels that have been coming to this region were played out from London previously, and moving the playout to the Dubai hub is a huge departure for us.

We have local playout from London, Italy, Germany, Turkey and now Dubai. The MENA channels are now being played out from du Samacom on Nilesat. This is a very recent development. Fatafeat has been playing out from since 2006. We were happy to extend our relationship with du Samacom, who have upgraded their facilities for clarity and DVB subtitling to meet Discovery’s specifications.

Not only are we now scheduling locally but also making the acquisition and production conversations locally. The packaging and versioning of all of these channels are done from here. Our Middle East team curates these channels. Being based here, they have a good understanding of what the audience wants to watch. Of course, moving these channels here also means we now have more edit suites, more software and Signiant
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connections, which are some of the key upgrades that are being undertaken in the Dubai office.

We have a studio for local production in Dubai Production City (formerly IMPZ), where content for Fatafeat is produced. We may take more studio space and expand our production facilities for other channels as well.

An Arabic talk show hosted by Iraqi-born humanitarian Zainab Salbi, Nida’a, was the first local commission for TLC (Discovery’s lifestyle channel), launched in 2015. We hope to re-commission a second season of Nida’a, for broadcast next year on TLC, on OSN.

You have signed several deals with local networks. Please elaborate on your recent deals and your business model for platforms in the region.

Yes, we are in the lucky position of having so much global content to create these channels. When we came in conversation with beIN, Fatafeat was the flagship brand for them. Their sports portfolio was already quite robust and they wanted to develop their pay offerings further with more family and female programmes.

On April 1, we launched three channels with beIN, Fatafeat HD, Animal Planet HD and DTX HD. DKids HD, Dlife HD and DMAX HD were launched on August 1. Dlife HD offers family-oriented programmes offering more than food and cooking. There’s parenting, education, relationships, travel etiquette, family – the content of this channel is global.

Discovery Kids HD was the number one kids channel in Latin America. We see a huge off-air opportunity with that and plan to create characters and local events around it.

DTX HD is a pure turbo channel with a lot of stuff about wheels. It is targeted at a younger audience.

DMAX HD is targeted at older males and has lots of adrenaline, extreme fishing, survival, engineering, military and so on. This is a great opportunity to engage more deeply with beIN’s existing audience and move them to family entertainment.

Any new launches in the pipeline that you can share with us exclusively?

We will be launching a Farsi channel called Home and Health this autumn. We have licensed the Home and Health product to a company called BHS, which is supported by Eutelsat. BHS will run the Farsi-language channels in Iran and the Middle East. They will manage the channel for us.

We consider Iran to be a high potential market and the new channel will have a mix of library content as well as original local productions

Amanda Turnbull, Vice President and Country Manager, Discovery Networks MENA

“We consider Iran to be a high potential market and the new channel will have a mix of library content as well as original local productions”

What is Discovery’s growth strategy for this region? Do you also do branded content?

This is an important region for us. Our goal is to get the content out on as many different platforms as possible, be it digital or OTT, pay or FTA. Our offerings are no longer limited to these screens; we also have experiential products and leverage the opportunity we have in the region’s malls.

Globally, what we are getting very good at is buying good sports rights, with a passionate fan following. These have a super fan following and are on social media that drives the products. This is what we are
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doing with TLC — they have these super fans who are on social media; they are our biggest advocates.

We are trying to link together our linear products with social media and digital verticals. That’s an interesting strategy for us. We want to engage with the young tech-savvy population in the region to gain maximum traction on our products.

We haven’t yet delved into branded content. We started ad sales on Discovery and TLC last year and consider ourselves relatively new to that.

If you give your time to any screen, you want something back in return. You want the security of knowing that your valuable time will be repaid.

We have also moved from just being factual entertainment to encompass a brilliant mix of scripted channels, kids’ entertainment and sports.

What is the secret to penetrating different markets? Discovery is now in 230 countries; how do you ensure content is relevant to so many different people and cultures?

In the pay space particularly, you have this socio-economic group of people who can pay for TV. These are people who are global consumers, they travel everywhere, watch TV everywhere and on multiple screens. What we offer on our channels is aspirational but also relevant and real for this socio-economic class.

Through the prism of this content, they can see an impact on their lives. Take the example of Jo Frost (Supernanny), which we plan to bring to this region. She has a huge following in the free-to-air market and we will now have exclusive content with her in the pay-TV space. We would like to bring her to the region and do experiential events with her. That’s something we feel is important to make it more relevant to the local audience.

Beyond TV
Discovery Consumer Products has opened a store at The Dubai Mall in partnership with Emaar Entertainment.

The store represents the concept of “responsible retail” by donating between 30-40% of proceeds to charities.

A new shark exhibit was also opened at The Dubai Mall to give visitors a chance to know more about these sea creatures that are being killed by the millions every year. The ‘Discovery Shark Week’ exhibit is a hybrid of digital technology and a living aquarium that features the shark heroes of Discovery Channel’s Shark Week. The entrance to the exhibit is a computer-generated image of a shark cage that divers use underwater to get close to sharks.

The interactive digital shark cage, which consists of LED screens, gives guests a chance to be surrounded by great white sharks through CGI.

We see an opportunity to develop a huge off-air platform for the show.

We launched the first Discovery Store in the region with Emaar and Dubai Aquarium. It’s located in Dubai Mall. All the stuff in the store has eco stories behind them, and a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of products at the store goes back to various charities around the world. The first ever Shark Week was held in August in Dubai Mall, also in association with Emaar and Dubai Aquarium.

Products like these give us a complete 360-degree approach that includes linear, digital and experiential. Through these programmes and events, we aim to enter people’s lives in a meaningful and authentic way.

How do you choose products for this region?
I am deeply involved in anything that happens in this region. Having a presence here, we are on the ground building relationships and we know what’s going on. Now that we are here, we can spot these opportunities to tailor-make products to the region’s requirements. We brainstorm with local partners, and based on the feedback on the ground, we relay this information to Discovery’s Consumer Products division, which is responsible for developing brands.

Shark Week and the Discovery Store are part of this initiative. We are very committed to our products and content packaging and the platforms we use. Our deal with Emaar and OSN is a tripartite agreement with each partner in a happy position.

Do you create content exclusively for this region or is there an opportunity to share that with your global channels?
Our studio in Dubai produces content every day, and we have plans for more. The point to make is we don’t make content for just one region. Whatever is created in one region runs elsewhere also, based on its relevance to that particular market. Having said that, most of our content has a global appeal. All the content that Discovery produces goes into a centralised content library where everybody makes a contribution.

Discovery has grown from being a very US-centric company to one that makes more money outside of the US and has more content sources outside of the US today. A very big TLC celebrity, for instance, wants to do something in the Middle East, and if we did
that, the programme would run everywhere, not just in this region.

**What is the outlook for the local pay-TV market? Where is the Middle East headed in terms of TV viewing?**

Pay is still small here, but it is influencing the dynamics of this market. Pay TV in the region is growing at around 8% annually, I hear, and that’s where we see opportunity. There is a growing realisation in the region that you need to pay for quality. This perception has percolated into the region now, and it will be very interesting to watch what’s going to happen. Traditionally, free-to-air has been a strong medium, as we all know, and we have leveraged this opportunity to grow our channels in North Africa. We have a widespread free-to-air network as well, but we need to have the right partners to achieve that.

Fatafeat may have transitioned to a pay environment. But we have to work hard to make sure we are still connected to the consumers by way of experiential offerings. Fatafeat will be touring around and you will see Fatafeat-related events in shopping malls near you, across the region. We have a big commitment in digitising the channel to make sure we don’t lose our existing audience. In order to achieve that, we are investing heavily in digital and Fatafeat’s direct-to-consumer app and VOD platform.

**Do you have any statistics to show how Fatafeat is faring on different platforms?**

Fatafeat has a VOD platform, Fatafeat Play (http://play.fatafeat.com/home), and as of July 2016, it

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**“We are a global player and are in a happy position of having this enormous content library that we invest in heavily. Discovery invests $2.5bn annually in developing content, and this does not even include the investment in sports rights, Olympics and so on. We want to make sure that our content is available on as many platforms and to as many viewers as possible”**

Amanda Turnbull, Vice President and Country Manager, Discovery Networks MENA

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The upgrade

Bassem Maher, Technical & IT Manager, Discovery Networks MENA, gives details of the technical upgrade at Discovery’s Dubai hub

Discovery’s latest channels – DKids HD, DLife HD and DMAX HD – will be broadcast from Dubai, alongside the existing local channel Fatafeat. The network’s remaining channels currently broadcast from London.

To achieve local playout, the network has had to upgrade its technical facilities at its Dubai hub. According to Bassem Maher, Technical and IT Manager at Discovery Networks MENA, the expanded playout involves upgrading 90% of its equipment.

“The playout now includes four channels as opposed to just one earlier. We are upgrading our switchers, edit suites, storage and file delivery systems. Introducing the new equipment with our old software will be done according to the plan laid out by our engineering teams in London, with full cooperation from the local team here in Dubai,” he says.

He adds that the local playout offers a more automated workflow in terms of content transfer to du Samacom’s teleport.

The networks will be using a file-based workflow for all work streams, from production to file delivery to Samacom. Du Samacom has been highly supportive of this move and has made the requisite changes as per Discovery’s specifications to meet global standards.

“We required some changes and upgrades to Samacom’s current workflow and systems. For example, we need DVB subtitles on all our channel feeds, plus Dolby capabilities for sound and more on-screen graphics. These, as well as other changes, were required in order to establish a complete integration between Discovery and Samacom’s playout centres,” explains Maher.

Avid, Signiant and Telestream have been the key software vendors, while Dell and Apple have provided the hardware needed for the upgrade. Telestream will be used to fully automate file conversion to any platform, either broadcast or digital. Signiant will offer secure file transfer from London and Dubai to Samacom’s teleport.

“These new solutions will increase efficiencies in terms of moving from a manual to automated workflow,” Maher confirms.

Another major change involves replacing FCP with Avid Media Composer and Nexis.

“While Avid Media Composer will be used to upgrade our post-production facilities, Nexis will be introduced as our new online storage system with 120TB, which will be accessible to the whole team. Interplay will handle media asset management, allowing us to archive our content with proper metadata. Telestream will be used to transcode our content, while Signiant will allow for automated file delivery,” explains Maher.

“We are also assessing the possibility of moving our other channels over from London to Samacom’s playout centre in Dubai.”

There is capacity to expand on the four channels currently playing out from Du Samacom. While the Fatafeat schedule is still based on Broadview for scheduling DKids, DLife and DMAX, Discovery MENA is working with IBMS, Discovery’s preferred supplier globally.

The Dubai hub presently has four edit suites and is aiming to include four more by the end of October 2016. Dubai’s playout solutions have been chosen to align the Dubai hub with Discovery’s global playout centres.

Avid is Discovery’s standard editing solution in London, which will be deployed in Dubai.

Ingest is carried out at the playout centre in London and the files are transferred to Samacom via Signiant. The Samacom team then performs a quality check for both video and audio.

“We ingest through the fibre connection, the files are delivered back to London and then to beIN’s Madrid facility. For now, we are broadcasting Fatafeat, DKids, DLife and DMAX from Dubai, with continuous support from our technical teams in London,” says Maher.
had 347,970 total video views. Fatafeat also has an Instagram page, and as of now, it has 239,000 followers (www.instagram.com/fatafeatchannel/).

There is opportunity with Fatafeat to serve it globally, but we need to serve our core audience first. Fatafeat content is running on TLC in Turkey, which is great for us to start cross-pollinating.

**What are your biggest growth areas?**

Saudi drives revenue in FTA, and that’s going to be the case for a while. Our growth policy is to get into the local market in a meaningful way and build credible relationships and partnerships. The idea is to take what works in other parts of the world and make it work here with a local spin on it.

We have a pan regional approach – Farsi, Egypt, North Africa – but each of these is a very distinct market to operate in. With the right partners on the ground, it’s a win-win situation for both, as we bring to our local partners global content opportunities and they in turn give us knowledge about local markets.

We are always looking for more deals. You’ve got to bring something that your local partner appreciates. We are an active partner in all the deals that we sign. When we sign a deal, we are committed to making it work and seeing where we can leverage our expertise. That’s how our relationship with Image Nation has thrived since we signed up with them. Quest Arabia is among the top 20 channels in the UAE today.

**What is your view of competition in this region?**

There is enough space for all of us. More than dealing with competition, it’s about developing pay TV here in general rather than fighting amongst each other. We come together with other global content owners when necessary to work for the benefit of the market.

We could get further if we worked more collaboratively. It’s about demonstrating the value of pay TV but all the way back to B2B and B2C relationships. People understand that it’s worth paying for quality content. It will improve over time when you have a more globally aware population. There is still enormous growth potential for pay in the region – unlike Western Europe, where it has maxed out – that’s why it is such a key focus for Discovery.

Discovery has a very collaborative approach to growth; we believe in building long-term relationships and partnerships. We see value in building local connections. Our global products have gained more traction by working with local partners. *By Vibhuti Arora and Vijaya Cherian*
From left: Nick Barratt, Senior Manager – Broadcast and Bassam Faour, Broadcast Manager of MBC Group.
MBC MIGRATES PLAYOUT

MBC Group recently migrated the playout of its Al Arabiya and Al Hadath news channels to Pebble Beach Systems automation. In an exclusive interview with BroadcastPro ME, Senior Manager for Broadcast, Nick Barratt and Broadcast Manager, Bassam Faour share more details about the project.

MBC Group, the Arab world’s largest free-to-air broadcast network, recently migrated the playout of its 24-hour news channels to Pebble Beach Systems automation. This migration included the transfer of Al Arabiya News Channel and Al Hadath News Channel to Marina control in June 2016. The broadcaster, headquartered in Dubai, has confirmed that its longer term strategy is to eventually move the playout of all 23 channels to Marina in a phased operation.

Originally an ADC facility, MBC initially deployed a Pebble Beach Systems Neptune playout automation solution around five years ago, but the long-term goal was to implement a Marina solution. Marina deployment involved meeting specific requirements to cater to the demands of a fast-paced news environment.

While Al Arabiya News Channel covers events from across the Arab World to include politics, breaking news and other types of news & information, Al Hadath News Channel focuses on extensive live coverage of events as they happen, coupled with in-depth analysis, be it in the studio or on the ground. They aim to provide and ensure an uninterrupted news feed of current major stories. As with many live news channels, therefore, their scheduling requirements rarely fit a sequential workflow.

Each hour is scheduled to have a number of live segments, each of a nominal duration with commercial segments in between.

“...In practice, the live segments rarely...”
adhere to the scheduled durations, so the automation system needs to deal with last-second changes and not overthink pre-emption,” explains Nick Barratt, Senior Manager – Broadcast, MBC Group.

“One of the great features of Pebble Beach automation systems is the intelligence behind pre-emption, which enables the automation to make smart decisions about media and devices. However, this can also cause complications in fast-moving live scenarios. We worked extensively with Pebble Beach through this to produce an extremely capable live solution.”

Marina was a natural choice after the majority of channels were migrated to Neptune, with the long-term plan to unify all channels on a single automation platform. MBC worked closely with Pebble to fine tune the systems’ behaviour to fully allow for last-minute adjustments within a fast-paced news environment, where changes are the norm rather than the exception.

This is a pivotal moment for MBC as the broadcaster looks to develop a future-proof, scalable technical infrastructure.

“Unifying under the common user experience of an open system with an extensive and evolving library of API integrations allows us to take advantage of the technology changes currently happening in the broadcast world, regardless of manufacturer.

“FXP was a key feature for us, removing the existing bottle neck of separate transfer devices, along with reducing system complexity and possible points of failure”

Bassam Faour, Broadcast Manager, MBC Group

We aim to make it totally immaterial to the operator not only what systems underpin the channel they are working on, but also if those systems are physical, virtual or even their location,” explains Barratt.

A key factor in this decision is Marina’s distributed architecture, according to Barratt, as it has the flexibility to allocate resources as appropriate, rather than being restricted to a fixed client server configuration.

“Further deciding factors were the simple user interface, which minimises the training requirement and simplifies the transition process, and Pebble’s track record of supporting an open approach to systems and suppliers,” adds Bassam Faour, Broadcast Manager, MBC Group.

“This allows for a mix of different technology suppliers to work together utilising API interfaces.”

In addition to playout, the Marina deployment encompasses traffic integration with ongoing development for integration to the asset management system. It controls both the main and backup Harmonic Spectrum servers via API control, and it was key for MBC to be able to incorporate the Marina system into the existing infrastructure alongside Neptune, which accesses the servers via serial control.

While Neptune is designated as the master system for deleting material no longer required on the server, it has a view into Marina’s list media usage to ensure that no deletions are made from the server of media which Marina is scheduled to playout.

Marina controls two chains of best-of-breed high-end devices including decoders, mixers, graphics and Harmonic servers for each channel, via a single Marina playlist.

Samir Isbaih, Regional Manager for the Middle East at Pebble Beach Systems, says: “As a specialist vendor, we are adjusting as the market changes, offering a choice of technologies to suit different playout and automation platform requirements, including virtualised IP playout via Orca and our self-contained channel in a box solution, Stingray.

“In this region, where Neptune is the dominant automation solution, it is vital to offer a flexible but intelligent migration strategy to the latest platform, which also enables
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new channels to be launched. The solution at MBC is enabling them to run both systems in tandem and make the transition to the new platform at a pace that suits their business, with our support.”

One of the key deciding factors making Marina attractive to MBC is the fact that Marina is an evolving product that Pebble Beach Systems is continuously developing with the intention of adding new features. “Marina is considered the most modern enterprise multi-channel automation and content management product in the market,” claims Isbaih.

For a larger perspective, Marina is the most recent product to have been released into the market. In addition, Pebble Beach Systems is one of the few companies in the industry that continues to specialise in automation and playout; several competing solution providers have moved into other spheres of the industry or diluted their automation offerings.

In this case, MBC wanted full usage logs to be generated in order for device usage to be audited for optimal deployment of available devices. There is a requirement in future for multi-cast operations, where the system allows clients to be in different locations; if MBC chooses to expand or add further operational sites, Marina can expand to the multi-site environment. In addition, the solution needed to make use of API control across all devices to simplify future deployments and to be able to play very short clips, unlike servers under VDCP control.

“Multiple clips can be stacked on the same timeline and cued in advance, thanks to API control. This enables the end user to send commands in advance to the Harmonic server so that multiple very short clips can be played back to back,” says Isbaih.

In addition, multiple systems can be accessed from a single client. Main and backup playlists are on the same client application, so if one fails, the system can transfer instantly, with transparent switching as far as the operator is concerned. Mirroring is possible, with changes on the main list instantly reflected to the backup list.

The system also detects operational errors.

“Marina has sophisticated validation which doesn’t simply confirm that media is present, as for the older automation systems. We can also detect, for instance, the file format which is permitted for this playlist. If any other format is delivered, it will be flagged and an alert sent. It also provides editorial validation. For example, if a file has been declared editorially unacceptable, it will not play. All attributes such as aspect ratio, subtitle files, editorial approval and so on need to be acceptable for the file to be okay to play,” explains Isbaih.

Furthermore, Marina uses FXP rather than FTP transfer.

“This means that the system instructs both the source and destination devices and monitors the transfer, which is direct. The file doesn’t actually go through another box, but we are provided with a monitoring interface. We can then prioritise, control, stop, start and view it,” explains Faour. “FXP was a key feature for us, removing the existing bottle neck of separate transfer devices, along with reducing system complexity and possible points of failure.”

Additionally, a secondary validation is done so that these events can be sold. If a sponsor logo is scheduled, for instance, the automation will send the trigger and be aware whether the file is there, it will be cued ready for play, and the AsRun log will show that this logo went on air as a separate entity, for however long, so that the info is there for billing.

“AsRunning of secondary events, and therefore the ability to accurately track non-primary commercial elements, is a huge benefit. The issue in previous iterations of automation used was that ‘just play’ triggers were included in AsRuns, regardless of whether the device responded or not, which in case of missing items on air meant that each event had to be checked manually using our compliance recordings,” explains Barratt.

The solution includes Air Protect redundancy, with both systems playing in parallel. This offers device failure protection as well as media availability protection. If an event fails to cue on the main device but the other is successfully cued, Marina can instantly effect an auto switch over and automatically choose the server with available media.

“Unifying under the common user experience of an open system with an extensive and evolving library of API integrations allows us to take advantage of the technology changes currently happening in the broadcast world, regardless of manufacturer”

Nick Barratt, Senior Manager – Broadcast, MBC Group
Furthermore, if errors are detected outside the automation control, a button on the Marina control interface allows manual switching between the ports.

The solution had to be integrated with several other existing solutions at MBC’s headquarters in Dubai. Imagine Communications’ Broadcast Master Traffic was already in place, but the implementation of Marina necessitated some work from them to have access to all of Marina’s functionality. Near line storage based on the real-time missing media list. Transfers from near line to main and backup Harmonic video server and video server space is managed by Pebble automation. We have auto registration as soon as a file is available on the server or any storage monitored by Marina. We automatically update the database, rather than requiring manual registration, as with other systems. The information automatically updated includes duration, media ID and start of media (SOM) info, plus any further metadata available in the MXF wrapper,” explains Isbaih.

There is also an IP driver for the EPG system, which ensures that the EPG automatically follows any changes to the Al-Arabiya dynamic news schedule. MBC has Marina’s rich API, which allows reading from the database, writing to the database, real-time reading of playlists and live updating of playlist.

“We are actively working with the available APIs of all of our systems to enhance and streamline our workflows,” confirms Barratt.

“The future plans for Marina integration include event-based AsRunning, syncing of useful metadata from our MAM and potentially live playlist updates from the traffic system.” He explains, though, that the transition to Marina has had some challenges.

“Marina is an extremely versatile system, but numerous functionalities had to be reworked to allow for the flexibility required for live news. This involved the entire MBC engineering and operation teams working closely with Pebble Beach Systems to detail functionality expectations, and test and roll out system updates to fully meet the requirements of the channels.

“We worked with Pebble Beach Systems for a number of months to ensure our functionality expectations were met, and they managed to allocate resources to implement the required changes in an accelerated time frame. We then moved into the roll-out phase, which consisted of a six-week parallel run ensuring that the core system remained stable while transitioning to new file delivery workflows. This healthy parallel run period highlighted any issues and resulted in a complete non-event during switch-over,” concludes Barratt.
Starz Play Arabia recently launched its 4K UHD direct-to-consumer service becoming the first SVOD service provider to do so in the MENA region. **BroadcastPro ME** brings you details of the technology behind the service.

When Starz Play Arabia launched in April last year, it marked the first Starz-branded service outside of the US. One year later in May, the service achieved a technological milestone by launching its first 4K UHD service in the region.

“Making 4K a reality is just one of many initiatives coming from Starz Play in recent months,” says Maaz Sheikh, CEO of Starz Play Arabia.

“Technical upgrades have been a key focus area of Starz Play and offering 4K is a way to differentiate our service. Starz Play features movies and series from all the major studios and has signed deals all over the world to bring the best content possible to its subscriber base,” Sheikh comments.

However, in a region with limited broadband penetration, launching a 4K stream came with numerous challenges.

Saleem Bhatti, Chief Technology Officer of Starz Play Arabia, says “the particular challenge is when VOD services deliver 4K quality to an off-net CDN’s network POP”.

“The overall network infrastructure is still growing throughout MENA, so delivery of an end-to-end 4K service will become easier as more service providers begin 4K services. The ISP or telco owns the last mile delivery and unless they deliver a constant and robust 15Mbps bitrate that is dedicated to the 4K stream, the quality of experience will be affected.”

4K content is delivered at a 2160p resolution over IP networks, and most of the streaming service providers focus on encoding standards and bitrate optimisations to maintain quality across devices. To achieve a certain standard of delivery, therefore, required preparation on the part of the Starz Play team. According to Bhatti, encoding is just one aspect of delivery.

“Like most streaming service providers, we started by optimising the encoding bitrates and worked on the
best possible renderings for a seamless delivery,” says Bhatti.

The company opted for several different solutions to achieve 4K delivery within the existing broadband infrastructure of the region. One of the ways was to analyse the realistic average throughput to end users.

With the help of Global Traffic Manager, a solution from its partner Cedexis, Starz Play Arabia has combined real-time internet performance monitoring with real-time global traffic management using crowd-sourced Real User Monitoring from the Cedexis Radar Community.

“By using real user metrics, we retrieve the realistic average internet throughput available to end users residing in different regions, countries, cities and even ISPs. This valuable data has allowed us to create algorithms that have helped to automate the detection of devices capable of handling 4K video streams,” says Bhatti.

The service uses multiple CDNs – Level 3 and Akamai – to provide an unhindered viewing experience.

To switch between different CDNs in real-time, it uses a combination of Radar and Cedexis Openmix technology. Cedexis Openmix improves application availability by load balancing across multiple cloud regions or cloud and private data centres. It automatically responds to detected server, data centre and ISP peering congestion and outages. This has helped Starz Play to avoid any CDN throughput bottlenecks, and select the best CDN to deliver 4K streams.

By utilising this intelligence layer deployment over the platform, Starz Play has improved re-buffering issues, and avoided streaming start failures, resulting in significantly improved video start times.

“Our next challenge was to maintain business KPIs alongside growing technical requirements. By selecting the best traffic-shaping decisions, the company managed to maintain performance, reduce costs and make availability improvements regardless of tier-2 challenges,” adds Bhatti.

Providing 4K to partners
Starz Play syndicates 4K content to a number of telcos throughout the region, with this offering being available to partner service providers “We could not have accomplished the speed of delivery if we had committed to our own transcode farms, say, two years ago – they would have buckled under the strain” Saleem Bhatti, CTO, Starz Play Arabia
in the UAE, KSA and Qatar.

“We had earlier announced a partnership with Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. MENA to bring the latest 4K content to its customers in the region as well as a partnership with Ooredoo Qatar to provide premium 4K English and Arabic content through Ooredoo tv and Mozaic TV services to viewers in Qatar,” confirms Sheikh.

The entire service from the ground up was designed using cloud-based services, he adds. This gave flexibility across a number of key areas in the production process. Importantly for 4K, working within the cloud takes the strain out of 4K logistics with the transfer and storage of over 100TB of content – often with 4K files sizes approaching 1TB.

“We could not have accomplished the speed of delivery if we had committed to our own transcode farms, say, two years ago – they would have buckled under the strain. Redundancy and ROI are not an issue for us with our cloud infrastructure,” notes Bhatti.

Starz Play’s transcoding partner is deep linked to the company’s cloud and offers prioritised services specifically for 4K. The operator produces adaptive bitrate formats for OTT and IPTV formats for telco partnerships – all accomplished through fast, automated and secure workflows. Along the way, the service monitors quality control and embeds subtitles in Arabic and French.

A 4K technology primer

4K UHD has four times the clarity of full-HD content, thus four times more bandwidth is required to process and stream the content. 4K is very bandwidth-hungry, so it is always a challenging task to squeeze it into less bandwidth and provide the service over-the-top – where the speed of delivery to a consumer’s home is over the internet and not through a dedicated broadband link as with IPTV. The broadband throughput of the last-mile to consumers remains crucial for a successful experience viewing 4K UHD at home.

Source files are large (700 GB in size) and Starz Play has tested different compression codecs (H.264, HEVC) to ensure quality at different bitrates, app responses and delivery, the CTO claims.

“Based on multiple tests at different locations and endpoints, we decided to use HEVC transcoding for PRORes files in multiple renditions,” informs Bhatti.

Adaptive-bitrate streaming with different renditions for the 4K service helps Starz Play to deliver life-like experiences on big-screens. The company has optimised its backend and streaming platform in a way that accelerates app start times. Video playback reaches the highest bitrate in 10-15 seconds. Starz Play provides three 4K streams – 3840 x 2160 @ 10 Mbps, 3840 x 2160 @ 12 Mbps and 3840 x 2160 @ 15 Mbps.

The 4K streams are now available to a growing subscriber base throughout the region as Starz Play continues to build its 4K library.

“The particular challenge is when VOD services deliver 4K quality to an off-net CDN’s network POP. The overall network infrastructure is still growing throughout MENA, so delivery of an end-to-end 4K service will become easier as more service providers begin 4K services”

Saleem Bhatti, CTO, Starz Play Arabia
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CHANGING THE GAME

In an exclusive interview with Vijaya Cherian, Sanjay Raina, GM & Vice President of Fox International Channels, speaks about the network’s new business strategy and the secret behind Fox's rising success in the region.

Two years ago, Fox Middle East suffered a setback when Abu Dhabi Media shut its pay-TV operations and Pehla was acquired by OSN, immediately making its offerings on both platforms redundant. It has taken two years for Sanjay Raina, GM & Vice President at Fox International Channels, to resurrect the network to its past glory and set it on a new path to profitability, with a refreshingly different business strategy that sees Fox straddling the pay and free-to-air spaces with equal ease.

Fox previously operated two FTA channels in the region. Raina, however, quickly realised the futility of confining himself to the crowded MENA FTA space, where there are now more than 800 channels scrambling for advertising revenue, which mostly goes into MBC Group’s coffers.

“FTA is hugely dependent on consumer spend. In the world and in this region, there is a subdued feeling of consumer spending. Advertising is down. If you’re only focused on FTA TV and your source of revenue is FTA monies, then you’re in for a tough call.

“There are very few other than MBC that may be breathing very well in the FTA market, so something must be reset or re-input in the market for this sector to grow,” he adds, calling the FTA space an “I-live-in-hope industry”, unlike pay, which assures a fixed monthly income from the subscriber.

“There is an assured top line. I think a lot of FTA stations will rethink their strategy and join the pay-TV bandwagon.”

Raina attempted something different for the first time in the region by moving two of Fox’s channels from the FTA space to beIN’s pay platform. Seeing the success of this move, he and his team have been encouraged to test the waters with more content and are now looking to bring more genre-specific channels to the region.

“We are breathing better with our new strategy to keep some channels in the FTA space and move others to pay,” Raina says.

“Our partnership with beIN has meant that Fox and Fox Movies have now come centre stage and we have bought additional content to ensure it is pay-TV worthy. We launched three movie channels – Fox Action, Fox Family Movies and FX – in the month of April on Etisalat, My-HD and Ooredoo. These are well made pay-TV channels. It has given more power to these
three operators, and the channels are also performing extremely well on these three platforms.”

Raina has gone one step further by attempting a global first with a Nat Geo Kids two-hour block on Majid TV. In this case, Fox has revisited international kids’ programmes and dubbed them locally for regional viewing. Seeing the success of this block, which airs in prime time KSA 7-9pm, the team is now evaluating launching a full-fledged National Geographic Kids channel and considering whether it should be in English or Arabic. If it takes off, the channel will be a global first for National Geographic, which does not operate any specific kids’ channels.

“This block has been doing extremely well on Majid TV,” says Raina, adding that it has become possible to bring more National Geographic content to the region because Fox now has a 73% stake in National Geographic Partners as part of a $730m deal. This gives the team access to a lot more content, including kids-related National Geographic content.

“Before the partnership, we used to be their international partners for television, but now it is a Fox-owned product. This new entity has been set up between National Geographic Society and Fox. It means Fox now has access to all of National Geographic Society’s assets, including its books, magazines, travel and merchandise among others,” Raina confirms.

“We are re-scripting some of the content and have employed dubbing agencies within the region to use kids’ voices or kid-friendly voices. At the moment, we have some 360 hours of programming that we deliver every year on this two-hour block. We don’t have a channel called NG Kids, but there seems to be interest in this region for one.”

Raina believes this is only the tip of the iceberg and is brimming with ideas on how to provide more value to viewers.

“Customers today are becoming finicky and monies are tough. People are looking for value-adds. Imagine your basic package costs you $100. You could tell them that for an additional $10, they can download an app that offers a 20% discount on travel for a Nat Geo cruise or a Nat Geo lodge, or you can get 200 hours of free programming from Nat Geo. Those are the kind of value-adds that viewers need, in addition to really good content.”

Raina is keen to bring dollar-plus value-adds into the mix.

“Otherwise, people are, at some point, going to question why they are paying $120 a month on entertainment in summer when everyone’s on holiday. We are going to be very vigilant about opportunities. As a content player, our job is to seize any content opportunity and be present there. We would also love to work with everybody rather than restrict ourselves. We are not necessarily exclusive. Fox and Fox Movies are exclusive to beIN, but the rest of our products are not exclusive. That is the best way to

“With the CPS [cost per subscriber] model, it is incumbent upon the channel owners also to ensure better content. If you are able to sell more and perform better, it works for both the platform and the channel”

Sanjay Raina, GM & Vice President at Fox International Channels
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At the moment, most content owners charge a fixed fee to platforms to run their channels. Raina says platforms should be willing to explore the cost per subscriber (CPS) model.

“Globally, payment doesn’t always mean only a fixed fee. Most companies pay a lower fixed fee but include a CPS model. The more popular the channel, the more money the platform pays to the channel owner. With the CPS model, it is incumbent upon the channel owners also to ensure better content. If you are able to sell more and perform better, it works for both the platform and the channel.”

Fox is working towards building a strong content base at the moment in the region. The network presently has around 52 people at its Abu Dhabi office and 20 at its Dubai office.

“We have a strong programming team in the region and they are based in Abu Dhabi. This team deals with all the Hollywood studios, including Paramount, Warner, Sony, independents, Miramax, and we buy products from them.”

In addition, Fox is looking to explore opportunities to launch channels in Arabic and other languages.

“There is so much opportunity to provide more content to the population here, especially within specific genres like crime, lifestyle and travel, and also within different languages.”

Fox has also introduced several firsts within the UAE. National Geographic Abu Dhabi, for instance, is the first to be named after a city globally. In addition, the team has been doing extremely well in terms of producing branded content and is averaging eight to ten productions a year. Several projects have already been produced, including the UAE army’s first trip to Everest, which is due to air in November or December; a documentary on the conscription of young Emirati men and women; another on Almarai, showing the highly nutritious grass the dairy company grows in Argentina for its cows; and the development of the Abu Dhabi and Dubai International Airports.

“We also did a programme with Land Rover, attempting to cover the spot where the Tropic of Cancer passes through the UAE,” Raina says, reiterating that the network is looking increasingly at value-adds and the possibility of launching more products that consumers can associate with the National Geographic brand.

“We are very hopeful that we can have an extension of National Geographic on FTA, but we don’t know in what form. It may be science. We have got ourselves into both areas now, but we have kept our factual channels within FTA while we are going as wide as we can with pay,” Raina adds.

Fox is also in discussions with a number of local entities to bring fact-based information to the floor in partnership with National Geographic. While Raina has set the stage for Fox to explore new partnerships in the near future, he believes media entities in the region can achieve a lot more through collaboration. One of his

“We would ... love to work with everybody rather than restrict ourselves. We are not necessarily exclusive. Fox and Fox Movies are exclusive to beIN, but the rest of our products are not exclusive. That is the best way to move forward according to us”

Sanjay Raina, GM & Vice President at Fox International Channels
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big concerns is that “most pay TV networks still operate in silos” here. He believes collaboration is the way forward for an industry that wants to grow subscriber numbers and change the viewer mindset.

“At the moment, there are deep distinctions between what each pay-TV operator offers in terms of content. While one’s forte may be entertainment, the other’s seems to be sport, while still others are focusing on low pay. North Africa is mainly French so they don’t count. Most operators stay away from Egypt because regulatory rules are very tough. That’s 80 million people ruled out. Iran is out of the question. What’s left? If we don’t come on to the same platform and discuss what needs to be done to up the values and volumes of this industry, we will indeed reach a plateau.”

“If we don’t come on to the same platform and discuss what needs to be done to up the values and volumes of this industry, we will indeed reach a plateau”

Sanjay Raina, GM & Vice President at Fox International Channels

Raina set the stage in the region by being the first to move a couple of Fox’s channels onto a pay platform. Since then, we have seen other high-profile channels like Fatafeat from the Discovery stable move into the pay space as well. Without doubt, some other FTA channels will see value in moving out of their comfort zones to explore the possibility of having their hand in the pay/subscription pie as well. It will be interesting to see how this pans out.
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Heba Al Samil is Digital Media Director at Dubai Channels Network.
Awaan, an OTT service from Dubai’s state broadcaster, offers content from several Arabic-language broadcasters on a common platform.

Heba Al Samt, Digital Media Director at Dubai Channels Network, speaks in detail about the platform’s offerings and its future plans.

**TV FOR ALL**

Dubai Channels Network (DCN), Dubai Media Inc.’s TV and radio arm, launched its online platform Awaan in June this year, offering viewers access to Arabic TV content from different broadcasters. The idea was to bring as much varied content as possible and build a platform on which broadcasters could showcase their content libraries. In addition to Dubai TV, Awaan has already signed up Al Aan TV and Future TV for free-to-air channels, as well as Selevision’s Seevi to provide encrypted channels.

What makes Awaan unique is the fact that it offers content from many different broadcasters. It also offers subscription, streaming services and video on demand, which makes it a one-of-a-kind initiative by a public broadcaster to offer a common platform for content from various players. It scores well with content owners for the flexibility it offers as a broadcaster can have its own independent service while also hosting content with Awaan.

The platform has been gaining traction since its soft launch before Ramadan. According to Heba Al Samt, Digital Media Director at DCN, Awaan is a way to engage broadcasters and generate quality content on a common platform.

“We had a strategy for Awaan to make it more than just an OTT platform for DCN. There are several OTT players, both regional and international, operating in the MENA market. How do you differentiate your service to get noticed? We decided to choose the best available content to offer to the viewer in the best possible quality,” claims Al Samt.

Awaan was created as a multi-channel network, hence any publisher, whether broadcaster or content creator, can host content on it. The platform also offers full end-to-end support in terms of technology. It handles the full technology part, including content and metadata migration from any platform to Awaan, so any content creators wanting to get on board just need to worry about the content; the Awaan team handles the technology.

Awaan is able to track viewership details and traffic segregated by publisher, media asset, content creator and so on. Content monetisation can also be customised for different publishers with different revenue-sharing or commercial business models.

Awaan’s focus is on Arabic programming for now, but eventually it will have English programming as well. “We have created a package called Pay to Watch Selevision that offers encrypted channels. The service already has 10,000-plus subscribers and 2.5m views. Awaan is also a streaming platform for live sporting events such as the Royal Ascot, Dubai World Cup and other premium events.”

Awaan has 70,000 video assets, and growing. The platform offers series, documentaries and other types of programme, going back to the ’60s and the ’70s, from DMI’s archives.

The development of the Awaan platform began in 2011. The state broadcaster’s online platform was previously called DMI on Demand and had limited content from DMI’s library only. Awaan includes more services and features, including video on demand, live streaming, catch-up, Awaan Gold paid package (five paid channels – Seevii, Dubai Sports Premium and Awaan’s latest shows), customised user recognition for subscribed users, and features such as start over and resume watching. It also has a completely new look and feel.

“Aftet Dubai Media Inc. (DMI) was restructured to create DCN, the management decided to remodel DMI on Demand as well, and that’s how Awaan was born. We were given more freedom to create an OTT platform that offered content to cater to a wider audience,” Al Samt says.

Al Samt says DCN is the first broadcaster to create an Apple app and have a presence on Apple Watch as well. In addition to

**Snapshot**

- **Objective:** To build an online platform for video content
- **End user:** Dubai Channels Network (DCN)
- **Platform:** Awaan
- **Key solutions provider:** Mangomolo
- **CDN:** Level 3
- **Content providers:** DCN, Future TV, Al Aan TV, Selevision
- **Content volume:** 23 TB
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being on iOS and Android, Awaan has also launched on Samsung smart TVs and Humax decoders, while support for Chromcast is being developed now. “We are currently in talks with a local broadcaster to create a VOD service in addition to its live streaming service. Awaan will have a separate page for this broadcaster once the deal is finalised.”

The creation and development of the platform was outsourced to Mangomolo, a Lebanon-headquartered digital technology company. Mangomolo built the platform for Awaan to offer live streaming and video on demand (VOD), automating the entire video delivery process to offer real-time viewership analytics with in-depth profiling that includes age, gender and social status. Also built into the platform is cloud video chaptering, social content synchronisation and virality tracking and social monitoring, for seamless video delivery.

“We had a strategy for Awaan to make it more than just an OTT platform for DMI. There are several OTT players, both regional and international, operating in the MENA market ... We decided to choose the best available content to offer to the viewer in the best possible quality.”

Heba Al Samt, Digital Media Director, DCN

“Mangomolo has been involved right from the start in building Awaan. The company’s involvement began as a conventional technology provider, which soon became more of a deeper collaboration in terms of R&D, testing new disruptive ideas and eventually taking this rather traditional industry to a whole different level. “Our relationship with Mangomolo has helped us in creating the platform. We launched the beta edition of Awaan a week before Ramadan, because we didn’t want to lose hits during Ramadan. As expected, the platform received substantial traffic during Ramadan,” she adds.

The top three shows on Awaan are Ayna Omry, Al Okhwa Zananery and Al Khayala, with drama, entertainment and music videos being the most watched genres. During Ramadan, the Awaan website recorded more than 500,000 views.

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Awaaan automates and enhances the entire web streaming platform, from better audience analysis to automated VOD delivery workflow, moving into content monetisation, social engagement/monitoring and ad serving.

“The product will continue to evolve and we will keep adding new features to make sure our clients are a step ahead in terms of making new technology work for them and for their viewers,” Al Samt says.

The service uses multiple CDNs, depending on the latency in delivering content to the viewer. A smart algorithm tracks the speed of delivery to viewers from different locations and serves content from the data point that minimises the latency. For workflow, Awaan uses an automated mechanism with artificial intelligence algorithms that track and automatically ingest content from its internal playout servers while detecting, tracking and removing commercial breaks. This provides clean content in the VOD library and in-depth analysis of content.

To avoid buffering and pixelation, Awaan uses adaptive streaming, a process that adjusts the quality of a video delivered to a web page based on changing network conditions. Awaan has streaming quality from 340p to 1080p to provide HD-quality streams without any pixilation.

“What you see in Awaan today is just the tip of the iceberg. We have very aggressive plans for the platform, to offer the best experience to users on every device. We also hope to empower and nurture talent by giving them a platform where they can share, monetise and analyse their content,” Al Samt says.

The service has developed on many levels in the past five years. “Now we have more clarity about what we want to achieve. We want to make Awaan the Netflix of Arabic content. Netflix doesn’t offer live streaming, but we do, in addition to VOD, catchup and HD content. We have grown slowly and learnt from other people’s mistakes. We have been testing different models and getting our viewers’ feedback on the services. Not being in the spotlight gave us the time to do that.

“Having said that, we are not competing with anyone but want to create a value product. Digital media will go forward when everyone works together. Audience engagement is the key to making a digital service successful. We cannot fool the audience, there is a lot of transparency in digital media. We also don’t see the need to push something no one watches; figures speak for themselves. We may not be the first in a lot of things, but we make sure we are the best,” Al Samt notes.

“**We are not competing with anyone but want to create a value product. Digital media will go forward when everyone works together. We cannot fool the audience as there is a lot of transparency in digital media. We also don’t see the need to push something no one watches; figures speak for themselves**”

Heba Al Samt, Digital Director, DCN
Slogan created by:

Name: Tim Jacobs
Job title: Technical Director
Company: NBC Universal

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IS YOUR OTT SERVICE READY FOR PRIME TIME?

Operators worldwide have recognised the need to build an OTT service, and have started down that road. Rodrigo Fernandes of Irdeto has some dos and don’ts for operators looking to create an OTT offering have a key advantage over new market entrants – a deep knowledge of the customer base. A notable example is the opportunity for MENA operators to grow premium OTT services by beginning with lower ARPU content tailored for regional audiences, such as Arabic-language content for distribution across sub regions.

Many operators are rushing to roll out OTT platforms, or have already launched in-house engineered offerings to capture the wave of customers for whom OTT is the new normal – but are these offerings actually well engineered enough to do the job? Informa expects revenue from pure OTT services to grow to $37 billion by 2017, and while the growth curve is steep, pure OTT revenue will likely reach just 10% of pay-TV revenue by the end of this decade.

The MENA market itself is ripe for this level of investment, with a fourfold increase in mobile broadband subscriptions driving demand for OTT services.

Growing consumer demand is a great opportunity for operators to drive revenue, and established operators have a key advantage over new market entrants – a deep knowledge of the customer base. A notable example is the opportunity for MENA operators to grow premium OTT services by beginning with lower ARPU content tailored for regional audiences, such as Arabic-language content for distribution across sub regions.
“A properly thought-out OTT offering is a complex operation to put in place, posing a number of challenges to the operator during the creation of the service and on an ongoing basis as the proposition grows”

Rodrigo Fernandes, Product Director Multiscreen, Irdeto

Avoiding an OTT box office flop
To ensure a successful move from broadcast to OTT, there are three major pitfalls to avoid:

1. Setting up a separate OTT infrastructure
Broadcasters and operators moving into OTT may be tempted to look at setting up a separate infrastructure for the service. However, investing in a separate ecosystem is costly and involves duplication of effort (content ingestion, metadata management) and pressure on resources (staff, expertise, time).

Integration of infrastructure reduces overheads, increases alignment and allows the leveraging of content rights across both platforms, as many existing content licences already include extension to unmanaged devices. The final benefit is that operation of the two systems can be fully integrated through a set of unified operational UIs that simplify day-to-day workflows and manage devices and subscriptions transparently across both channels.

2. Missing out on easy options for mobile video
With the way consumer viewing habits have evolved, there are some quick-win options with existing subscribers that operators must not overlook before trying full OTT services. Research shows that a streaming service to mobile devices (as well as secondary STBs) is one of the most effective ways to improve subscriber satisfaction. Many operators can easily expand their existing TV services to stream content to mobile devices within the home, and even for download and go.

3. Getting the timing wrong
Timing is critical when moving from broadcast to OTT, as going too fast or slow can result in failure. On the one hand, waiting until all options are straightened out may lead to missing the OTT boat. On the other hand, underestimating the complexity makes rushing into proprietary solutions seem tempting, but can lead to technology lock-in that impedes future growth.

Creating a blockbuster offering
After going through the process of setting up an OTT offering, it’s important to monitor the service to identify when it’s time to scale up. While a home-grown approach may be ideal for start-up OTT services looking to manage a limited range of workflows, operators must be ready for the signs that a do-it-yourself approach is limiting growth.

Consider the following points to ensure that OTT offerings are robust enough to deal with market shifts and are able to provide the level of service to which customers have become accustomed:

1. How rapidly can my business accommodate shifting and emerging OTT technology needs?
For maximum reach, operators should adopt the latest in consumer technology, be that devices or browsers. On the business side, they should also be able to react to new video formats, metadata schemes and streaming technologies – flexibility is key. Ideally, OTT vendors should be able to automatically support new digital rights management (DRM) types and streaming formats to their video content management system (CMS), relieving operators of any burden from integration. This is not the case with all vendors, so ask the right questions when forging long-term partnerships.

2. Is it taking too long for catch-up content to reach consumer devices?
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according to rules based on metadata. Streamlining content preparation workflows can reduce time-to-screen for newly acquired or catch-up content by up to 40%.

3. How easy is it to implement an increasingly complex range of rights agreements with different availability windows and pricing plans that change over time? Videos can be automatically de-activated when rights expire via an automated CMS. The same technology can intelligently manage categories to maximise lifetime content revenues by moving an episode between price plans at the right time.

In addition to having a robust OTT platform for the best reach and usability, operators must also have the flexibility to experiment and change offerings quickly to create a blockbuster service. Operators should look to test different content packages and pricing models – such as providing cash and mobile payment options in MENA – as every market is different and consumer demands shift rapidly. Even established OTT providers like Netflix constantly tweak their offers.

Sit back, relax and enjoy – how QoS enriches customer experience

Alongside the business needs above, operators must be aware of the demand for reliability and quality of service from customers. Customers have little tolerance for slow delivery or viewing glitches, with anything less than a broadcast experience leaving them disappointed.

In order for video content to get to the end user, it has to jump through a number of hoops. Typically for OTT delivery, the bottlenecks arise from the integration points between the multiple systems that process the content, including encoding/transcoding, packaging, encryption, storage [CDNs] and playout.

With any number of different data flows that the content can take, each OTT service needs to be carefully monitored to identify capacity bottlenecks and potential failure points. Operators must consistently ask themselves the following questions to stay on top of QoS and reliability:

- Does my technology contain a single point of failure?
- Is my technology managed by just a few highly skilled individuals?
- Would it be difficult for my organisation if key individuals left suddenly?
- Does my technology have video processing delays because no one is able to fix my solution?
- Is my organisation missing documentation for the architecture and operations of its video preparation systems?

“If operators that have been through the process of setting up an OTT offering, it’s important to monitor the service to identify when it’s time to scale up. While a home-grown approach may be ideal for start-up OTT services looking to manage a limited range of workflows, operators must be ready for the signs that a do-it-yourself approach is limiting growth”

Rodrigo Fernandes, Product Director Multiscreen, Irdeto

If the answer to any of these statements is yes, then operators should seriously consider if their OTT service has an appropriate level of support and resilience. Ideally, OTT services should be as robust as broadcast infrastructure, and should include 24/7 network monitoring to identify anomalies before they affect the end user.

Making a classic rather than a summer hit – how OTT can work for you long-term

Flexibility is the key to making OTT work. Businesses in the MENA region and worldwide must be able to respond with equal speed to the roll-out of new technologies such as UHD, new devices used by consumers, and changes in consumption patterns. Crucially, OTT solutions must be able to grow with the business and follow the trends that emerge as the technology develops apace.

Expanding into OTT is a very important move, and hopefully this article is a helpful guide to operators and broadcasters looking at rolling out a service, as well as those wondering if they may have outgrown their DIY offerings. Competition for consumers’ time and money is not about to abate, and operators that evolve their offerings to suit new consumption methods can create personalised TV services that propel them into tremendous leadership positions.

Rodrigo Fernandes is Product Director Multiscreen at Irdeto.
Turkey-based firm HD Protek recently upgraded its OB van to include a modular infrastructure. The revamped van offers flexible work space with the ability to expand or contract as per project requirements.

Turkish OB company HD Protek, a division of Saran Media, provides engineering, broadcast and production services throughout Turkey and internationally. Among its many technical accomplishments is the fact that HD Protek is the first OB company in Turkey to design a 16-camera HD live-broadcast vehicle. The OB company recently worked with Turkish systems integrator Teratek to overhaul its HDP 04 OB van with all-new HD equipment.

HD Protek's main market is sports production, but it also covers other live TV programming and events such as concerts and festivals. With these events growing in popularity, the aim was to make HDP 04 even more flexible so that it could easily accommodate any type of production, and at the same time, ensure it would be compatible with the latest post-production elements of its customers' workflows.

That meant outfitting the van with all the essentials of a modern broadcast facility, such as up-to-the-minute encoding technology and broadcast equipment, and the latest data connection and communication protocols.

Yucel Ozacar, GM of HD Protek, gives an overview of the project. He says the foundation of the overhaul was a modular infrastructure that allowed a flexible work space.

“We had to ensure that all of the various production elements were located or relocated in different places...
within the van, and the capabilities could be expanded or contracted as needed to suit the requirements of any given project. For example, during productions that require both a video mixer and a director, HD Protek can convert the space next to the video mixer into a production area and relocate the slow-motion server operators to behind the director position. Also, depending on the number of cameras used in the production, HD Protek can easily turn the shading area into a recording area. With HDP 04 producing an average of four sporting events each week in addition to a growing roster of other live programming, the versatility of a modular infrastructure is important,” he explains.

Besides its modular design, the upgrade resulted in another significant change: the move from tape to data. HD Protek removed its old tape recorders and replaced them with Blackmagic HyperDeck Studio, AJA Ki Pro and EVS XTnano data recorders to accommodate the modern data-based workflows more common in today’s broadcast environment. Furthermore, with HD Protek’s specially developed control software, crews can control all the recorders from one location. Now, HDP 04 can support a wide range of popular formats and codecs, such as DNxHD, ProRes and XDCAM HD, and can transmit signals over IP and fibre.

The nine-metre-long van can accommodate a crew of 10, with different workstations for system control, operation functions and wireless signal encoding/decoding, along with a separate audio control room. The van is wired for up to 12 Sony cameras. Other major equipment inside the van includes Sony switchers and monitors, Pesa video routers, Crystal Vision video distribution and synchroniser products, Canon video projectors, an Imagine Communications video matrix, a Calrec audio mixer/router and a Clear-Com intercom system.

Overall, the upgrades HD Protek made to HDP 04 have significantly accelerated the workflow for its busy and dynamic production schedule and helped to make the OB company more competitive. For example, installing a Calrec Summa broadcast-grade audio console — the first Summa in the Turkish OB market — saves HD Protek’s sound engineers a lot of time and effort compared to the old tape-based audio setup.

HD Protek needed HDP 04’s equipment to be as flexible as the truck, such as being able to configure audio meters to meet changing requirements, and rapidly reconfigure audio I/O and system setups. It was able to work alongside equipment manufacturers to ensure that these requirements were met. The Calrec Summa, for example, helps streamline the audio workflow. Knowing that engineers can easily track the signal and that the console will work without question is a big comfort and enables HD Protek to handle more complex shows more easily.

The Summa makes it possible for HDP 04’s sound engineers to configure the meters however they want, tracking every output, aux output, main and loudness meter on-screen in any layout, to follow the signal visually as it flows through the system. I/O patching

“Thanks to this overhaul, we now have the resources to take on more complex productions more easily for our customers, so we are well positioned to be a force in the market well into the future”

Yucel Ozacar, GM of HD Protek
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is easy, as the system identifies the I/O box before patching a signal on an empty fader, and I/O ports can be grouped logically using port lists.

The Hydra2 matrix system and the simplicity of operation make it easy for sound engineers to reconfigure the console from one show to another, which happens daily with HD Protek’s full schedule and variety of events. All these features accelerate workflow and fit the design principle for the truck.

“Given the market demand for an OB van with HDP 04’s size and capabilities, taking the van out of service to complete the renovation was the biggest challenge we faced during the process. In fact, because customers were desperate for this particular truck, there were a few instances in which HD Protek had to send it on assignments while the renovation was still in progress. The project was finally finished in March 2016. The end result was well worth the time,” says Ozacar.

HDP 04’s first live broadcast was The Voice Turkey, and it has since covered volleyball and beach volleyball. Its latest project was managing the host broadcasting operation for the 2016 UEFA European Under-17 Championship in Baku, Azerbaijan. “HD Protek’s engineers have a keen sense of technical trends and what our customers need. In this case, meeting that need required brand-new equipment and workflow and a commitment to short-term downtime, which was very difficult in a busy market like ours. Thanks to this overhaul, we now have the resources to take on more complex productions more easily for our customers, so we are well positioned to be a force in the market well into the future,” concludes Ozacar.
PROREVIEW

Having been a DaVinci Resolve Studio user for six years, I have to say version 12.5 is the most exciting release so far, and also the most polished. With more than 250 new features added and countless enhancements to existing features, DaVinci Resolve 12.5 has made a mark by becoming a more prominent tool in the industry, not just for colour grading, but now for editing as well.

As soon as I took my first look at the GUI, I noticed some important changes. The interface now has a more polished and sophisticated look. Resolve 12.5 has reorganised the previously congested menu, which has made it much more user-friendly and less overwhelming for a first-time user, a crucial aspect to ensuring filmmakers can focus purely on telling their stories.

As with version 12, there are four separate pages, or rooms, that users can go into to complete their projects: Media, Edit, Colour and Delivery. Also as with Resolve 12, there are two different versions of Resolve that users can try: DaVinci Resolve, which is available to download for free from the Blackmagic Design website for Mac or...

THE DAVINCI CODE - RESOLVED

Dubai-based editor Nina Sargsyan gives us the lowdown on DaVinci Resolve Studio version 12.5
PC, or DaVinci Resolve Studio, which adds additional features for professional users, which is available from authorised resellers for Mac, PC or Linux from $995.

The Edit Page

For starters, let’s dive into the exciting new changes on the Edit page. With the addition of a few new features, editing has now become much faster and easier in Resolve 12.5.

When working on large projects with overcrowded timelines and numerous clips to sort through, editors are always looking for ways to simplify workflow. They need to constantly refer to the metadata of the clips they’re working on, and to make that easier, version 12.5 has added the Metadata palette to the Edit Page. In previous versions of DaVinci Resolve, one had to jump back and forth from the media page to check the metadata of clips.

Another enhancement is the option of having Cinema mode available on the Edit Page, so editors can now seamlessly switch in and out of the mode during playback to easily view their work in full screen. Another handy feature added to the Edit page is the option of viewing a clip’s audio waveforms directly on the video clip as an overlay in the source viewer. This makes it easier to navigate through video and look for audio cues.

Advanced Editing Features

As an editor myself, I work on-site on mobile workstations, jumping from one location to another, always looking for ways to make my workflow cleaner, simpler and more functional, needing more flexible software. With version 12.5, Blackmagic has taken DaVinci Resolve a step further by adding the necessary features for a faster, more functional and smoother workflow, even when editing dailies on set.

Let’s start with the basics. The menu on top has now been reorganised and editing tools now have their own menus. The new Trim menu contains all the trimming tools – such as Slip, Ripple and Dynamic Trim – available in Resolve. The Timeline menu has all the typical tools pertaining to the timeline, such as Add Transition, Match Frame and Split Clip.

Editing workflows need to be functional and simple. Resolve 12.5 has made this easier with the addition of three new features:

1. Ripple Cut allows a user to select clips for removing. By clicking Ripple Cut, the clip is removed and the gap is closed.
2. Paste Insert gives users a chance to add clips to the timeline and ripple the clips in front of it forward.
3. Ripple Overwrite lets a user close an empty gap in the timeline during playback to easily view their work in full screen. Another handy feature added to the Edit page is the option of viewing a clip’s audio waveforms directly on the video clip as an overlay in the source viewer. This makes it easier to navigate through video and look for audio cues.

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2. Paste Insert gives users a chance to add clips to the timeline and ripple the clips in front of it forward.
3. Ripple Overwrite lets a user close an empty gap in the timeline

“For more than half a decade in the colour grading industry, Resolve has had no capable adversary, making it the only reliable option in colouring”

Nina Sargsyan, editor, Fat Brothers Films
by selecting a clip. This causes the gap to close. If the new clip's duration is slightly longer than the gap, Resolve automatically ripples the clips in front of it forward.

These three features give users a faster, more functional workflow, without the need to constantly make adjustments in the timeline when removing clips and adding clips, saving valuable time.

With this version, Blackmagic has added a few new video transitions to the existing transition library, including Barn Door and X-Wipe. In addition, users can now edit multiple transitions at once. All you have to do is select a few transitions together and adjust the settings in the inspector, automatically giving all transitions the same settings. This is a great new addition that makes the workflow faster.

Another handy enhancement is Durational Markers. This allows the user to stretch out a marker, spanning it over a few frames or even over a few clips.

DaVinci Resolve’s retime settings now have a new feature, the Retime Curve. This provides users with a curve editor for their retime settings. This is a great addition, as it gives the user more control over speed changes within a clip. With the choice of linear curve tools or Bezier curve tools, the possibilities are unbelievable, giving the user total control and versatility.

Lastly, DaVinci Resolve has added an amazing feature which I am very excited about. Version 12.5 now has direct integration with Blackmagic's compositing software, Fusion. It is the same as in Adobe Premiere Pro, where the user can directly click on a clip and send it to Adobe After Effects, all you have to do is right click a clip in the timeline in Resolve, and you can send the clip to Fusion. Once the clip opens in Fusion, all you have to do is adjust as needed and those changes will be updated in DaVinci Resolve. This new seamless integration is a giant leap for DaVinci Resolve, as it makes the software more versatile. You no longer have to jump between programs; everything can be done within DaVinci Resolve itself.

The Colour Page
As a colourist, it’s always exciting to see what new features come out with each version of DaVinci Resolve, the leading colour grading software in the market. Version 12.5 maintains DaVinci Resolve’s status quo as the ultimate professional requirement in the industry for colour grading.

The Node tree on the Colour page of this new version has a few new features and enhancements which make working with nodes much easier. For someone like me who constantly has multiple nodes while grading, I face the issue of it being overcrowded, and having to move nodes around can become extremely tedious. In version 12.5, users can finally lasso all their nodes together and move them around with ease.

Users now get the opportunity to work with High Dynamic Range clips more easily. In this version, Resolve has introduced HDR Mode. One simply has to right click a node and select the option to make grading tools in Resolve work in an extended Dynamic Range, giving the user the ability to work with HDR videos. Version 12.5 also gives users a few more compositing modes to add to the nodes, including Luminosity and Colour Dodge.

The features that caught my eye the most are the effects that can be added to nodes on the Colour page. In previous versions of Resolve, one had to download and install plug-ins to the OpenFX tab. Now,
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users have a number of effects readily available. In the OpenFX tab, users can add effects such as Light Ray, Gaussian Blur or even Glow to videos. With the addition of these new effects, Blackmagic has once again taken Resolve a step further and made more of an all-in-one tool for graders and editors.

In this version, graders have two new slider options in the Primaries Bar, Temp and Tint. After testing the Temp parameter, the colours achieved had more depth, for a more rich and fluid look without looking artificial. It’s a simpler way of changing the overall hue and texture of footage.

The Tint parameter works by bringing a lightness to the colours on the colour spectrum, a great way to subtly adjust the hues of colours without losing depth and intensity. Just touching the Tint parameter adds colour to an image but with a more pastel look, allowing a user to make subtle changes that significantly affect the overall look.

These two new grading parameters allow users to have more detailed grades in Resolve 12.5. In the past, colour graders had to spend a bit more time trying to achieve certain looks. However, with these additions, users can achieve more film-like grades which are rich in colour and layered in appearance.

**Enhancement to Noise Reduction**

If you decide to opt for the paid version of DaVinci Resolve Studio, there has also been a lot of enhancements to noise reduction features. DaVinci Resolve Studio has always had a great noise reduction tool. I’ve always preferred to use it since I have a great deal of control over the amount of noise reduction I apply and the adjustments I make. Now, in the Spatial NR, control users have the Mode option, with two algorithms. Faster does a quick calculation of the NR that needs to be applied.

The NR that needs to be applied. Faster does a quick calculation of Mode option, with two algorithms. Spatial NR, control users have the adjustments I make. Now, in the noise reduction I apply and the of control over the amount of to use it since I have a great deal has always had a great noise enhancements to noise reduction there has also been a lot of version of DaVinci Resolve Studio, if you decide to opt for the paid Enhancement to Noise Reduction colour and layered in appearance. film-like grades which are rich in additions, users can achieve more certain looks. However, with these a bit more time trying to achieve detailed grades in Resolve 12.5. In the past, colour graders had to spend a bit more time trying to achieve certain looks. However, with these additions, users can achieve more film-like grades which are rich in colour and layered in appearance.

**Other Enhancements**

The motion tracker in Resolve 12.5 has a new Single Point Tracker which gives users the option to select a point and track footage, which I believe adds more versatility to Resolve as it gives the user more control.

DaVinci Resolve 12.5 Studio now also offers Edit Sizing with an automatic geometric distortion correction. This allows users to fix any footage affected by lens distortions such as perspective lens.

Overall, with the new additions to the Colour page, Blackmagic has enhanced the entire DaVinci Resolve experience, making workflows smoother and grading more in-depth, allowing one to explore the infinite capacities of colour.

**Deliver Page**

The Deliver page in version 12.5 has been slightly revamped. In Render Settings, users can now see common presets in a panel on top. These include the usual YouTube and FCPX XML, with the addition of two new render presets:

This mode can produce artifacts. Better switches to a high-quality algorithm which gives better results. This method is processor-intensive.

I tested these two new features out on a noisy night shot. The footage was taken on two different cameras, a RED Dragon and a Canon DSLR. We chose a DSLR camera for its extremely processed capture which does not give us much space to treat the footage, and we chose a RED Dragon for its RAW shooting capabilities that give you a lot of space to treat the footage to your liking. The footage I took from the RED Dragon was RAW footage in extremely low light conditions, with visible noise in the darker areas. However, when the noise reduction was applied, not only was the high frequency noise in the blue channel (the colour channel known to be the noisiest) reduced, the quality of all the footage was also enhanced.

When I took the DSLR footage to DaVinci Resolve Studio and applied the new Spatial Noise Reduction, I was surprised with the results. There was almost no noise in the footage, as if it had been shot on RAW and well-lit. This means the new enhanced Spatial NR not only reduces noise in the footage; it also gives lower-end cameras that do not have the option to record RAW a chance to achieve industry standard quality without expensive lighting.

Of the two modes, I naturally prefer Better, as it removes all the noise for a smoother, more natural look without any artifacts. There was none of the pastiness to the image that comes with many noise reduction tools.

**As a colourist, it’s always exciting to see what new features come out with each version of DaVinci Resolve. Version 12.5 maintains DaVinci Resolve’s status as the ultimate professional requirement in the industry for colour grading**

Nina Sargsyan, editor, Fat Brothers Films

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Premiere XML is the one I have been waiting for since I have been using Adobe Premiere Pro and DaVinci Resolve together. Previously I relied on FCPX XML to go back and forth between the two programs, and every now and then I would encounter inconsistencies which I would have to manually fix. However, after trying the new Premiere XML, I can say that those issues are no longer a concern. The integration between the two is finally consistent and functional.

With the Audio Only option, users can now export just the audio of their timeline. Users can select to export Wav, Quicktime or MXF OP-Atom. This is a great new feature lacking in previous versions.

Render Settings has been reorganised into three tabs. The Video tab now has the option of exporting media for a 3:2 pulldown with the new 29.97 (3:2) frame rate. The Audio tab now allows users to export each track as an individual track. The File tab now has various tags one can apply to the custom file name.

Overall, DaVinci Resolve has been very bold with its features in 12.5, extending its own boundaries. For more than half a decade in the colour grading industry it has had no capable adversary.

Everything Blackmagic has added to Resolve this time around has made it more of an all-in-one tool; more than anything else, there is no longer any need to constantly go from programme to programme. Depending on requirements, users can now freely edit, composite through Fusion, grade in Resolve and output footage without ever leaving the interface.

As a long-time Adobe Premiere Pro editor, I can safely say that DaVinci Resolve 12.5 is not only the best for colour grading; it is now among the leading editing software solutions in the market.

Nina Sargsyan is Producer and Special Effects Supervisor at Fat Brothers Films Production, UAE.
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As OTT gains more traction in the MENA region and more services are launched, the strategies which content providers and TV platform operators must adopt if they are to remain relevant and successful in MENA are different from the approaches being taken in other regions, says Adam Nightingale.

CONSUMER CONSUMPTION IS CHANGING

How TV content is discovered and consumed has changed dramatically over recent years. Consumers have access to more content, more of the time, from more providers and on more devices – and in more places as well. We live in a world of abundant content and passionate, hungry consumers.

We have already seen a seismic shift in how premium video entertainment is consumed in North America and Europe, and are now seeing a similar change in consumption habits in MENA.

This region, however, has a number of unique characteristics. The strategies which content providers and TV platform operators must adopt if they are to remain relevant and successful in MENA are different from the approaches being taken in other regions.

Going over-the-top

At the end of 2015, research conducted by Parks Associates showed that 2015 was the year of OTT. According to the research, the global OTT marketplace comprised over 65 players, either already offering video services or due to launch in the coming months. The report stated that around 1.6bn subscribers were actively watching online video worldwide on a variety of connected devices.

Revenues from the global video on demand (VOD) market are expected to exceed $263bn by 2016, compared to the $207bn which the industry generated in 2014.

Research conducted across six MENA countries by Qatar’s Northwestern University and Doha Film Institute shows that average TV audiences are down 5%, a decline most notable in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Viewers are increasingly favouring internet-based video consumption.

What this trend hasn’t yet equated to, according to the survey, is an increase in subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) revenues. However, Digital TV Research forecasts that SVOD revenues in the region will rise from $124m in 2015 to $1.24bn in 2021. That’s a lot of money by anyone’s standards, and incumbent operators want their fair share of such a large pie.

The report goes on to predict that there will be 19.59m SVOD homes across 28 MENA countries by 2021, compared to just 15,000 in 2010. We fully expect to see the trend begin to emerge over the coming months, with around 2.79m SVOD homes by the end of the year.
In a world where compelling content can be delivered anytime and anywhere, consumers increasingly expect to get what they want, when and where they want it. This shift is making fragmentation an issue for content providers.

We have been talking about fragmentation for some time. It comes in lots of different guises. Consumers are viewing content on a wide range of different devices and platforms, for example, and that makes it extremely difficult for content providers. Any service needs to provide a consistent experience across all of those devices, which all have a very different set-up.

In MENA, we can add some very challenging demographic variants. Audience fragmentation is far more prominent than in many other regions. Content providers need to cater to the needs of locals as well as consumers from other countries with different cultural tastes and requirements. With such a vast array of cultures in one region, audiences clearly have divergent interests and cultural needs, and huge variations in how they watch and find content. In short, there is no single dominant cultural group. In MENA, fragmentation extends even to the audience. Catering to these multiple groups efficiently and effectively is not easy, but it’s not impossible.

I have been watching with interest the impact of OTT standalone services, such as Netflix, on broadcaster offerings. Since Netflix launched in January in MENA, there has been growing realisation that the TV world is changing.

As Netflix had already licensed much of its content to local operators (OSN carries *House of Cards*), it had a slimmer content proposition than its American content line-up.

Its MENA launch also highlighted what many experienced local operators already know – play to your local audience. What Netflix conspicuously lacks is local content. While local broadcasters should have an intrinsic advantage, outsiders who think carefully about what makes MENA unique also have the potential to thrive.

Regional OTT services such as Starz Play Arabia, Intigral and OSN have launched engaging OTT offerings, which include much of the basic functionality users expect from the likes of Netflix, and more in some cases. Add in local content and the proposition becomes even more attractive.

In MENA, piracy continues to be a major problem and is throttling legitimate uptake. There are a number of reasons for the piracy problem. It’s easy to blame a lack of licensed content, high fragmentation of content availability and some eye-watering prices being paid for sports rights, but there is more to the issue. According to International Data Corporation (IDC), illegal content transmission within MEA costs the industry in excess of $750m in lost revenue every single year. This issue needs to be addressed if local operators are to make a success of OTT services in the region. The report says that the most prevalent reason relates to consumer mind-set and consumption habits.

To tackle piracy, the consumer

“Consumers are viewing content on a wide range of different devices and platforms, for example, and that makes it extremely difficult for content providers. Any service needs to provide a consistent experience across all of those devices, which all have a very different set-up”

Adam Nightingale, VP EMEA, Accedo

mind-set needs to change. Part of that will come down to educating consumers on the impact of piracy, especially for local content that simply cannot continue to be produced if production houses are not being paid for it.

In MENA, the rising uptake of SVOD services presents a challenge when it comes to the task of paying for it. Credit card usage is rare in the region, so providers need to find different ways to charge for content and subscriptions. This will be far easier for telcos and pay TV providers with an existing billing relationship with their customers. New providers launching in MENA need to find simple and safe ways to cross this hurdle.

One thing that is absolutely clear is that consumers are now very much in the driver’s seat, regardless of region. The vast and growing availability of low-cost, high-value premium content, available on any device at any time, means they pick and choose what they want, when they want it. Service providers need to offer a better, more ubiquitous service to ride the wave of growing premium video consumption.

There is no finer industry in which to work, and few regions more dynamic than MENA. But the winners will be determined neither by brawn nor by financial fire-power, but by the wit and commercial nous to find the best content, distribution and technology partners. Fast. Before it’s too late.
There are so many cameras available, all of which are talking resolution and making big claims. In order to maximise the capabilities of your camera, however, it is imperative to have good quality glass in front of them.

I recently tested the Fujinon Cabrio Premier PL mount 19-90mm and 85-300mm. These lenses are both cine zooms that marry the quality of high-end optics with ENG capabilities. Both lenses have a built-in servo demand. This is incredibly useful and the only PL mount zoom lens that I know to do this. The servo allows you to plug in both a zoom and focus demand without all of the usual accessories you would need for a traditional cine zoom. It also serves as an ENG hand grip, reducing the requirement for any bars for hand-held operating. The servo is removable, so if you want to cut down on the weight, you can reduce the 19-90mm from 2.7kg to 2.2kg.

The lenses have a macro, another feature one would relate to an ENG lens. However, before you stop reading due to the many mentions of ENG, these lenses are far from that! They have exceptional optical performance, rich contrast, high resolution and super colour fidelity.

I was filming with the British chef Jamie Oliver recently. He likes to move very fast, and as a cameraman, you equally need to be quick-witted to physically keep up with your subject.

The show remit was that it must look cinematic. We shot several cooking sequences on the Sony F55, mostly hand-held. Having the range of 19-90mm was incredibly useful, as the servo proved to be crucial to quickly reframe and change shots, and also smoothly zoom in. I continuously used the macro to get big close-ups of ingredients, something that would have been impossible with another cine zoom.

The lenses also benefit from having an adjustable back focus, a feature that is very important with zoom lenses. If you’re moving between different camera models, then each one might have a slight difference in the back focus due to the distance of the CCD. Being able to easily adjust this is vital.

The 85-300mm is a very short and light zoom weighing only 3kg with the servo, which is also removable. This size and weight is very rare!

I used this lens when filming in a date farm. We needed some long lens shots of a character making his way through the dense leaves. We hiked a fair distance into the farm, where...
the foliage was at its thickest. It was super easy to transport this lens, and there was no need for any extra set-up time that you would expect from a 24-290mm Optimo. The director, Bruno De Champris, loved the servo so much that we incorporated a contra zoom shot into our film.

The base stop for both lenses is T2.9, and they have nine blades. With the 85-300mm, it does change to a T4 above 218mm – a small price to pay for what the lens gives back in ergonomics and quality.

The last project I used these lenses for was Dubai Walls, a series of films about high-profile street artists painting at City Walk in Dubai. I combined hand-held informal documentary filming with high-end crane work. This project was shot on the RED Epic 4K.

Having the range of focal lengths with just two lenses made the project a complete joy. I could quickly move from the 19-90mm to the 85-300mm in a matter of seconds, with no real weight change to worry about. In addition, we had the same size front element and the lenses are true 4K+.

The price is fair at approximately $39,000 for the 19-90mm and $42,000 for 85-300mm. There are more lenses in this range, including a 14-35mm, a 20-120mm and a 25-300mm. Sadly, I didn’t get to test these yet.

Lenses, unlike cameras, can be a long-term investment if chosen wisely. If you know you’re going to need a PL mount zoom lens, then the 19-90mm and 85-300mm could certainly be the ones for you.

“Having the range of 19-90mm was incredibly useful, as the servo proved to be crucial to quickly reframe and change shots, and also smoothly zoom in”

Harvey Glen, Cinematographer

Harvey Glen is a Dubai-based Cinematographer. He can be reached at www.harveyglen.com.
Top: The Karim and Noor team at Blink Studios, Dubai. Below: Karim, the young boy with Noor, the robotic lantern.
UAE content creation and production company Blink Studios launched a short-form animation series for children titled *Karim and Noor* this Ramadan. In an exclusive interview with Executive Producer Nathalie Habib and Director Hani Kichi, *BroadcastPro ME* finds out how the series came about and where it is headed.

**Children’s animation series **Karim and Noor launched this Ramadan as short two-minute webisodes on YouTube and programme fillers on pan-Arab TV channel Spacetoon. Created entirely in the UAE, the series was conceived and produced by Dubai-based Blink Studios.**

The series revolves around two main characters – Karim, a young boy, and Noor, a robot.

Though Karim is inspired by Arab traits, he has been carefully designed to also carry a universal non-stereotypical personality that can engage children from around the world. Noor is a machine-like object, a cross between a robot and a lantern – LANBOT. It has a fascinating ‘wonder belly’, which gives it the special ability to produce from behind its lantern door anything that the pair might need to tackle a problem.

The two characters’ physical attributes and character traits carry cultural nuances from the region but also appeal to a global audience. Through their fun and humorous interactions, they discover the importance of friendship. They engage a young audience with a short plot that focuses on positive values.

Short-form series are seen as working well with younger audiences on web-based platforms, according to Creator and Executive Producer Nathalie Habib.

“We saw an opportunity to highlight simple values in a fun, non-didactic approach, which we hope will produce a positive impact on children in the way that they perceive themselves and the world in which they live,” she says.

The series primarily targets both genders aged three to six and has spill-over appeal to seven- and eight-year-olds. The studio has already developed 15 episodes, with its second run currently in production.

Music and SFX are key creative drivers of each story, according to Habib. As a scripted, non-dialogue format, music and sound play a fundamental role in driving the story from start to climax, making a fun and entertaining journey.

“The animation is in minimalist style using ‘pose-to- pose’ exaggerated movements which highlight key action points in the story and create humour,” explains Habib.

*Karim and Noor*’s animation production pipeline was achieved through 3DS Max for character animation, modelling and texturing; V-Ray for rendering and After Effects for compositing.

“The series is purely an investment made by Blink Studios, therefore, the key creative and production assets had to be built to deliver on a sustainable pipeline with room to allow the series to grow as it gains audience popularity. Starting with two characters is only the beginning. What will follow in the coming seasons is actually planned to be more exciting from both a

**Snapshot**

- **Project:** To create a children’s web series
- **Production house:** Blink Studios, UAE
- **Technology:**
  - Modelling, texturing and animation: 3DS Max
  - Rendering: V-Ray render engine using Blink’s in-house render farm
  - Compositing and VFX: Adobe After Effects
  - Music and SFX: Seaboard Rise by Roli and Logic Pro X
  - Editing: Final Cut Pro
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storytelling and visual engagement perspective,” comments Habib.

Director Hani Kichi adds: “We had to be smart and efficient in setting up a sustainable, cost-effective production pipeline. We have a total of eight main artists and two production management support members working from script to screen. It’s almost a value engineering approach to creating a practical and efficient pipeline of strong talent and tech tools that reduce the time, with negligible compromise on the quality of storytelling and visual experience.”

Pre-production carefully briefed character design to the character artist, coupled with in-house script writing and story development.

“Production was all in-house, utilising our highly experienced 10-year UAE-based artist pipeline. Post-production was also in-house for final edits and musical composition. As we further develop the series for a global audience, we are already exploring co-production deals with international studios,” points out Habib.

*Karim and Noor* recently featured at Annecy’s International Animation Festival and its international content market. The series garnered significant interest from a number of global representatives at the festival, which is a good sign for regional animation, says Habib.

“We are confident this is a sign that the intellectual property will grow and thrive beyond its borders, which will attract increased revenue streams and offer a sustainable business model,” she adds.

The entire score and musical as well as sound compositions were created and produced by Director Hani Kichi using Seaboard Rise, a high-end musical technology instrument that allows composers to

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**“As a property built for trans-media potential, *Karim and Noor* is being built to appear as part of a global VR children’s content platform”**

Hani Kichi, Director, *Karim and Noor*
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#IBCShow
“We are aiming for a successful and sustainable children’s intellectual property created from the Arab world that can speak to its own children, as well as any child around the globe. We hope Karim and Noor can make that happen for Blink Studios, for the UAE and for the region”

Nathalie Habib, Executive Producer, Karim and Noor

create and express a conversation and impression through a flexible composition technique. It replaces the piano’s black and white keys with a continuous, touch responsive surface that combines the expressive capabilities of many instruments in one interface.

“The five-touch feature on its silicon pad allows the composer several features such as bending notes, changing expressions, velocity and musical accents. This is coupled with a vast library of sounds provided through its Equator software that delivers thoroughly distinctive audible sounds,” Kichi explains.

According to Kichi, animation can only look better with more time and money. To this end, the team identified its limitations at the very early stages.

“Time and budget constraints are some of the limitations one faces. We did not see them as a hindrance, but rather as an opportunity to produce a show that could launch with limited resources yet still achieve visual appeal, engage with good storytelling and fun characters. In doing so, we are also inviting leeway for investments from third parties in its following seasons.”

Licensing and merchandising was a major focus for developing the show’s creative assets, which allows access for ROIs beyond distribution fees and other monetisation tools.

Google-certified, regionally recognised MCN Kharabeesh was chosen to help support the Karim and Noor YouTube channel. Blink Studios closely collaborated on achieving maximum reach, as well as examining monetisation possibilities through the youtube.com/karimandnoor platform.

Commenting on the partnership, Hana Malhas, VP of Talents and Partnerships at Kharabeesh, says: “We are very excited to have Karim and Noor join the Kharabeesh network. These intriguing characters have the potential to appeal to a universal audience, transcending the boundaries of language or even age, delivering positive social messages with light-heartedness, music and high-quality content.”

In addition to YouTube, Karim and Noor also airs on Pan-Arab children’s TV channel Spacetoon and other terrestrial TV stations. The programme is delivering fillers for TV broadcasters, thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of its two-minute format for its first season launch.

The producers plan to go global with this series and will be partnering with international companies for a wider reach.

“As a property built for trans-media potential, we are also in talks with a VR developer based in Los Angeles. There is not much we can reveal at this stage except that Karim and Noor is being built to appear as part of a global VR children’s content platform,” says Kichi.

Going global is not easy, points out Habib. She laments the fact that animation in the Arab region hasn’t gained much traction yet and very little from the Middle East has gone out into the international market.

“The first milestone is growing audience traction, and that in itself is a massive challenge due to the high volume of content available for children today. However, there is always a content checklist that guarantees audience engagement, and we aim to carry this out over the creative development and delivery of Karim and Noor.

“We are aiming for a successful and sustainable children’s IP created from the Arab world that can speak to its own children, as well as any child around the globe, and we hope Karim and Noor can make that happen for Blink Studios, for the UAE and for the region,” Habib notes.
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IBC2016 brings global players together to discuss how technology is reshaping the broadcast industry

IBC2016 features a star-studded speaker line-up with keynotes by executives from Netflix, Warner Bros, Cisco, Ericsson, Buzzfeed, Canal+, NBCU, Amazon, Google, Sony Pictures and Spotify. On the agenda: How IP is reshaping the economics of media production; where the world’s biggest advertising agencies are placing their client’s money; how to best reach millennial audiences; monetising virtual reality; and strategies to stay two steps ahead of continual market disruption.

WPP’s Sir Martin Sorrell, one of the world’s most influential and successful business leaders, sets the tone by addressing IBC2016’s theme ‘Transformation in the Digital Era: Leadership, Strategy and Creativity in Media’ in the newest conference stream Audiences and Advertising. That statement, and Sorrell’s presence, underlines the fact that IBC is the place where the strategic thinkers come to exchange ideas. Guaranteed to provoke further discussion are keynotes from Erik Huggers, President and CEO at Vevo; Dominique Delport, Global Managing Director/Chairman, Havas Media Group/Vivendi Content and Dr Manuel Cubero, who heads up Vodafone’s Kable Deutschland AG business. The IBC Conference tracks alongside the comprehensive exhibition which features the world’s major media technology brands and all emerging, innovative developers too.

The agenda for 2016 will present key transformational insights and case studies to be shared by influential speakers across the industry. Sessions will include a discussion on Eurosport’s strategy to sign up one million OTT subscribers by 2017, transforming the company’s culture and business model. Attendees will be shown how innovation and transformation are key to next-generation media and communications. Spotify will be speaking about changing the way audiences consume music. Also discussed will be the challenges and time span for the whole broadcast chain to potentially move online as the industry faces up to the prospect of Google TV.

Opening the discussions at the IBC Content Everywhere Europe Hub this coming September is ‘IBC’s Introduction to OTT’, which will kick off the programme of sessions.

Eight sessions have been curated to provide visitors with editorially independent introductions to some of the new concepts, technologies and business models at the intersection of broadcast and broadband.

Dominique Delport will give his view of how the media landscape has changed and what this means for traditional media companies, including his outspoken views on the power of the big digital platforms collectively known as GAPA – Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon – and how important it is for Europeans to continue to develop local content that
speaks to their cultures. Entitled “Transformation in the Digital Era: Leadership, strategy and creativity in media and entertainment”, the conference will see more than 300 executives sharing insights on key issues at the heart of the entertainment, media and technology sector. Staged in the Hub Theatre at the heart of Hall 14, these free-to-attend sessions will be complemented by a full schedule of demonstrations that showcase a broad cross section of the latest products and services that are contributing to the exponential growth in the distribution of digital media online.

IBC’s Introduction to over the top (OTT) at 13:00 on Friday at the show will explore the implications for broadcasters and content creators of the new route to media distribution that isn’t bound by the conventions of traditional linear broadcast.

Conceived as a beginners’ guide to OTT and content everywhere, this first session will explain the processes by which content can be made available online and the sometimes bewildering jargon behind technologies such as codecs and encoding, mixing and streaming players. From the present to the future, the panel discussion programme will conclude on Monday on 12 September at 15:30 with a look at the roadmap for new mobile technologies that will impact the smart screens that are in so many people’s pockets.

The IBC Leaders’ Summit will look at how and what strategic stakes and partnerships are necessary and where smart businesses should be investing. Some of the big regulatory issues across Europe including the digital single market, a media framework for the 21st Century and what the implications of this are for Europe and the rest of the world.

This year’s big debate will look at the best of business and strategy models for the future. These will embrace both the success of online businesses and the proven track-record of traditional broadcasting and content creation.

The Exhibition
There are 15 halls, curated by theme for ease of navigation, plus outdoor exhibits, making 2016 by far the biggest IBC in terms of floor space. An integral part of the IBC experience are the feature areas, special zones designed to help visitors gain a deeper understanding of innovation and to quiz the people driving it. The IBC Technology in Action Theatre, for example, hosts a series of case studies at the leading edge of technology, including the cloud and IP as well as production, post and delivery. Often presented by users, this is a prime opportunity to gain insider knowledge. No one wants to miss the IBC Future Zone where prototypes and theories leap from academic and broadcast labs into potential reality. The researchers working on them come too, so not only can you see and test what they are thinking, you can influence the direction of their work.

Unafraid to tackle the status quo, IBC invites sponsors to outsource their R&D to talented designers, coders and entrepreneurs at IBC Hackfest, a weekend of convention-defying brainstorming that could witness the next big thing.

Nowhere is the interface between art and science more dramatically illustrated than at the IBC Big Screen Experience, a series of sessions benchmarking the future of cinema. Ang Lee, Oscar winning director of Life of Pi, headlines this IBC stream, treating visitors to a sneak peak of his extraordinary new feature which is filmed with pioneering ultra-high frame rates to achieve a look which can only be described as cinematic reality.

A highlight of every IBC are the IBC Innovation Awards which uniquely recognise the expertise and sheer endeavor that teams of vendors, service suppliers and media organisations make to achieve breakthroughs. This year’s finalists include Endemol Shine, ESPN and Tencent. IBC invites all visitors to attend the Awards ceremony - just one among dozens of attractions that make IBC2016 the place to share business with people from all corners of the industry.
Ultra HD is now becoming a reality as broadcasters around the world begin to deliver content in 4K. In the UK, Sky launched its satellite 4K service with the start of the new season of the English Premier League, while NHK has conducted hugely exciting 8K tests at the Rio 2016 Olympics. The 130 hours of 8K content it’s transmitting back to Japan represents by far the biggest test of the format yet, and is a significant waypoint towards the broadcaster’s stated goal of being able to cover and broadcast the Tokyo 2020 Games at that resolution.

Meanwhile, according to a new survey of 475 global video service providers by SNL Kagan, 96% of respondents believe that a majority of consumers and video service providers will adopt 4K UHD TV by 2020. As a result of that, 88% of them, and that translates as over 400 broadcasters, are planning to launch 4K UHD content by 2020, with an astonishing 78% (370) saying they will have launched content two years earlier by 2018.

In other words, where Ultra HD is not yet here it is coming fast, and IBC will be examining how the rollout is progressing, as well as the challenges it still represents, in a major papers session ‘UHDTV Launches Across the World’.

The session will examine some of the major firsts to date in UHD broadcasting including: the launch of Europe’s first UHD sports channel, BT Sport, which is now a year old; the adoption of UHD by Pope Francis and the always-innovative centro televisivo vaticano for the first worldwide Ultra HD HDR transmission of a major ceremony; and the first global broadcasts of full-spec 8K to trial receivers.

To overcome the difficulties of achieving these firsts necessitated the use of cutting edge technology, and attendees can hear first-hand how the challenges of setting up higher resolution workflows and production and distribution chains were met and surmounted in a succession of detailed presentations.

The four papers being presented as part of the session are:

- "BT Sport Ultra HD – Europe’s First Ultra High Definition Television Sports Channel" (Andrew Beale, Chief Engineer, BT Sport, UK);
- "Opening of the Holy Door by Pope Francis: First Worldwide Live Distribution Via Satellite of 4K UHD Pictures and HDR HLG Test" (Christiano Benzi, Director Special Projects Italy, Eutelsat HQ Paris, France);
- "RealWorld Live 4K Ultra HD Broadcasting with High Dynamic Range" (Peter Sykes, Strategic Technology Development Manager, Sony Professional Solutions Europe, UK);
- "Celebrating the Launch of 8K/4K UHDTV Satellite Broadcasting and Progress on Full-Featured 8K UHDTV In Japan” (Satoshi Hara, Engineer NHK, Japan).

Taken together they promise to provide a fascinating glimpse into the new landscape of Ultra HD broadcasting: a landscape that looks set to become increasingly crowded as the next few years unfold.
Ross launches ACID cameras

Ross is now in the camera business, having launched ACID cameras that will make their European debut at IBC, under the Smart Production banner.

ACID is a series of compact box cameras that offer full-size studio camera performance. These new cameras provide and capture images in any environment and make a great companion to Ross or other robotic camera systems.

ACID cameras offer special performance characteristics for chroma keying in virtual environments, and include a unique new signal format. These cameras output standard SMPTE 4:2:2 video signals for use in any production, and in addition output a special 0:4:4 full bandwidth colour signal that is combined with the primary output within the Carbonite UltrachromeHR system to generate a full resolution 4:4:4 signal for superior chroma keys. All camera operation, set-up and shading can be performed from Dashboard soft control panels, including the transfer and recall of scene files from one ACID camera to another.

Stand 11.C10

SAM showcases 4K workflow

At IBC, SAM will demonstrate its latest capabilities in 4K and IP sports production workflows; its complete IP product portfolio; and its accelerated move into the software application world. Building on its 4K workflow offerings, IBC will see the launch of the new LiveTouch 4K highlights and replay system with a live demonstration running over IP.

LiveTouch enables seamless and efficient scalability and uniquely powerful workflows in standalone systems or integrated into a wider production environment. With LiveTouch, collaboration is instant by all users on the system with no media movement.

SAM is also showing its 4K Kula 1ME/2ME production switcher along with its 4K Kahuna range of switchers — all of which feature 4K UHD M/Es that are as easy to use as HD production formats.

SAM’s IP-Edge production routing technology is one such example, which takes the complexity away from hybrid and pure IP rollouts and closely follows the interoperability goals of AIMS. High capacity 25 GbE and 40 GbE IP Edge interfaces are available on many of SAM’s products including routers, switchers and MultiViewers, along with dedicated IP only processing and control products.

Stand 9.A01

Sachtler strenghtens support

Sachtler, a provider of camera supports, accessories, and bags and a Vitec Videocom brand, is introducing the FSB 10 – a new entry-level 100 mm fluid head. The FSB 10 builds upon the legacy of the lightweight FSB series to offer a premium solution for on-the-go camera operators working in news, documentaries, wildlife, and more.

Sachtler’s FSB line of fluid heads has a reputation for being resilient and long-lasting. Director of Photography Alessandro Beltrame used his FSB 6 system for The Antarctica Project in the South Pole, where temperatures often dipped below -40 degrees Celsius.

The FSB 10 boasts five positions +0 for pan and tilt drag, giving operators better flexibility and speed no matter their project or location. For even more convenience, it also offers ten steps of counterbalance, compared to other products in the same market that only provide four.

“The FSB 10 suits today’s modern camera operator on the go. It is ergonomically designed with our customers in mind and supports today’s digital cinema-style cameras, including the Sony FS7 and Canon C300,” commented Tobias Keuthen, Senior Product Marketing Manager for Sachtler.

The FSB 10 has an integrated flat base (e.g. for use on a slider) and an ergonomic design that gives camera operators easy access to operating elements. It also features Sachtler’s Speedbalance technology.

Stand 12.E65

Canon images at IBC

Canon Europe is demonstrating its full range of professional imaging products at IBC 2016. Canon’s Cinema EOS range has been instrumental in transforming the professional video industry – with its Dual Pixel CMOS AF for effective autofocus, leading sensor technology and advances in resolution. In April 2016, Canon saw the family of Cinema EOS products expand further with the launch of the versatile ME200S-SH, a compact professional multi-purpose video camera, and the CN-E18-80mm T4.4 L IS, a compact cinema EOS lens with cine-servo style functionality. Both will be on display for touch and try, for the first time in Europe.

At the show, broadcast and cinematography professionals can get hands-on with Canon’s full range of 4K, full HD and HDR products.

Stand 12.D60

Canon’s full range of 4K, full HD and HDR products.
Utah Scientific launches new IP gateway

Utah Scientific is demonstrating new prototype IP gateway cards that feature the company’s new core IP engine, the foundation for the next stage in the IP revolution.

The new UTAH-400 IP Gateway will provide two-way conversion of SDI video signals and VSF TR-03, complying with the AIMS roadmap for transition to IP operations. All the key AIMS TR-03/04 initiatives will be demonstrated, including RFC4175 video, AES67 audio, SMPTE 2059 timing, and NMOS discovery and registration.

The UTAH-400 IP Gateway/TR-03 IP engine will be shown in Hall B at the IP Interoperability Zone in addition to the demonstration on the Utah Scientific stand.

Utah Scientific’s new UHD-12G 4K digital routing switcher is the industry’s first enterprise-class router to enable distribution of a full range of 4K SDI video signals.

Stand 10.A21

Sony re-imagines media production

Sony is highlighting how it is backing organisations across the broadcast landscape to re-imagine their approach to media production. In particular Sony will explore how innovations in the fields of image, IP and workflow are enabling new ways for audiences to engage with media creators and their content.

Sony will be joined by its peers to unveil products, systems and solutions, and to discuss new technology standards underpinning new ways of working for media organisations. Sony will present case studies of customers who have successfully introduced new ways of working, as well as introducing European audiences to its new HDC-4800 system camera for the first time.

A key focus will be on how Sony is working alongside its partners and competitors to deliver solutions that suit the ‘real world’ practicalities of modern broadcasting, ensuring technology breakthroughs are established in the context of interoperability, legacy value and reliable uptime.

Sony will unveil advances in image, IP and media workflow, debuting solutions to empower customers as they change the face of media and broadcast.

Stand Elicium Hall

Each frame counts for Rohde & Schwarz

Rohde & Schwarz is presenting its latest product portfolio under the theme “Each frame counts” at this year’s IBC. The company has expanded its R&S VENICE ingest and playout platform to include the R&S VENICE Control application. R&S VENICE Control is ingest software for controlling complex multi-camera recordings. It makes it possible to record up to 16 independent channels.

The latest Release 6.1 of the R&S CLIPSTER mastering station focuses on HDR, expanded colour scales, HFR and localisation workflows and provides IMF subtitling and basic compositing.

Stand 7.E25

Ikegami spotlights 4K

IBC2016 is a special event for Ikegami, which this year celebrates its 70th anniversary. At the show, Ikegami is launching the HDL-F3000 multi-format ultra-low-light camera, which produces high-quality colour video under an extremely wide range of night or daytime conditions. Image adjustment capabilities include haze removal, backlight correction and digital zoom.

The camera is suitable for a wide range of ground-based or airborne gyro-mounted applications. It employs three 2/3 inch 2.6 million pixel MOS sensors in RGB prism configuration to achieve 1,000 television lines horizontal resolution.

The new Ikegami UHK-430 portable broadcast camera incorporates three new 4K-native 2/3 inch 8 megapixel CMOS sensors which provide full 3840 x 2160 UHD resolution.

Stand 12.A31
Companies globally are reimagining business realities fast. Join Gitex to stay ahead.

### Vertical Days

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GatesAir brings green transmitter

GatesAir is emphasising operational efficiency and low total cost of ownership for RF operations with its latest transmitters and software-defined exciter.

The latest product line includes Maxiva UHF DTV transmitters with PowerSmart Plus and the Maxiva XTE exciter.

Designed for the green economy, PowerSmart Plus is a next-generation transmitter architecture that can raise AC to RF efficiencies up to 50% for ATSC and DVB-T2 transmitters—the highest levels of any UHF DTV transmission products on the market. In the past, this efficiency topped out at 30-40%.

Stand 8.C30

Playbox debuts Neo at IBC

Available exclusively from PlayBox Technology and its regional partners, the PlayBox Neo, a channel-in-a-box product suite is based around the AirBox Neo playout server. Designed for 24/7 unattended operation, it can also be operated manually, including the ability to handle live-to-air throughput. AirBox Neo supports UHD, HD and SD in single server.

The most recent updates to AirBox Neo add compatibility with Microsoft Windows 10 running on the latest certified Intel CPUs, including the sixth generation Core i7 and the Xeon Processor E5 v4 Family.

Other new additions include advanced automation, ingest control for CaptureBox Neo, Service Description Table support on streaming outputs, automatic playlist export on playlist changes, extended third-party playlist import, and support for closed-caption data from MXF files.

Stand 8.B71

Point-to-Point fibre link from Bluebell

Making its European debut is Bluebell Opticom’s BCX-760 Series 10G Ethernet point-to-point fibre link, a camera-back interface that allows easy connection and signal transport between a camera and an outside broadcast (OB) truck or a base station.

In a first for the industry, BCX interfaces map all signals presented at the back of any broadcast camera onto a 10G Ethernet point-to-point link, ensuring safe, robust, interference-immune, high-quality transport over much longer distances than previously possible.

BCX-760 series products are designed to create rugged connections in a range of OB environments, such as special event venues, ENG sites, sports arenas and golf courses. They can also replace heavy SMPTE hybrid connections on cameras in a studio setting and in certain variations to link and control remote robotic cameras.

Stand 10.F24

mediARC makes History

Item History is an important enhancement to the mediARC archiving solution that enables media archivists to more easily ensure and verify the accuracy of a database.

Item History allows cataloguing teams and supervisors to ascertain not only who changed an archive item and when – but also, exactly what was changed. This allows users to easily and quickly review previous versions of an item. Existing users will automatically receive Item History as a free upgrade to their installed systems. Broadcasters and archivists need an archive asset management system.

Stand 8.D91
Imagine showcases software-centric solutions

Imagine Communications is shining a spotlight at IBC2016 on the current state of the media and entertainment industry’s evolution to a new technology foundation, and how the company is delivering advanced solutions that help broadcasters, service providers and other media companies accelerate the modernisation of their production, playout and distribution facilities.

Imagine Communications, a founding member of the Alliance for IP Media Solutions (AIMS), is unveiling its latest innovations, demonstrate the widespread interoperability of its solutions and presenting a series of knowledge-sharing seminars featuring thought leaders from across media, entertainment and IT.

**Stand 4.A01**

Edgeware brings new TV CDN technology

Edgeware is bringing its TV content delivery network (TV CDN) technology to IBC2016. Broadcasters, content owners, network operators, cable companies and OTT providers can discover how Edgeware’s scalable three-layer architecture, designed specifically for TV, will let them deliver services with no delays, buffering or glitches.

Edgeware’s product demonstrations at IBC2016 will show how a TV CDN, as opposed to the general-purpose CDNs designed for software delivery, allows broadcasters and network operators to benefit from low-latency and cost-effective scalability, as well as gather insight into viewers behaviour through analytics.

**Stand 14.C36**

Vitec debuts MGW Ace Decoder

Making its debut at IBC2016 is VITEC’s new MGW Ace Decoder. This professional-grade, compact HEVC/H.265 decoder delivers broadcast-quality decoding of HEVC streams up to 1080p60 4:2:2 10-bit, supporting the most demanding and diverse video streaming use cases.

It offers a robust panel of connectivity options and two pairs of audio decode capabilities.

When the MGW Ace Decoder is used with the MGW Ace Encoder, the pair forms the industry’s first entirely portable, hardware-based end-to-end 4:2:2 10-bit HEVC solution, delivering low-latency and bandwidth-efficient streams suitable for IPTV, broadcast and point-to-point applications. With its flexible FPGA architecture that supports ongoing video improvements up to 4K60p, the MGW Ace Decoder provides users with a future-proof solution.

**Stand 7.G16**

Vimond launches new tools

Vimond is launching an improved Vimond IO product that combines the capabilities and features of its two previously stand-alone digital video production tools: Vimond IO, a cloud-based, online video storytelling solution; and Vimond Highlights, a live-to-VOD conversion tool that supports rapid, short-form clip production and immediate publication.

Where Vimond IO is a portable video editing workflow and storytelling tool, Vimond Highlights provides a streamlined, live-to-VOD conversion process for high-volume, short-form clip production and direct distribution to social media channels. The integration of features from Vimond Highlights into Vimond IO allows broadcast and online media journalists and editors to create short stories extrapolated from live streams and VOD assets, either for later use or for direct publishing to broadcast, OTT video and social media outlets.

From ingest to publish, Vimond IO now offers creative control and flexibility for multiple use cases within the same organisation. Vimond Highlights has helped users such as TV2, TV4, NRK and DR to deliver key moments to their online viewers.

**Stand 14.F19**

Edgeware brings new TV CDN technology
**Veset plays out from Nimbus**

Veset showcasing its completely re-designed Nimbus platform, which now includes provisions for live event management.

By leveraging the resources of Amazon Web Service’s S3 and EC2, Veset’s new Nimbus provides virtually unlimited possibilities for broadcasters to create, manage or run test channels with no client-side hardware investment.

**Nimbus’s new self-service capabilities enable Veset clients to launch new full-time channels in a matter of hours and quickly create part-time channels for special events. Veset’s software-as-a-service approach not only reduces up-front investment, it also reduces direct and indirect operating costs by eliminating the need for client-side engineering support.**

**Stand 8.D31**

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**RTW’s loudness control**

RTW’s new audio processor hardware, APRO-CLC01 for Continuous Loudness Control (CLC), will be shown for the first time at IBC this year, using the first OEM hardware for the CLC algorithm that RTW has developed in cooperation with the German Institut für Rundfunktechnik (IRT).

The CLC signal processing algorithm allows users to constantly control and regulate to a given programme-loudness value and definable loudness range with minimal obstacles for unknown, live content.

A new software version 4.0 is also available for RTW Loudness Tools and Mastering Tools software. The new version adds support for Mac OS X 10.11 “El Capitan” and addresses user requests with features like a selectable 12th octave RTA, cinema loudness (TASA and SAWA) and free scalable instrument size.

**Stand 8.D89**

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**Harmonic focuses on IT**

To address the market shift towards standard IT-centric infrastructure, Harmonic is showcasing its new VOS cloud-native solutions: VOS Cloud and VOS 360. Visitors to the stand will get a snapshot of the monetisation opportunities enabled by cloud-based media processing solutions and services, such as cloud DVR and packaging-on-the-fly.

Additionally, Harmonic will showcase a complete UHD HDR workflow and new video-quality assessment technology for OTT workflows that maximises bandwidth efficiency while assuring that video quality targets are hit. Powered by the Harmonic PURE Compression Engine, the technology enables an outstanding user experience. With its broad portfolio, Harmonic is the only company offering an end-to-end workflow for the delivery of live and VOD UHD content with HDR.

Ad insertion, playout and splicing at the edge of the network help pay-TV operators regionalise and monetise content as part of their primary distribution workflow. Harmonic’s solution can be delivered via satellite or internet for ultimate flexibility, and includes the ProView integrated receiver-decoder (IRD) and FUZE-1 playout system.

**Stand 1.B20**
Sennheiser brings action mics

For extreme sports footage with great audio, IBC will see Sennheiser show the prototype of a new microphone for GoPro action cameras that easily withstands adverse conditions such as wind, water, snow and splashes of mud.

The special windscreen of the microphone ensures protection against wind noise even during water sports. The microphone is expected to become available from March 2017. Also demonstrated will be a virtual-reality recording with Sennheiser’s upcoming AMBEO VR Mic.

For the growing field of mobile journalism, Sennheiser is showcasing the wireless microphone systems of its AVX series, which operates in the license-free 1.9 GHz range. The broadcast headsets of the new 27 Series will bring a new age of user comfort to commentary booths. All models are lightweight and feature a closed, circumaural design and fulfill the EU directive on protection against noise at the workplace.

Stand 8.D50

Eolementhe improves workflow

Videomenthe is presenting its solutions for processing media files. Videomenthe is a tool for creating media file workflows, and VideomentheCloud, is a cloud platform for secure, accelerated file sharing. This year the company will shine the spotlight on Eolementhe v2, which makes for intuitive media workflow creation, facilitating ready-to-broadcast [RTB] file sharing between broadcasting users. Within this automated multi-provider environment, there is a complete workflow that includes transcoding, quality control, audio level correction and analysis, manual or automatic delivery of the technical and editorial metadata, and so on.

All that’s needed to implement a workflow is a simple workstation connected to the internet and the interface can be picked up immediately. For even more flexible use, Eolementhe can also be run by a third-party system, thanks to its application programming interface [API].

One of the key features presented at this IBC is the inclusion of the “pause” option. The user can manually halt the workflow at any point by simply ticking a box and providing an option for taking action if errors are detected.

Stand 2.A36b

Interra Systems demonstrates new BATON

Interra Systems is showcasing BATON 7.0, the latest version of its QC solution for file-based SD, HD, and mixed workflows. The BATON 7.0 user interface now features a revamped functionality across smart folders, manual scheduling, test plans, reports, and more, simplifying the user experience while continuing to provide flexibility.

It also offers 4K/HDR resolution support for quality checks while ensuring compliance with the latest industry specifications to perform deep data analysis on file-based workflows.

BATON 7.0 offers a full range of video/audio quality checks, including new support for text detection and recognition of burnt-in subtitles.

Stand 7.B13

Video Clarity delivers 4K over IP

Video Clarity Inc. is demonstrating 4K-over-IP contribution-level delivery with a full video and audio testing system at IBC2016 in conjunction with Macnica Technology and PacketStorm Communications.

Together the companies will give two demonstrations: one showing how manufacturers and programme service providers can deliver 4K video inside networks built for HD with TICO, and another that shows new standards for IP network transport, emulation, and quality testing for uncompressed video. The demonstrations will take place on Video Clarity’s stand in hall 2.

“Today the trend is to deliver all media-over-IP infrastructures. One of the last areas to adopt IP infrastructure is the network core of a large video facility, where a high volume of uncompressed or potentially lightly compressed streams are required,” said Adam Schadle, Vice President of Video Clarity.

“By applying TICO in conjunction with 10-Gigabit IP transport technology, as well as new uncompressed IP transmission standards, we will demonstrate an emulated IP network and an end-to-end delivery test.”

The demonstrations will centre specifically on video and audio quality in the uncompressed domain, and on the mezzanine-level, visually lossless compression solutions being deployed for live-contribution video.

Stand 2.C57
There is a scene in *Star Wars*, where the inhabitants of a planet are looking up at the night sky as a massive battle rages between Star Destroyers and rebel Star ships. The winner would get control of the planet and all its inhabitants. Most Arab broadcasters must feel like those helpless inhabitants at the moment as the future of "television" is redefined in multiple battles of equally epic proportions.

In one battle, Google and Facebook are entangled in a digital turf war that will ultimately determine the gatekeepers of content discovery and consumption not only on mobile but also on that large screen in the living room that used to be the only gate. This digital battle has been blissfully ignored or dismissed by most Arab broadcasters. The typical broadcaster in the Middle East is not lying awake at night fretting about the advertising budgets shifting to digital, as all those dollars must be coming from print. On-demand content is for teenagers. Facebook is a tech company, not a media company. Snapchat is just an EPG that uses video for tune-in info. There is no need to own any of your content, just license it while repeating the "Content is King" mantra.

The pay-TV battle, on the other hand, is eliciting much more interest. BeIN and OSN are locked in a head-on competition that can tip the scales: MBC. Only if MBC abandons the FTA sector will the region’s broadcasting dynamics shift. While the face-off between the two pay-TV heavyweights will undoubtedly increase pay-TV’s share in the Middle East, BeIN and OSN on their own are not enough to dislodge the dominance of FTA. Even if several more FTA channels make the switch to BeIN’s pay platform, there really is only one broadcaster that can tip the scales: MBC. Only if MBC abandons the FTA sector will the region’s broadcasting dynamics shift.

BeIN certainly has multiple reasons to prefer pay-TV over FTA. The new platform, BeIN’s attention seems to have shifted to adding properties from traditional pay-TV networks such as AMC and Discovery. Meanwhile, OSN has extended its studio deals, signed a multi-year exclusive deal with HBO, and licensed new channels. The BeIN-OSN competition has certainly been a boon for channel owners as the entertainment pay-TV market shifted from a one-horse race to a competitive environment, where premium channels can expect a bidding war to raise licensing fees. Similarly, Arab producers are anticipating BeIN’s foray into original Arabic content to increase the production sector’s revenues in the face of declining demand from FTA channels.

Yet while MBC has much to gain from a potential shift to a pay-TV model, it also has the most to lose. Transitioning to a pay-TV platform takes time to establish distributors, install decoders, execute marketing campaigns and alter consumer habits. This period would undoubtedly see a drop in both audience share and revenues while launch costs are at their highest at a time when advertising revenues are already suffering. More importantly, the low entry hurdles in FTA broadcasting make it likely that new competitors would quickly attempt to fill the void left by MBC. While MBC would have a brand and content advantage, it would have a disadvantage in reach while consumers considered the shift from FTA to pay.

There are ways to mitigate these risks. A gradual rollout of pay-channels could stagger the transition. The acquisition of an existing pay-TV platform would accelerate the rollout. Regulatory changes may make it more difficult for new entrants to launch or grow rapidly. Pre-commitments from advertisers to the new platform could be negotiated in return for favourable rates or the prospect of data sharing.

One thing is certain; the next 12 months will be interesting to watch for the inhabitants of planet Media.

Karim Sarkis is CEO of Sync Media.
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