



Rogers Sports & Media Produces Tim & Sid with Wirecast Gear

How Canada's top media powerhouse uses Telestream Wirecast Gear to remotely produce its popular Sportsnet radio and TV show "Tim & Sid" live from multiple sites

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--Pierre Fortin,
VP Technology and Operations,
Rogers Sports & Media

Considered the final word on all-things sports, *Tim & Sid* is the leading sports talk show in Canada in its 5pm to 7pm ET timeslot on Sportsnet, Canada's #1 sports network. Hosted by the fan-favorite duo of Tim Micallef and Sid Seixeiro, *Tim & Sid* also simulcasts live on the Sportsnet Radio Network, which allows fans to engage live with the TV co-hosts through their radio call-ins as well as on social media.

Produced by Rogers Sports & Media – a subsidiary of Canadian multiplatform media giant Rogers Communications – *Tim & Sid* features breaking sports news, in-depth sports analysis, and guest interviews with VIPs of the sports world, including star athletes, league insiders, coaches and executives.

Since its television launch in 2015, *Tim & Sid* has developed a massive reach through traditional, online and social media avenues. Up until March 2020, the large-scale production featured:

- A visually appealing talk show set
- Quick camera cuts between the co-hosts
- Guest interviews
- Sports highlights
- Viewer-generated social media content
- B-roll and other video clips
- Graphics
- TV and radio simulcasting
- Call-ins to the radio station

So, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused the studio production to shut down for health and safety reasons, Rogers Sports & Media actively sought a solution that would enable them to produce the live show remotely with high-resolution video and audio. After exploring the many live streaming products on the market, Sportsnet was able to get the show back on the air by producing it remotely with Wirecast Gear from Telestream.

“We chose Wirecast Gear because it’s robust enough to handle this complex live TV and radio simulcast workflow from multiple remote sites,” said Pierre Fortin, VP of Technology and Operations at Rogers Sports & Media. “More importantly, it doesn’t introduce any discernible delay when we cut quickly between remote camera sources. Because of these features, we can preserve the hot, fast-paced look and banter our fans love and expect.”

THE CHALLENGE

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, *Tim & Sid* producers needed to continue the popular live TV and radio show by pulling together talent and sources at multiple sites including:

- Both hosts from their basements in Toronto
- A producer remotely accessing Wirecast Gear in the Sportsnet studio control room
- Video clips, graphics, logos, and other media assets on a control room server
- Interview guests from their respective homes or other locations across Canada and North America
- Audio of people calling into the radio station
- User-generated social media content, such as Twitter posts

Tim & Sid needed to feature the hosts and guests in heated debates and brisk discussions of the day’s hot topics in an organic way, without delays slowing things down. The TV show simulcasts on radio, but radio listeners call-in on radio tie-lines to speak with the co-hosts – an essential production strategy that enables real-time audience participation. And this multi-faceted remote production relies on Rogers Communications’ own robust, high-speed internet service—backed up by its wireless LTE service—for dependable delivery of this flagship Sportsnet program.

THE SOLUTION

Wirecast Gear proved to be the perfect solution for *Tim & Sid* for many reasons. As an all-in-one hardware appliance running Wirecast Pro video production and streaming software from Telestream, Wirecast Gear is

quick and easy to deploy and set-up because all the necessary components have been integrated into a cohesive, purpose-built box. Just plug in cameras, mics, or other sources, and it’s ready to go. *Tim & Sid* uses Wirecast Gear 420, the top-of-the-line turnkey system that’s pre-configured with the following computing essentials:

- Five HD-SDI ports/capture inputs
- One program output channel
- An NVIDIA QUADRO graphics card, which supports four simultaneous, GPU-optimized encodes
- Faster RAM processing
- NVMe system drive for fast bootup and reliable performance
- A one terabyte solid state drive for media recording
- 2-channel XLR/TLS audio interface
- Support for NDI-enabled devices

For *Tim & Sid*, the Wirecast Gear box is situated in the show’s Toronto studio control room. Authorized personnel can access, monitor, and control it remotely from any connected device or location using a downloadable, third-party desktop application called TeamViewer. Despite the distance between hosts, guests, and producers, Wirecast Gear is powerful enough to switch between live video, audio, and graphical elements without introducing delays.

“Wirecast Gear allowed us to produce a show as intricate and multi-faceted as *Tim & Sid*. Combined with low latency NDI video, this technology made it possible to achieve a studio-quality production from our hosts’ basements.”

-Adrian Koziol, Senior Manager, Media Support Services, Rogers Sports & Media

Another extremely appealing feature that clinched the deal for Wirecast Gear is its native support of NDI video and audio from Skype, the consumer communications platform that Tim, Sid, and their guests use for the show. NDI, which is an advanced, IP-based networking protocol, enables the capture of broadcast-quality video and audio from Skype, which feeds directly into Wirecast Pro software as a virtual source. Wirecast Gear can also stream shows directly to multiple destinations simultaneously, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or RTMP, without overtaxing its internal processing power.

LIVE TV and RADIO WORKFLOW

At the heart of the *Tim & Sid* workflow, Wirecast Gear was situated in the show's studio control room to make it easier to feed the live HD-SDI output directly into the broadcast chain using Rogers Communications' robust enterprise networking. The producer switches the show, adds graphics, rolls in video, and performs other production tasks remotely using TeamViewer to access Wirecast Gear in real-time.

While they could have used Skype, Zoom, or any video sharing platform, they chose to standardize on Skype because it offers built-in NDI video/audio capabilities. The co-hosts' remote video and audio travels as NDI streams from the ad-hoc basement sets they've set-up in their respective Toronto area homes. (This live studio TV show was originally three hours long but COVID pressures reduced it to a two-hour live remote production.)

To ensure quality control, *Tim & Sid* producers shipped the co-hosts broadcast-grade production equipment, such as Razor webcams with embedded ring lights, as well as microphones and panel lights. While Wirecast Gear users typically plug their cameras and microphones directly into its back I/O panel, this production backhauls NDI streams of the co-hosts' Skype video and audio at high-quality over Rogers Communications' reliable, high-speed broadband to the control room based Wirecast Gear.

The workflow is complex because the show is a simulcast of the Sportsnet TV program produced in parallel with a call-in radio show. The workflow, which involves a tight interplay between the Sportsnet TV and radio platforms, is as follows:

- Having a producer use TeamViewer to gain IP-based remote access and control of the Wirecast Gear computer system to run the whole show from his home
- Capturing video and audio of the co-hosts via Skype over Rogers's high-speed internet service; a home-based router automatically fails over to a Rogers wireless LTE service for network redundancy
- Placing high-quality webcams, microphones, and lights at the co-hosts' home-based sets
- Interviewing guests that call in on phone lines
- Simulcasting the TV show audio on the radio

- Allowing radio listeners to call-in to the radio station's tie lines and have the audio of their conversation with the co-hosts feed from the radio station's sound board into an overall program audio mix for the TV and radio simulcast
- Displaying lower third texts on the TV portion during call-ins that say 'On Call is...and the callers' name and location'
- Reading and posting Twitter comments by fans

To bring the Skype NDI streams into Wirecast Gear, the operator first selects "NDI Enable" from Skype's Advanced Calling settings. This enables the output of separate, high-quality NDI streams for each co-hosts' video. Next, in Wirecast Gear's settings, the operator selects NDI Source from network options, which prompts Wirecast to detect the presence of the NDI streams from Skype. The operator then chooses Add Shot-Master Layer in Wirecast Gear to bring in the NDI streams as virtual sources. By bringing the shots in as separate sources, the operator can switch between them, or configure them as picture-in-picture displays, to name a few of the creative options.

DIGITAL STUDIO WORKFLOW

The Wirecast Gear 420 used for *Tim & Sid* is one of seven systems that Rogers Sports & Media purchased to support their pandemic-driven remote production needs. It's interesting to note that—while Rogers's live news shows could continue to be produced in the studio because news was deemed an essential service—sportscasting was not.

For this reason, all of Rogers's sports-related productions needed to convert to a remote workflow. Koziol and Fortin indicated that in March of 2020 the pandemic prompted the need for multiple Wirecast Gear units to support the work of their Digital Studio. This department produces (non-live) video distributed exclusively via social media, including another popular show *In Conversation with Ron MacLean*, as well as video podcasts and features.



“We normally would have bought Wirecast Pro software and integrated it ourselves. But due to the pandemic, we couldn’t go to our field operators’ homes and help them set-up the systems. The pre-configured Wirecast Gear appliances ensured a much easier set-up, without the challenges of integrating hardware and software from multiple vendors.”

--Pierre Fortin, VP Technology and Operations, Rogers Sports & Media

Wirecast Gear 420 appliances were “drop-shipped” to their Digital Studio field personnel, including producers and editors, so they could continue to do their work remotely from their homes.

All of the Wirecast Gear systems at Rogers were acquired through ROCKET, a Toronto-based technology solutions provider and Telestream partner. ROCKET has had a long-standing working relationship with Rogers. According to Donnie Gallant, ROCKET’s VP of Technology, their recent sales and technical support included “upfront architecture, design assistance, as well as qualifying various NDI and Skype workflows to determine the best approach for the live application.”

THE RESULTS

Koziol and Fortin both envision that Rogers Sports & Media will likely continue to produce Tim & Sid remotely for the foreseeable future. And they’ll perfect ways to make the show even more visually dynamic—with more video roll-ins and graphics and possibly the addition of video call-ins—as they go along.

Before they adopted the remote approach, they looked at every imaginable platform in the marketplace. But, Adrian Koziol notes, “Given the complexity of our unique mix of live TV, radio, and social media, there wasn’t another option out there that could meet our needs or what we wanted to accomplish. For this specific use and need for uncompromised quality, Wirecast has proven to be a reliable go-to.”

And Pierre Fortin adds:

“It’s not about cost savings for us. Our focus is on being able to do the show right, period. The fact that Tim and Sid are doing this sophisticated, high-profile sports talk show from their basements is pretty spectacular.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information about Rogers Sports & Media:
www.rogerssportsandmedia.com

More information about Sportsnet: www.sportsnet.ca

Learn about Wirecast Gear’s turnkey, integrated toolbox at the Telestream site:
<https://www.telestream.net/wirecastgear>

