

news briefs

Nexio to Switzerland

Leitch Technology has sold its Nexio server system to tv productioncenter zürich (tpc) for the German-language channels from Schweizer Fernsehen DRS (SF DRS), in Zurich.

tv productioncenter zürich (tpc) is Switzerland's biggest production company for audiovisual applications. SF1 and SF2 have been on air with the Leitch servers since March and are playing out new programmes during the early hours of the day. The servers, which interface with a Pebble Beach automation system, were sold through Leitch distributor Videolink.

"We chose the Nexio because it offers a shared storage solution and an easy pathway to expansion and is cost effective," said Fritz Rödiger, project leader from tpc's engineering department. "Leitch's commitment to integrate and be involved with technology such as MXF gives us confidence in moving forward with its products." tpc was launched in 2000 as a spin-off from the Swiss television corporation DRS (SF DRS).

Quantel News to Go

Quantel has introduced 'News to Go', a new concept based on Newsbox, a range of affordable pre-packaged integrated news production systems. The pre-packaged approach of Newsbox ensures that server-based production need no longer be regarded as a major systems purchase. Quantel's idea is that now, with Newsbox, every broadcaster can match the look and speed to air of even the largest stations.

Newsbox is a self-contained unit that comes with all that is needed to ingest material, view rushes, choose shots, edit stories, review finished pieces and play them out to air. Its common progressive user interface and toolset are exactly the same as all the sQ systems.

TV news on the train

Independent news provider ITN has a history of innovation, both in production and in delivery. As part of its plans to deliver tailored news programming to new media outlets, it is now 'broadcasting' to trains, reformatting content using Telestream's FlipFactory. Ian Auger, head of IT and communications at ITN, describes the system.

The ITN new media division has been creating news content for 3G mobile phones for some time. We see this as an important expansion of our business, and we have now built a dedicated studio for this as well as adding editing capacity to repack-age the content.

The new contract is with 360 Onboard, a specialist business which installs televisions on trains, largely in commuter areas. The installation and programming is funded by advertising: ITN provides a large part of the content in news, sports, business and entertainment information. The service is fully operational on Central Trains around Birmingham, and is now being rolled out with other train operators.

It is presented as a news programme, with one of ITN's well-known anchors, and typically around seven two-minute packages. We do three completely different programmes a day: delivered at 5.00 for the morning commute with an update at 16.00 for the return home, but the technology allows us to update any part of the programme at any time, so as sto-



ITN on board: ITN hopes to expand into other new media using same workflow

ries develop we can ensure that the content is as up to date as any other part of our news operation.

To look at the technology, let me start at the train. Each unit has a Linux PC that delivers the content, according to a playlist which is also capable of instant updates. At each main station there is a wireless link — using standard 802.11 technology — between a server on the station and the train PC. In the time it takes a train to arrive at an interme-



mediate station, load and unload, and move off again, the wireless link can push around 10 minutes of content onto the train. Typically, though, the main programme downloads are carried out at the terminus stations where the train has a longer dwell, and the servers on

intermediate stations are used for updates.

The content is delivered formatted for 640x480 pixel screens, with audio, as MPEG-4 files at 700kbps, which offers good quality. Note that the on-train system uses audio, although we are also captioning at least some of the material.

Alongside the media we also send XML control files with the necessary metadata for the on-train playout automation. We deliver our content to a playout centre managed by Ascent Media, which then uses SIS for satellite distribution to the station servers. This makes the system very easy to scale: as new train routes are added all that is needed is to install satellite dishes and servers on additional stations.

QUANTEL TO FLIPFACTORY

The big challenge for ITN, of course, is to create this specially formatted media. The benefit of the service for the commuter is that the news is truly up to date; the benefit for ITN is that

we can repurpose our content quickly and easily.

When we first went into 3G services we hand-crafted bespoke systems using products like Sorenson and Media Cleaner, but they are not ideally suited to automatic operation and, with the expansion of the operation as the train system was added, we needed to find a way to reformat content quickly and easily.

ITN's production system is based around a large Quantel server network that was not designed for file transfers. But our continuing programme of development led us to install a new GenerationQ server, which has FTP capability.

We were aware of Telestream and its FlipFactory product, which seemed to be exactly what we needed. FlipFactory is a suite of soft-

ware that not only flips the data from one format to another — Quantel's internal video to MPEG-4 in this case — but it provides an automated environment which does the transcoding and delivery as soon as a completed package is published to it.

This project was a challenge for the Telestream team in two respects. First, they needed to work with Quantel to develop the gateway interface, at a time when Quantel itself was moving its gateway architecture to offer MXF in addition to the separate audio and video structure currently delivered.

Second, the 360 Onboard system uses an unusual variant of MPEG-4, but Telestream worked with Apple to provide a fast, single pass encoder.

Telestream was determined to chase all this down, and has now delivered a system which works well and does what we need. We are now heading for our vision of journalists cutting their packages on Quantel, then allowing the editor of each new media service to use a standard web browser interface to pick the packages and route them as needed.

The installation currently has two Telestream FlipFactory systems installed, but we will add more to increase capacity as the range of our services grows. The 3G delivery systems will follow the on-train service in using Telestream: then we will be looking to move our web streaming and expanding into other new media projects using the same workflow.



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