Post

Produced VidTranS 99 program for the Video Services Forum

VidTranS '99: the future is now

By DAN RESTUCCIO

LOS ANGELES — While most of us are still struggling with fuzzy QuickTime movies over 56K modems, the attendees at VidTranS '99 casually chatted about transporting 1.5Gb high definition video streams over DS3 and 270Mb fiber optic networks with ease. The conference is not a trade show, but an opportunity to share knowledge about the transmission of video using broadband technology, explained organizers Merrill Weiss, senior partner of Merrill Weiss Group (www.mwgrp.com), and Matt Peterson, president of Scenic Wonders, Inc. (www.swonders.com).

Senior execs from major networks, studio people, telecommunications companies, post production houses, content providers, and even the US Defense Department swapped stories about their migration to digital video transmission. The conference also had about 30 exhibitors displaying the latest in fiber optic video transmission technology.

FOX ABANDONS VIDEOTAPE

Dumping atoms (videotape) in favor of bits (data) was the dramatic theme of panelist Jim Hopkins, VP of Engineering at Fox Digital. "Having video running around the television plant," said Hopkins, "is like running the Indy 500 in a 1966 Chevy Impala station wagon. You can get around, but not fast enough and with very little style.

"Fox Network Center bumps all their programming and commercials to Tektronix Profile PDR servers as soon as they hit the door," continued Hopkins. "Once the program is in the digital domain we can make transfers up to three times faster than real-time clone data and have an efficient way to video archive."

In May of 1999 Fox delivered its first 720p broadcast of the feature *Independence Day*. The movie was transmitted via satellite in NTSC to over 200 television stations and over fiber to 10 stations that transmitted the movie in DTV.

Fox first transferred the film to D-5 using the Philips Spirit DataCine high definition telecine. On the airdate, data from the Panasonic HD VTR entered an MPEG encoder where it was converted into an asynchronous stereo interface clocked at 19.39Mb per second. From there it went to a Network Adapter Unit (NAU) where it was converted to a 45Mb, G703 signal for transmission down a DS3 line.

At the affiliate end the DS3 stream was received by the NAU and a 19.39Mb MPEG signal was extracted and sent to an MPEG splicer. From the splicer it entered an ASI SMPTE 310 converter. The SMPTE 310 was then sent to an 8VSB modulator and then transmitted.

Starting this fall, Fox requested a four-by-three and a 16-by-nine version of each of its primetime shows. Tapes come into Fox in either Ampex DCT or Digital Beta format. They are quality controlled, dubbed to the Profile servers and archived on to 330Mb DST data tapes. On the airdate, the data tapes are transferred to playout DDRs where their automation computer simultaneously rolls both the four-by-three and the 16-by-nine versions. At the affiliate end the four-by-three version goes to an NTSC transmitter and the 16-by-nine version goes to a DTV transmitter.

HOLLYWOOD & DIGITAL DAILIES

Byron Wagner, another panelist at the conference and CEO of Metawire (www.metawire.com), is busy wiring Hollywood for the transmission of video dailies. "A lot of time and money is spent in the approval process," says Wagner. "Many productions are international. Many productions can't wait for the Federal Express guy. We save money for our clients and virtually change the way people work by creating a system for almost immediate access to digital dailies, anywhere in the world, via existing computer and Internet technology and cost-effective broadband solutions.

"Most approval decisions do not require broadcast quality videos," continues Wagner. "Metawire leverages that fact and uses normal and high speed private connections to allow creative people, production people and studio executives who are separated geographically to make choices in almost real-time."

APPROVALS ON THE SPOT

Post production panelist Scott Carleton, VP of Nomad Editing in Santa Monica, got his first taste of digital dailies using VidTranS exhibitor Telestreams' ClipMail product. "We were working on a package of Discover Card spots for Goodby, Silverstein & Partners [GSP], an agency client of ours based in San Francisco," recalled Carleton. "Using the Telestream we sent edited spots, got feedback and sent revisions back to San Francisco several times in the same day. This is impossible using FedEx and cost prohibitive over Vyvx or satellite."

"Before I bought this system," said GSP post production supervisor Greg Martinez, "I was very apprehensive about committing to a proprietary, point-to-point system. The thing that sold me was the full-screen resolution and the ease of going straight to tape. It became a no-brainer."

ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

The scale of operations between Fox Digital and Nomad Post may be different, but the issues and solutions they raised at VidTranS '99 are essentially the same. Attendees got to see how production professionals are managing the transition from analog to digital, upgrading to HDTV and learning fresh ways to streamline the production and distribution pipeline via digital transmission over Internet and broadband lines.

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