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VSat cuts the cost of uplinks for TSL



V satisfied: Webber with TSL's new Mercedes VSat van

TSL has built a new, lower-cost uplinks vehicle based on VSat (very small aperture terminal) technology. The internet protocol-based standard allows hardware that is "very much cheaper than traditional uplink technology", explained David Webber, TSL's chief operating officer.

Standard definition over VSat is about half the usual cost, while HD is about a third, putting satellite contribution within the realms of budget productions, such as web TV. The vehicle costs about half of a conventional SNG unit and can accommodate up to two cameras before a larger vehicle is needed.

The single-camera demonstration Mercedes has been built to show off the technology to potential customers after IBC, but will be offered for sale later in the year. A single-camera vehicle would cost less than £100,000.

"We've gone for what we think will be a popular configuration," Webber said of the vehicle at IBC this year. "It is designed for journalist operation. It locates the satellite automatically, in under two minutes, so you don't need an engineer."

The set-up includes editing on Final Cut Pro, using an AJA KiPro recorder as a server, with a wireless camera and talkback, and can also return recordings via 3G telecoms if not needed live. The van can run off batteries for about eight hours. Users can also plug into the mains, or start the engine.

Orders can apparently be turned around remarkably quickly. "Including the coach building and integration, and if we have a base vehicle available, we can do it in a month," said Webber.

The VSat antenna on the roof is provided by the coachbuilder Dawson Communications, with TSL responsible for the integration. In addition, the equipment racks and battery compartments are removable without damage to the interior trim, making the system suitable for leased vehicles.