

IBE
March/April 2008

Production line TV

By **CHRIS EXELBY**, general manager of TSL Products.

The introduction of new technologies in recent years, such as Dolby Digital Surround Sound and High Definition TV, has caused a seismic shift in the demands of consumers. Having invested in high definition screens and surround sound systems, they are thirsty for new content and expect to be offered a choice of content from a proliferation of channels. Unfortunately, at a time when viewer demands are increasing, there has been a noticeable reduction in the technical knowledge and skill levels in the broadcast engineering and programme making fraternity.

In the recent past, engineers were trained to a high level by well-established and respected broadcasters such as the BBC. Several years ago, a TSL manager provided a training course for a group of engineers in Tanzania and, facing a knowledgeable audience, he discovered that they had originally been trained in the UK by the BBC at Evesham as part of a World Bank Initiative. That type of foundation training is unfortunately rare now and the need for education is a hot topic at the moment. Audio discussion groups frequently contain criticism from 'old school' sound supervisors and sound engineers who are frustrated at the quality of the content produced by some programme makers. Although with equipment available today it is possible to make a TV programme on a camcorder, edit it on a laptop and deliver it over the Internet, this does not necessarily mean such content is appropriate or acceptable for mainstream broadcast channels.

Driven by the demand for content, there has been a shift in broadcast investment away from technical expertise and towards content



creation. So, as the quantity of technically poor content increases, the engineering departments which receive and process it are increasingly under-skilled and under-funded.

The outcome is a greater reliance on manufacturers for the provision of technical support and consulting. As a major manufacturer of audio monitoring products, TSL has responded to this change in the market by making equipment more user-friendly and by educating customers on how

Whilst the high technical quality of a programme will not on its own deliver the highest ratings, broadcasters' who offer high and consistently engineered output plus enjoyable and entertaining programmes will be the eventual winners in the ratings wars.

equipment should be used and results interpreted. By working with audio giant Dolby, TSL is well placed to guide broadcasters on the use of new standards as well as on the intricacies of audio delivery and monitoring, maximising the quality of the audio sound and the subsequent experience of the end customer. Also through its close relationship with Dolby, TSL has acquired an understanding of, and insight into, customers' requirements, enabling the company to act as valued consultants to its customers as well as developing a range of advanced Dolby-ready monitoring equipment.

Strict regulations in the UK mean that programmes have to meet stringent technical criteria, which are increasingly not being reached; so whilst the simplicity and cost of new equipment has made television a more accessible channel of communication, poorly produced programmes will fail to meet the required standards. No matter how hard you try, you can't use a Handicam to make a surround sound movie.

To ensure that the high standards demanded by regulators and customers are met, it is critical that the implementation, delivery and monitoring of broadcast standards is improved. Companies like TSL Systems and TSL Products are helping programme makers and broadcasters understand the technical demands of the television arena and the obligations they have to the viewer, enabling them to avoid the pitfalls which lead to material being rejected by the regulators. Whilst the high technical quality of a programme will not on its own deliver the highest ratings, broadcasters' who offer high and consistently engineered output plus enjoyable and entertaining programmes will be the eventual winners in the ratings wars.