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# Network first

**RUSSELL GRUTE, head of sales at TSL, reports on a ground-breaking installation at Meridian - part of the UK's ITV network.**

**I**n the multi-channel world, the relative values of content types have changed over time as viewers begin to watch, and indeed use television in different ways. Both sports and news coverage have undergone particular and extensive changes in the way that content is created and viewed. TSL's international systems integration work with companies like ITN, BBC, ESPN, RTP in Portugal and TVNZ in New Zealand, has helped the company build up considerable expertise in broadcast news.

News now occupies a primary role in many broadcasters' schedules and that is reflected all the way through the chain, from 24-hour international news channels right through to their regional counterparts. Viewers expect both speed and accuracy of coverage across

the range. In turn, this requires an increase in the efficiency of news-gathering and the corresponding production workflows.

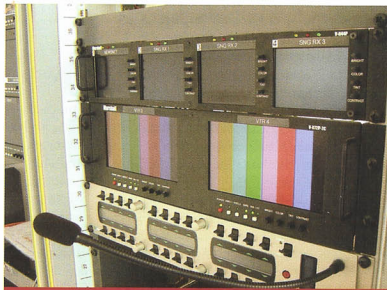
Meridian, the most south-easterly region of the UK ITV network, is the first ITV franchise in the UK to undergo a significant change in both its structure and the use of new technology to maximise the efficiency of its news creation and the accuracy of its output. Recognising TSL's skills in this environment, earlier this year ITV contracted the company to design and install a new production centre in Southampton.

Paul Stevenson, controller of News System and Projects for the ITV News Group, explains: "News and regional programming is now the main part of our activity and so we needed a technology update, and to refresh our working practices."

Meridian actually comprises three separate sub-regions, each with its own independent news service. The whole set-up is being restructured to provide a new and more efficient operation. Previously, both Southampton and Maidstone operated studio presentation facilities locally in their respective regions. Newbury had its news-gathering base locally and its presentation based in Southampton, alongside Southampton's service.

The Maidstone operation is evolving to better news-gathering only facilities. Maidstone presentation will

now be co-sited along with Newbury's and Southampton's at the new facility. TSL is responsible for the design and installation of the new facility including three new studios, each of 700 sq ft, and each studio will operate independently to continue to provide genuine



Part of the TSL installation



The audio production control room at Meridian

regional programming. TSL is also responsible for the five non-linear edit suites, master equipment room, and there will be a new, integrated newsroom system based around iNews/Avid technology.

Key to the drive to empower journalists and enhance its output, Meridian is deploying a UNITY storage system with separate LAN shares (effectively smaller UNITYs, at Newbury and Maidstone). "What is very different in our new set-up is the shared storage, workgroup approach to content," explains Stevenson. "We will be sending stories between the centres using file transfer rather than base-band video or tape. We are also creating a desktop editing environment - with reporters accessing full bandwidth media - so a large proportion of the on-air content will be edited by journalists at the desktop. Ingest will also be local rather than central." Careful management of the UNITY system's online storage capacity - around 500 hours - will provide a local and more accessible archive for journalists.

ITV at Meridian is implementing a workflow that a lot of other regional broadcasters worldwide would like to achieve with the unification of its news production operations within the region.