

TSL integration at TV New Zealand

DON CUNNINGHAM chose Television Systems Ltd to oversee the upgrade of TVNZ's routing and newsroom systems.

In 1988, the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand was dissolved, and Television New Zealand (TVNZ) was formed. TVNZ is the country's main broadcaster with approximately 70 per cent audience share and is currently (since July this year), going through the process of changing status to that of a Crown Owned Company – meaning that while we are still required to turn a profit, TVNZ now has to increasingly reflect minorities and the arts and is also carrying less advertising. In a competitive TV environment, this is no mean challenge.

As well as broadcasting TV ONE and TV TWO, our master control room (MCR) is also the satellite gateway for many third-party clients including Sky Television's New Zealand services, as well as TV3 and offshore clients. The growth of the company's Satellite Services Division has added



significant workloads that the previous system was simply not able to handle, and was one of the key reasons why major upgrade work was required.

Earlier this year, a comprehensive six-month project, which was completed

on 1 October, was initiated to upgrade the heart of the Network's facilities. UK-based Television Systems Ltd (TSL) was contracted by us to operate as both systems integrator and installer for the digital upgrade projects.

Overseeing the project

As part of the contract, TSL was hired to oversee the management of the detailed system design, pre-wiring, on-site installation, commissioning, and training. Working alongside our engineers, TSL was totally responsible for four major projects: the Auckland-based TVNZ station router and MCR; news production and control rooms digital upgrade, along with the associated newsroom production area; a replacement station talkback system, and small digital router and conversion equipment for mobile use. All of this is now in SD format.

The upgrade centred on the fact that the Network Centre was designed in the mid-1980s, and the video and audio systems were all analogue. There was the increasing danger of on-air failure, compounded by the fact that there was a growing lack of vendor support for the ageing systems. Alongside replacement equipment being ever harder to source (because the vast majority now feature digital and

not analogue interfaces), inefficiencies were creeping in, as well as signal degradation because of the limited flexibility and unnecessary processing required by the MCR's equipment and the associated systems in the CAR. In essence, the central matrix was imposing a ceiling on capacity and efficiency. The heart of the upgrade centred on the MCR and the main news studio, Suite 4. In order to link an increasing number of 'digital islands', the MCR's basic functionality had to be upgraded to digital infrastructure – while our production suite could not keep up with the requirement to generate over six hours of live news content on TV ONE daily because of the inherent lack of automation via the analogue set-up.

Equipment supply for the projects was split between TSL and TVNZ free-issue items. Major TSL-supplied components included Quartz Routers, Vistek digital interface hardware, Trilogy talkback and JVC monitors. We supplied the Sony MVS8000 vision mixer, studio cameras, and accessories, while TSL also handled the systems hardware. This included desks, audio monitoring stacks and so on.

TSL adopted an innovative approach to the Suite 4 upgrade, deciding to build the entire system first at its facilities in Maidenhead, UK. The TVNZ installation was replicated exactly, including the preparation of all the inter-area wiring. Once this had been tested thoroughly, our staff were then able to fly over to the UK and put it through

our own rigorous trials, particularly checking the workflows. As a result of this approach, the actual installation was as painless as possible and was quick too. Following the central station matrix upgrade, the MCR and CAR can now handle digital sources, as well as data and control on top of video and audio.

TSL also recently completed the design and manufacture of a fly-away 'events package' for us that we used at the Manchester Commonwealth Games. This was also constructed and tested in the UK and then shipped to New Zealand after the Games. Once again, TSL provided a fast, efficient service working to detailed requirements from our engineers and that allowed us to satisfy the needs of our viewers in a competitive market.

Flexible and efficient

Because of the size and complexity of the projects and the timeframe involved, it was essential that the system integration and installation was handled by an experienced company that could provide the dedication and professionalism that we required – and TSL lived up to that billing. Our whole operation is now more flexible and efficient, and there have been significant improvements to the way that TVNZ operates.

TSL responded promptly to any problems along the way – there will always be glitches with projects of this size – and provided effective solutions so that we now have an operational environment with flexibility and efficiency that we need.

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