

production

CNBC Pakistan Launching

JAMES CARELESS profiles this prime example of a DV acquisition, server-based greenfield operation

The much-anticipated launch of CNBC Pakistan will do more than localize one of the most respected names in business news. It will also inaugurate TV production facilities that are possibly "the most advanced in Pakistan," says Aaron Shaw, CNBC Arabia's Director of Broadcast Operation and Engineering. Shaw is heading up the technical side of the launch.

To achieve this goal, CNBC Pakistan hired independent UK systems integrator TSL to design, integrate, and install the complete facility in Karachi. It will contain two fully featured news studios, a newsroom, automated audio/video playback, post-production, and graphics. The Karachi facility will be linked to news sub bureaus in Islamabad and Lahore.

"This new facility represents focused thinking in every area of the design and has been conceived to maintain and improve the high production

values that CNBC is known for," says Russell Grute, TSL's head of sales and marketing. "It will transmit a combination of CNBC's international programming, plus locally-produced content."

Nuts and Bolts

CNBC Pakistan's operation is being built on the Pebble Beach Neptune automation platform. In the network's Karachi transmission suite, Neptune will control an Omneon storage area network, five DVCAM VTRs, and an NVision router. CNBC Pakistan Karachi headquarters will also use AP's ENPS newsroom system, with Neptune being interfaced directly into the ENPS using the MOS protocol. This will allow newsroom-based producers to adjust the video playback order on the fly and have direct access to graphics.

"We chose Pebble Beach because their system is the right cost and size for the requirements of a customer

like CNBC Pakistan," says Russell Grute. "Neptune offers a multi-client system. By this, I mean that the various functions of the station that can benefit from automation – such as ingestion, transmission, and production control – can be divided among numerous operators during peak times sharing the same clip database and pool of devices, then during slow periods these operations can be easily combined onto one workstation for single person control.

"Since the client will be in start-up mode when they launch, they want a small but scalable system," he adds. "The Pebble Beach system will allow CNBC Pakistan to adjust their facility workflow and staffing configuration as needs and growth dictate."

As for the choice of video server? TSL chose Omneon because CNBC Pakistan needed a true storage area network and open network connectivity for

editing, and the system needed to be flexible and reconfigurable, rather than a fixed system that is tied down to specific designated ports. "When a customer needs to support multiple workflows, a true shared storage system is always a good choice," Grute says.

TSL specified Ross Vision Mixers for the two Karachi studios. "We've installed Ross Video switchers in many places, including a recent upgrade for ITV News in the UK," says Grute. The larger studio, which will be equipped with three Sony cameras, will feed into a Ross Video Synergy 2 switcher, while the two Sony cameras in the smaller studio will feed a Synergy 1.

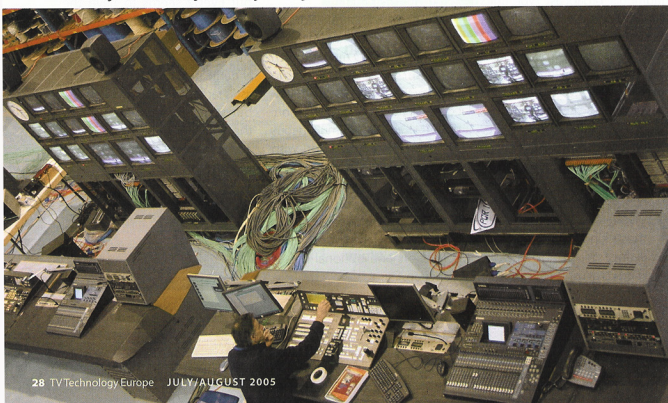
Finally, CNBC's studio audio will be mixed using Yamaha digital audio, and the facility's Autoscript teleprompters will be tied directly into the ENPS newsroom server. Because CNBC uses a lot of graphics in its on-air presentation, "a full system based on Pixel Power's Clarity range is specified, and this has been directly integrated with the ENPS system and the run down," says Grute.

Field Acquisition

CNBC plans to have seven ENG crews nationwide. They will be divided among the network's Karachi headquarters, plus the news bureaus in Islamabad and Lahore.

"All of the crews will be shooting in DVCAM," says Aaron Shaw. "In Karachi, news rushes will be ingested into the video server, then edited on one of four Final Cut Pro 4 non-linear

Production galleries 2 and 1 during their final stages of testing



28 TV Technology Europe JULY/AUGUST 2005

TV Technology
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July/August 2005

editing workstations. Final Cut is the most cost-effective platform that meets our broadcast production standards, and its price point means we can also have a system in our Islamabad and Lahore bureaus. They will send finished news packages to Karachi for ingest direct to video server, and these will immediately be available to play out to air under ENPS and Neptune control."

"Omneon works well with DVCAM," Grute says. "In turn, Final Cut Pro also works well in the 25 Mbps realm and when connected directly to the Omneon can also edit in place, so the combination of all three was a good solution for CNBC Pakistan."

Challenges

It is never easy for a broadcaster to start from scratch. However, the pressure is doubly on CNBC Pakistan, because the CNBC brand is one that viewers

associate with premium production quality. In short, any start-up glitches would be doubly glaring!

To minimise the problems of an all-new technology rollout at an all-new operation with rookie staff, TSL decided to first assemble every element of the network's Karachi operation in their Maidenhead headquarters; connect them all, and refine the workflows. "At TSL, we have space to set out the entire CNBC Pakistan facility exactly as it will be set up in Karachi," says Grute.

"At the same time, we brought in staff from CNBC Pakistan to train on the equipment for two weeks," he adds. "We have worked closely with all the manufacturers to offer technical, super user and operational training in one package. In this way, CNBC Pakistan's technicians



Shad Heshmi of CNBC Pakistan training at TSL's offices




Aaron Shaw looking at an edit station



will know how to run the station when it goes to air; ensuring a professionally-polished presentation from Day One."

This said, creating a fully automated TV network is still no small feat. "The most challenging technical aspect is integrating the newsroom's ENPS production system and the Pebble Beach automation

with the rest of the network's video equipment," Shaw says. "For traditional broadcast engineers, much of what IT systems do is akin to black magic!"

One thing is certain: CNBC Pakistan's facilities will set a standard for advanced broadcasting in that country, and perhaps the region as well. 

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