Making our News Business Faster, Cheaper and more Flexible

A Conversation with Turner's Michael Koetter, Vice President of News Technology Planning & Development, about MXF for Production, AS-10

AMWA Marketing and Membership Manager Neil Dunstan explores how the news operation at CNN is moving towards a technical standard which will substantially improve their operation.

Neil Dunstan: What business drivers were behind your decision to ask the AMWA to create AS-10, a file specification, to support production at CNN?

Michael Koetter: For any news organization to satisfy its consumers, it has to capture, edit and play out news stories as quickly as possible. We wanted to get tape out of our process. Speed and efficiency were our goals and we thought we could do better than we have been in the past.

ND: How did this impact on the way you worked?

MK: We had already chosen Sony XDCAM for our acquisition format and that was serving us well but we were struggling to get suitable workflows downstream.

ND: And that revealed some problems to be solved?

MK: Yes, in several respects. We have a wide range of file sources <u>and</u> lots of consumers of those files in the production process. So we need a huge range of functionality in the production process and, of course, lots of vendors. As we started to design our system architecture we realized that interoperability was going to be a problem – almost certainly a show-stopper. There were different interpretations by each vendor of what the file should comprise, all well considered but unfortunately different.

ND: So what does the emerging Application Standard, AS-10 promise to offer?

MK: First and foremost, reliable interoperability. We're working towards a clearly defined, unambiguous specification with the help of both media companies and vendors. Once the specification is defined we'll be able to test the files from any vendor and ensure that they match the requirements. We'd like the specification, when complete, to be an implementer's guide! We want to be able to build best of breed systems.

ND: How is it going?

MK: The vendors currently involved in the AS-10 working group have been great. All have been very open on technical matters and everyone learned a lot. At the start there was a wide range of levels of knowledge and experience across the companies. Now we are talking the same language and making great progress. Some vendors have added functionality which previously they hadn't been able to achieve.

ND: Are there any benefits from this project that you didn't expect?

MK: It turns out that a big range of vendors have shown interest in ensuring that their products will meet AS-10, which means that the vendor ecosphere has grown. That's got to be good for everybody.

ND: What is the current status of the project?

MK: The specification is in the final review cycle and soon ready to be released.

ND: If another media company or vendor was interested in benefitting from the current discussions, would that be possible?

MK: Yes – definitely. Contact Barbara Main at the AMWA and she will make the introductions. (barbara_main@amwa.tv)

ND: What sort of organisation might find that valuable?

MK: Any media company that uses XDCAM as their main format and is looking for a solid workflow in their production process. Or any vendor that wants to expand their business into that market.

ND: What criteria might a news company use for deciding to get involved?

MK: That is easy. Can you be sure that files made by the vendors of your acquisition and production tools are interoperable? Can you test the validity of any of those files? When one vendor makes a change, do you currently have to regression test the resulting files across your entire workflow?

ND: Do you have final comments?

MK: When we get to the point where a product has "AS-10 compliant" written on the box I will be very pleased.

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