



Salon du NAB à Las Vegas

With a record number of visitors (108,000), NAB remains the world's most important Broadcast exhibition.

A plethora of post-production players were present (Avid and Apple competing once again for both the largest booth and the loudest presentations), not to mention providers of production services and broadcasting center equipment such as Grass Valley, SONY, and Panasonic.

Interoperability is here at last

Some of these players have managed at last to define a common content exchange format (MXF). Until now, each vendor used its own proprietary format, requiring operators and content publishers to choose all their equipment from a single vendor. Once the new format is finalized and accepted, it could provide genuine interoperability in this industry.

Video encoding news

This issue will describe the key changes since the first shows MPEG-4 appeared in. New players, new solutions, niche markets, very large players.... All these factors are important new components, when one could have thought that the end of the MPEG-2 era would result in a jolly consolidation of the industry.

Challenges and risks for broadcasters

Broadcasters and distributors: competing partners

The challenges facing broadcasters are both disturbing and exhilarating. How does an outstanding mass medium like TV shift from an unquestionable position of strength to become a simple content supplier partner, or a newcomer in the Internet or mobility sectors?

How can it best push and protect its content while setting up productive partnerships with ISPs, telecom operators, and even local newspapers? Basically, how can it best arbitrate potential conflicts?

Is IPTV the next El Dorado?

The buzz generated by shared video platforms such as YouTube and Yahoo! Video is amplified by the extraordinary good health of the IPTV industry, where video has become the killer application thanks to television services. Cisco Systems is a good illustration: as one of the leading suppliers of Internet routers and switches, the company's earnings improved significantly following its acquisition of Scientific-Atlanta.

Furthermore, the president of telecoms manufacturer Ericsson – which made a successful takeover bid for Tandberg, the Norwegian provider of digital broadcasting systems – recently declared that "IPTV for cable and telcos is the most important opportunity today in the networked multimedia industry."

Key issue: how to divide up the profits?

Traditional TV stations are certainly threatened by TV over IP. But they are also benefiting from the extraordinary showcase provided by video sharing sites. The various skirmishes between YouTube and Viacom – which in the end resulted in a gigantic court case – illustrate the importance of the potential revenue streams generated by those popular platforms.

Another battle is raging over content:

the cost of transporting offers to value-added formats such as HD. While the market is only budding for the moment, network operators do not intend to be left by the wayside. They will fight brazenly to immediately receive their share of broadcasters' new revenue streams. In this battle, the key negotiation factors are not only the popularity of a channel among its potential consumers, but also the quality of the content and its availability in HD format.

Poaching on new ground

Broadcasters are looking for ways to benefit from this situation. They are trying to maximize their audience on every available media and to test new business models by acquiring additional skills and betting on their subscribers' growing appetite for content.

Having exploited a full range of "derivative" products on its network, CBS – like all the other networks and majors – has begun to take its editorial strategy one step further. It will use platforms dedicated to mobile devices in order to distribute entertainment content (games, video clips, etc.), leveraging its successful TV shows. The network makes money from the advertising on its two WAP sites, and from end users' royalty payments for each download. Moreover, a pilot series on WRAL-TV is testing the public's interest for local TV stations distributing not only local content but also syndicated programs to their audience. In other words, yet another test of strength is shaping up between networks and affiliates concerning a new way to distribute revenue generated by Web broadcasting.

The challenges faced by broadcasters demonstrate that while content may be king, their future also depends on the keys for sharing economic revenue among the growing number of increasingly demanding partners.