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USER REPORT

Leightronix Automates Public Access TV

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Folk singer Bob Dylan quoted in one of his songs that “When you ain’t got nothing, you ain’t got nothing to lose.” I can relate to that in my position as executive director for a small community television operation. Public access television often suffers for lack of adequate personnel and equipment. But weaknesses in this area can prove to be a strength when it comes to innovation. In public, education and government access, aka PEG, we have an advantage over commercial broadcasters in that we are not committed to old technology.

Commercial broadcasters spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for nonlinear editors, automation systems and other broadcasting infrastructure to get their signal out at the quality and consistency their advertisers and audiences expect.

When a new workflow methodology presents itself, broadcasters have to make purchasing decisions based on the perceived future stability of proprietary formats and hardware.

In our much smaller environment, we can make our decisions without fear, knowing that things can only get better. We try to emulate what the big guys are doing—but on a shoestring. Sometimes we miss the mark and sometimes we are able to move and innovate in ways that beat the big guys to the punch. I am happy to report one such example.

DIGITAL MIGRATION

I had been looking for an inexpensive



Jason Benjamin, Norton Community Television executive director, with the Leightronix automation controller

way to migrate from an analog, tape-based environment to a fully digital plant with acquisition and play-out technology. I managed to accomplish both of these objectives on a very limited budget.

Content acquisition was the first step in this process. For this I chose the Firestore FS-4 Pro from Focus Enhancements. This is a portable hard drive recorder that acquires a DV25 signal and translates it into any one of several native NLE codecs for ingest. The file is encoded on-the-fly and is instantly available to drop into an edit timeline.

I equipped my stringer cameramen with FS-4 units. I then purchased a 360 Systems Image Server 2000 for play-out. The 2000 can capture composite and SDI video, but it also has the ability to ingest raw DV streams via FTP.

My stringers capture athletic events, municipal meetings, concerts and other events on the FS-4s and then stream the files over a LAN directly into the 2000.

The end result is a new acronym I like to call DTB or “direct-to-broadcast.”

I have not implemented network-attached storage, but still make use of the full 25 Mbps DV stream. With this workflow, we can export all of the edited content from Final Cut Pro as a DV stream and FTP it directly from the Mac.

Archiving content is another important consideration that is addressed by this model. When my server drives begin to fill up, I move programming back over Gigabit Ethernet into a Lacie Firewire 800 drive and burn the files onto a dual-layer DVD.

AUTOMATION RECIPE

Automation control is the final ingredient in this recipe, and the solution came from another dear friend of public access—Leightronix. I cut my teeth on their Mini-T Event™ Controller, and graduated with the TCD/IP network managed video system controller.

