

# TRIED AND TESTED PARTNER

**Simon Farnsworth** is one of the key people behind the scenes trying to make the London 2012 Olympics an unforgettable experience for viewers the world over. As Head of Contribution Services for **GlobeCast** globally, he is putting everything in place to service broadcasters' requirements in the run-up and during the 2012 Olympics. What are the challenges in London?

In London we certainly don't have to deal with all the on-ground challenges and satellite frequency licensing issues that we had in Beijing. London is an extremely well-connected place in terms of fibre optic cable and we are fully familiar with (UK regulator) OFCOM's framework.

Broadcasters around the world are working with squeezed production budgets so the challenge for us with the London Games is to provide clients with robust, reliable and innovative technologies and more cost-effective solutions – without jeopardising the technical service in any way.

We'll have GlobeCast staff from the UK and from overseas as well working on this – from France, Italy, South Africa, Singapore and more. Our teams will comprise staff who have the right depth of experience, because in live TV you don't get a second chance.

#### What do you offer non-rights holders?

We are offering services from two sites. From Stratford, where the main Olympic park is, we offer six stand-up positions for news crews to do their daily bulletins. We are also offering the potential to build a studio there if a broadcaster wants to host a news show from this

location. We'll have SD and HD satellite connectivity to Intelsat 905 coming out of Stratford, with all the communications that go alongside that.

We are also offering a position by Lambeth Palace for a traditional London shot overlooking the Houses of Parliament, which broadcasters can use as a one-stop solution for doing a report which is then beamed back to their broadcast base anywhere in the world.

#### What timeframe are you working to?

For non-rights holders, we'll have everything ready two weeks prior to the Games. For the rights-holding broadcasters, we will have everything in place and tested one month before the event, and then moved into the IBC and tested again with two weeks to go.

#### Is there still time for NRHBs to approach you?

We work with new requests right up to the last second: that's a key part of our offering. A major story might break at Games time – anything newsworthy and unexpected can come along.

#### Are you getting specific service requests?

The specific requests and the technical developments are driven by the rights-holders. For news, we

“Remote production is one example of innovation in our offering”

are seeing a lot more requests for HD and in general we are seeing much more demand for file-based play-out; instead of bringing a tape to play out on a tape deck clients are bringing a laptop with a file. We are also responding to requests for office space and logistics to help clients get their people around.

It is important to mention the technology that we are using because, compared with Beijing, it is a lot more advanced. London 2012 will be predominantly an MPEG4 or JPEG 2000 encoding environment. With JPEG 2000 comes a convergence between the traditional video encoding technology and the IP world – we are able to deliver not just video but also file transfer data and IP phones over all these networks. So we are offering value-added services in order to make the broadcasters' experience a much more holistic one.

#### You mentioned more cost-effective solutions – can you give an example?

There is a lot of innovation in our offering for the rights-holders, to provide greater efficiency. An example is the ability to do remote production: allowing broadcasters to stay in their home countries and do the final programme production from base instead of sending their whole team to London. We are ideally positioned to help them



with that because we do have a global network. A broadcaster sending say 2,000 staff over to cover the Games could spend £3-4m, whereas it might only cost half that amount to send all the pictures produced by host broadcaster OBS back to base, and produce the final programme in the US, for example.

#### London will be the first live 3D Games. What does this mean for you?

We have been asked to deliver 3D content all over the world, so it means extra provisioning. But ultimately, 3D over satellite is just another channel within a multiplex. If a broadcaster is going to be transmitting in 3D, it will be in a mix with its HD channels – there won't be any stand-alone 3D.

#### Do you make it easier for broadcasters to service multiple platforms?

Many of the major broadcasters today have the resources in house to manage the multi-platform aspect of what they do. That said, if a broadcaster asks us to do it, we are equipped and we do have the tools and resources to make that happen. So far we have not been asked to provide any reduced bit rate services for mobile or tablet devices.

Anything that a broadcaster takes will be derived from the

highest possible bit rate, because even though the Games is a multi-device event, the TV broadcast platform is the most important one for the broadcasters.

What is interesting is that this time you are going to see more data feeds being delivered, such as live scoring and results. These data feeds allow broadcasters to do more with that information back at their base – perhaps with enhanced graphics or interactive platforms for connected devices such as an iPad application that can show video alongside scores and other information.

#### How do you make sure there is not a single point of failure?

We build great resiliency into the systems. We will have two dark fibre links between our various sites in London, and also between our sites and the IBC. We'll also have satellite feeds out of Gray's Inn Road and Brookmans Park and the IBC. So if the fibre goes down between Brookmans Park and the IBC we can route the signals through Gray's Inn Road to the IBC, and there is also a satellite backup. It's a ring structure with multifunctional methods of delivering content via satellite and fibre optic cable.

#### Are broadcasters opting for fibre

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For the Games, the TV broadcast platform is still the most important one

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#### or satellite?

It's still a combination of both, to give them resiliency. The main feeds are coming via fibre, but satellite is still being used as backup. It's not a technology that is disappearing.

#### In terms of business done, how important are the Games for you?

Very important, not only in terms of a commercial stand-alone project but also for our reputation as a delivery provider. GlobeCast has established its reputation as a tried and tested partner by delivering a quality service on these big events, and broadcasters turn to us again and again as a result.

We have huge resources in London dedicated to the Olympics but we are also delivering these feeds worldwide to the different technical operations centres that GlobeCast runs around the world.

I think this is where GlobeCast stands out – we are a global company with a presence in 15 countries on 5 continents. So for example the South Africans can speak to our Johannesburg office and have a direct link to our London operations, we have people who are in touch with OBS London on the ground, and our office in London can give customers support should anything go wrong.

#### The 2016 Olympics will be in Rio de Janeiro – give us a preview.

First, you have the Football World Cup in 2014 which from a logistical point of view will prove really tough just because the distances between some of the venues and the IBC in Rio are massive. For example, from Recife down to Rio there is no fibre optic cable so they are going to have to lay new cable through the Amazon.

Thinking about all the upcoming major events, we have been building our infrastructure in Latin America, connecting South America to our global fibre network and our teleports. By 2016 technology will have moved on – in Rio we may be broadcasting super high definition or 4K, or 3D in 4K!

Thank you, Simon Farnsworth.