

EARLY WINS, QUICK WINS

Planning to join the Navy at 17, **Russell Grute** got distracted by broadcast technology and joined a small company called Sony Broadcast. Today, as Director of Marketing for **Pharos**, he is a champion of tapeless workflow and efficiency, pinpointing where clients can make quick wins and real savings. With some big projects in the bag, business right now is interesting for the solution provider and software integrator



At NAB this year I could feel a much keener focus on making the right decisions - customers had done their homework, and they did not leave us until they had the answers they wanted. We met some very well prepared customers this year.

Any interesting trends to report?
Regarding technology trends – key building blocks in IT, media file wrappers and codecs, they are now ready and mature, there is less inventing going on and more integration.

Another trend I noticed was the rise of the business and channel management companies - I think the future trend is to look from the top down, look at business priorities, at what various processes mean to the business, where they are being monetised and crucially what bad processes really cost.

Working efficiently across the business is a top priority for broadcasters. What can Pharos do for them?

Efficiency is our core business, trying to get processes, users and technology better screwed together on a wider scale. We're helping our customers change the processes and work more efficiently

department by department. Our typical customer is either a multi-channel broadcaster or a busy publisher broadcaster with complex thematic content. They broadcast to a growing number of regions and they need to efficiently localise content using subtitles or voiceovers.

They also create multiple local channel identities and the promotional structure to grow these new audiences. Our solutions are now addressing a wider range of departments across the business – we have almost reached critical mass where we can cover enough of the business, or enterprise as many like to say, to help reorganise content preparation and playout operations completely.

Let's look at a recent project.

We've been working with HBO Asia in Singapore for a year now – they now broadcast to over 30m viewers. The main difficulty for HBO is the number of languages they have to manage and the number of different promotions they have to create and securely distribute to 22 different countries in and around SEA.

So we've worked closely with both the operations and engineering teams to study the key backend processes to help improve that workflow. HBO replaced their existing automation with Pharos

“**Customers need to recognise which department and processes to tackle first**”

Playtime but the most significant achievement was rationalising out the backend workflow using Pharos Mediator. An integrated approach to workflow and automation meant they could be very much more efficient upstream to make the playout automation work more cost efficiently downstream.

Their long term aim was to create a cost-efficient workflow to enable them to expand further in Asia so they can get to more countries without increasing staff. We have also helped them go HD at no extra cost. In the next phase for HBO we are going to tackle automated QC workflows, and their compliance and promotions editing workflows. These kind of workflow reorganisation projects are long term, customers need to recognise which department or processes to tackle first.

Another recent new client is UK multichannel broadcaster Channel 5. Over a one-year project we are improving their in-house workflow – they are aiming to save hundreds of thousands of pounds per year in tangible costs. Channel 5 uses other service providers in London including Ascent Media and Red Bee Media, and this project also aims to integrate Channel 5 more closely with those other providers in areas like ingest and content transfer.



If a new client comes to you – what typically happens?

Try to look at key processes that should be improved across the business. They often see their challenge in terms of technology choice first, although increasingly they do want to talk about their users, operators and departments and the processes developed so far, so that's bottom and middle.

There is however a crucial top layer where we recognise that the business management systems they use in planning such as acquisitions, resource management, traffic or scheduling are actually running their organisation. A longer term perspective that looks top down to mediate business priorities across the departments, staff and technology - and work out where they could make the biggest gains first whilst showing them that they can tackle all the other stuff in the longer term.

We're embarking on one of these projects every few months now, so we have built up a lot of experience. And it is getting easier to show prospective clients what other customers have achieved so far.

You are one of the companies that drives technological change...

There is innovation in the product and the solution of course, and in project delivery. We have become a specialist for content, workflow



management and automation projects. There are 70 of us here at Pharos, and that's all we do. We're also a software integrator which really helps.

Where we have really innovated is in long term support. The real unsung hero is our support team who keep our customers in action 24/7 – we provide the backend to keep content moving for more than 300 channels globally now and more importantly our solutions are managing millions of assets a year for our customers. We have developed a whole new remote support methodology here, with a support team of only about 8-10 people who manage this 24/7.

What are the latest developments?

We recently founded our first overseas office in Singapore and now have staff there. Asia and what is usually known as the Middle East are very interesting to us right now. Both regions have complex content and many regions to address. One recent large project is a contract to provide studio control, media management, workflow and playout for new Arabic content creator twofour54 in the Abu Dhabi Media Zone and its partner venture in transmission ADTV. And we are also striking out to North America – we have opened a new US office and appointed Glen Sakata as General Manager - Americas to help capitalise on strong demand for Pharos solutions.

What about the competition?

It's a confusing time because things are moving so fast. Use of the more conventional broadcast signal path technology is decelerating rapidly



and the need for file-based workflows and tapeless systems to work properly now is very pressing. So technology providers that really have learnt what they needed to know for tapeless and file-based, the manufacturers that really have the breadth of experience in delivering real workflow and media management projects, real archive projects, real transmission projects, and really extending linear TV into VOD, those are the ones that are now best placed. It's our future strategy to extend linear TV workflow efficiently into whatever on-demand becomes. We did this for Channel 4 with 4OD quite a few years ago and all of our customers including Ascent, MTV and Viasat are adding their own on demand workflows.

How do you see the broadcast industry moving?

It's going through a traumatic yet healthy consolidation right now which is driving efficiency – viewers in turn are moving from push to pull consumption which is making investment decisions difficult for our customers. So we are helping our customers increase efficiency in their existing linear TV, get to more countries and a wider audience, and at the same time get them ready for on demand - with the same Pharos solution and aiming at no staff increases. We have already taken some big organisations through some big changes. Our customer base is trying to survive, isn't it, so we are seeking to share what's already worked for others.

Russell Grute, thank you. ■

WWW.PHAROS.TV

