

DIGITAL CONTENT & DELIVERY

Acting MD **Andy Williams** has been involved in **ITN Source's** 'Project Digital Archive' since 2009. The mammoth task of digitising all assets now completed, he says it has transformed the business while making it easy for media companies worldwide to access and purchase digitised clips online around the clock



Some companies or entire industries have seen the change to digital as a threat and have lost business or market share, yet others have embraced it and capitalised on the move to a world of e-commerce. The broadcasting industry is a case in point.

Producers, broadcasters and media businesses can either see the web as something that threatens the industry - citing online media as taking advertising revenues, viewers or talent away from TV - or they can work with online platforms and publishers to diversify and find new ways to do business or push content.

Broadcasters are commissioning multi-platform programmes, advertising sales teams are developing online and TV packages, and marketers are using social media to engage viewers in content.

WAYS TO EMBRACE DIGITAL

As a leading news and multimedia content company, ITN has embraced digital in a number of ways. Our news outlets ITV News and Channel 4 News have smart, sophisticated online offerings, our content creation hub ITN Productions has the most popular news and entertainment channels on YouTube, we have multiple Twitter feeds and Facebook pages across

the business, and our consulting division gives global media companies strategic advice on key issues including digital technologies. However, for the purposes of this article I'm going to outline how ITN Source - the content licensing division of ITN - has overhauled an aging business model through digital content and delivery.

ITN Source manages the ITN archive dating back to 1955 and partner archives for companies such as Reuters, ITV Studios, Fox Movietone and Nine Network Australia, which means we license footage from as far back as 1896. Every day we syndicate and license footage from these archives to researchers and producers who use our content in news programmes, documentaries, feature films, music videos, museum exhibitions, art installations and corporate productions. Our move towards digital really began in earnest in 2006 when we gave our website a complete makeover and started archiving all on-the-day ITN content digitally as well as storing it on tapes or film. The website began operating as an e-commerce portal with our newly digitised content available for search, preview, download and purchase online for researchers and producers.

DIGITAL ARCHIVE

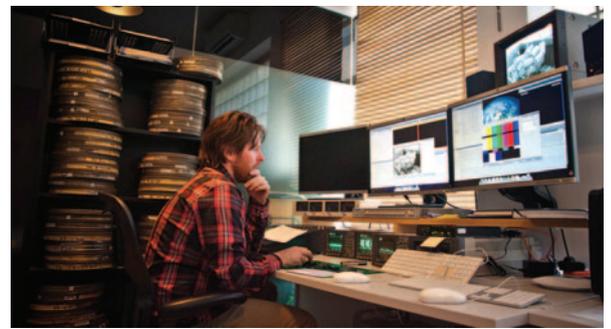
We then took a further big step in 2009 when we decided only to

archive content from ITN and our partner Reuters digitally and stop using tapes and film altogether. We had recognised that archiving content digitally had a number of benefits for ITN Source in terms of storage, accessibility and search functionality, but we were well aware that having content in a digital format was a major benefit for our customers too.

Archives are often seen as static repositories that live firmly in the past, but we were now determined to bring ITN's content up-to-date with the digital times. The archive is one of ITN's biggest assets, containing thousands of hours of iconic and important footage, and we had learnt enough from our experience of digitising and delivering content from 2006 onwards to know that we needed a full digital makeover to best exploit the way that we could use and license our content and preserve it for generations to come. So, in 2009 we spent six months scoping and planning Project Digital Archive - a project that would see the whole of the ITN archive digitised.

It was clear from the outset that this would be a transformative and mammoth task that would take around two years to digitise and flash-scan 30,000 film cans and legacy tape formats. Project Digital Archive would require significant investment as we needed the technical support of third party Deluxe

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Digital to digitise each piece of content. It was no mean feat making this decision to invest to futureproof our business in the middle of a recession with downward pressures on many of our clients' budgets and when none of our rivals had attempted anything like this. However, our scoping made a sound business case that investing to create a fully digitised archive combined with our already sophisticated e-commerce portal would reap rewards; this led to the all-important sign-off from the Finance Director to embark on the project to make ITN the only major TV news archive to become fully digitised.

ON TIME, ON BUDGET

Fast forward two years and we have now completed Project Digital Archive on time and on budget. All content is in a consistent high quality standard definition IMX30 format stored in ITN's Digital Asset Management system. Flashscanned files are also stored on an ITN server, and digitised to high quality files on demand. That isn't to say that there weren't challenges along the way. For example, variances in legacy metadata and the different tape and film formats that were used over the years meant that we had to constantly review and adapt our workflow. However, our scoping and planning work had anticipated this and it had come as

no surprise considering that the ITN archive spans back to 1955.

Now that we have this vast newly digitised asset we're able to service clients globally 24/7 whatever the timezone. Producers and researchers can search and watch any piece of ITN content at www.ITNSource.com, decide if they want to license the clip for their production and then download and purchase it online. This was simply not possible in the past, but is now making the process much easier and dramatically reducing content delivery times. This transformation of our business model through Project Digital Archive is what I call a perfect example of how the broadcast industry can embrace technology and the digital age.

It's worth making the point that it is not just business benefits that are delivered through our move to digital content. It's also important for the industry to preserve history itself as otherwise, tapes or films can degrade and formats become obsolete. Exclusive and iconic footage such as Nelson Mandela's first interview upon his release lives in our archives and it's our duty to ensure such footage is preserved for future generations as well as made easily accessible to film-makers and producers.

ENHANCING METADATA

Our digital vision doesn't end with

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Our new service offers up to 80 news highlight clips at broadcast quality every week
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the completion of Project Digital Archive. We are now enhancing our metadata across the ITN archive and we've also launched a new web-based subscription service for our on-the-day news syndication business ITN Source News. The service is aimed at media companies worldwide that don't have the technology or infrastructure for ITN's full syndication service, and offers up to 80 news highlight clips at broadcast quality every week. Just another example of how the web is enabling us to distribute ITN footage and provide a service to companies that otherwise wouldn't have the capability to access our content. This is particularly important ahead of the London 2012 Olympics and Diamond Jubilee, when international media companies as well as major broadcasters will want to access ITN's on-the-day news footage.

In the archive industry, I see it as a simple choice: digitise or be left on the shelf. It may not be as stark in other areas of the broadcasting industry and many execs will make the case for traditional TV by pointing to examples such as high-rating event television that online can only dream of; but the world is changing, we are in a multi-platform media landscape and, like the examples I've cited for ITN Source, you may find that digital content and delivery can transform your business model too. ■

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