



# BROADCASTING ON A MAC

**Mike Skibra's** motto is 'We love what we are doing and we love doing it on a Mac'. As Business Development Manager for **Softron Media Services** he works at the cutting edge of providing 24/7 video playback without the cost and overhead of a dedicated hardware video server – turning a standard Apple Macintosh computer into a professional broadcast server that can do 95% of everything that you probably want to do at 20% of the cost of an upscale proprietary system

**O**ur core business is working with broadcasters who want to take a look at the benefits and the feature set of Mac because a lot of them are editing in Final Cut and they want to stay in the Macintosh world – whether it is ingesting video and editing video on the fly, or whether it is taking those clips that have just been edited/ are still being edited/ have been edited in the past and dropping them into an automation system to play out on air, or to use a character generator on the Mac in order to overlay characters on incoming live video during sales meetings, broadcasts, or events.

The main benefits are the ease of use and the ability to get up and do what they want to within the shortest period of time possible.

**You target the cost-conscious broadcaster – that's everybody these days. Have you felt the pinch of the economic crisis?**

We feel the pinch in that it takes longer for an opportunity to close but our sales have been steadily incrementing. A lot of that has to do with a sales focus. In the past the company had great products but there was no outbound activity to bring these Mac based solutions to the attention of potential customers. When I started working with Softron two and a half years ago we took a

different approach in that we openly solicited reseller partners throughout the world in order to maximise our efforts in marketing through them. That has met with a lot of success. As the Mac resellers, integrators and consultants have gone out there to speak to people, the Mac is seen not just as an interesting tool with a very good editing application but the operating system is seen as very stable and a lot of people are familiar with it from educational backgrounds.

If someone takes a look at a Mac solution with our software they see that we basically answer everything that they probably want to do at 20% of the cost of an upscale proprietary system. At the end of the day, what broadcasters are doing is putting video out to distribution, and we do that. Our attitude is digitise the media, put it on a hard drive, and then play it out. We don't control external devices that are going to pump through us.

**Your OnTheAirNews software creates and manages news bulletins for TV and web delivery. Where do you see web TV going?**

There are two ways we connect to the web, input and output. In the first area, the web is used as a source of news information, so what we have is a setup where you can have an RSS feed that would be tied to various RSS feeds from around the world. When we are

involved in creating a story, we actually create an abstract for the story and then we have the script for that story – which can be adjusted based on who is actually going to read it. That abstract will be posted to a PHP server as it is finished, so we can have a graphic subsection which would post the graphics to the PHP web server as well.

Once the story is finished that immediately gets published, even before the run-down is actually read on the daily news. So it's quite an effective way of getting information from the web, editing it according to the way that the news organisation wants it presented to the outside world, associating that with graphic media and making sure that it is posted out there so that the news is in real time as up-to-date as it can be without actually having to wait for the broadcast to occur.

#### How does the relationship work with your customers?

The short answer is, we are dependent on input from users to tell us where they see the future in their organisation, and we try to jump ahead to enable that. For example, we have an ingest application called MovieRecorder. The OnTheAir Video remains our prime product but in terms of units we have sold more MovieRecorders because it's not just for the broadcaster, it is also for the person who is just archiving media or editing media.

Now I can gang 12 of those over a network, so I can have six MacPros with two Blackmagic cards for example in each Mac Pro and I can be hooked up on a network and I can see via Bonjour - which is part and parcel of the Mac operating system – proxy images of what is being seen by each of those work stations on the input, and I can control each recording from a remote work station. I can actually do that via my iPhone as well.

#### Which features on that application are the result of requests from users?

Companies have come to us and said 'The playout is really nice however we do not want to burn a logo in on our media because we want to use the media on multiple channels'. So one of the things that we did was create an option for OnTheAir Video that allows you to preload the audio and the video, preload a clip, and while we have preloaded that clip we can take an image, a graphic – it can almost be your full screen – and we can mix those two together as they are in the memory of the computer before they go out, meaning that you have now mixed the image and the logo for playout without burning the logo into the actual media.

#### What about broadcasting in multiple languages?

In much the same way, the Mac will work with multiple languages as stereo pairs. We can identify that in our software on playout and it can actually broadcast five, six languages simultaneously if the video card that's doing the output supports it. If you look at a TV station that is broadcasting in multiple languages, the whole system pays for itself in the first upload. If you are paying to upload to the satellite and only have to do it once instead of five times, you've saved 80% of your upload time. The customer who brought that to us was Luxe TV in Luxembourg. I never cease to be amazed at some of the requests that I get where companies want to do X, Y and Z. Many of our applications were initially designed for one aspect but wound up being used in multiple aspects.

#### Does your system sit side by side with other systems in the bigger broadcasters?

I see it running side by side in certain situations, and where

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you'd see that is not necessarily in the output side but in the newsroom side. For traditional reasons a lot of TV stations will want to go with a newsroom system that they have been working with for many years, so that ends up integrating with us.

#### What markets are important for you?

Mexico and Brazil are very strong markets for us. Our business in Latin America is predominantly SD, not HD. And the feedback that I get is that they'll go HD in two or three years. Mexico now is really pushing hard in the HD area, so the infrastructure is being built for HD, and for IPTV.

In the US we have a number of good resellers but their market presence isn't as strong as in Brazil and Mexico because there are so many competitors out there.

#### What's the outlook?

We have some new products coming out – the OnTheAir Server and OnTheAir Node – and once we have those available I expect us to see a lot of activity in the larger mid-size broadcasters, possibly even some major networks outside the US. In the US, we already deal with the affiliates of CNN, Fox, ABC and CBS, and I think once we go in with our new products those affiliates will push at the upper level.

The channels that we sell to are constantly expanding, the religious broadcasters being one, the educational broadcasters being another. And the nice thing is that in those two environments we provide demo software that is identical in every way to our regular full-blown licence, except that on the output it watermarks the word 'demo'.

We don't care if hundreds of students use that demo software on their work stations ...

Mike Skibra, thank you. ■