

For immediate publication

MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

New-age broadcast demands better network ‘view’, says Broadcast Australia

30 September, 2008: Sweeping changes to core broadcast technologies and business models are creating demand from Asian broadcasters for a better ‘view’ of their transmission network performance, according to broadcast transmission services provider, Broadcast Australia.

Mike Dallimore, Broadcast Australia’s Vice President International Business Development, said that the ‘business of broadcast’ in the Asian region is changing significantly. This, in turn, is creating a surge in demand for more timely and refined network performance reporting and management --both at a station and a whole-of-network level.

Dallimore cited two key drivers behind this upsurge: firstly, the shift away from conventional vertically integrated broadcast business models to more free-form, fragmented and collaborative variants; and secondly, the region-wide migration from legacy analogue to digital transmission systems.

“We are increasingly seeing Asian broadcasters moving toward business models that incorporate a separation of transmission system responsibility,” he said. The most common example of this is the evolution of commercially efficient business models that see transmission pared away from core content development and management activities. But this is not the only reason. “Fragmentation can also be due to the allocation of transmission responsibilities across a number of separate groups--say, on a province-by-province basis. Both these situations result in the same outcome--a need for real-time performance monitoring and management across the network as a whole,” Dallimore said.

A rich source of network performance information quickly finds application beyond simple reporting, most specifically as the foundation for network opex minimisation and ‘services availability optimisation’ tools. “This has been our experience with the Network Management System (NMS) deployed across Broadcast Australia’s nationwide broadcast network,” Dallimore said. “Reporting was initially our driver, but now it is much more. Once we had such data gathered,

it was immediately obvious that it could be used to analyse equipment and systems performance, the efficiency of our maintenance activities, the adequacy of spare parts holdings, staff location, and other parameters.

“This data provides us with a very powerful tool for improving network availability and minimising the total life-cycle cost of the network. Our prediction is that Asian broadcasters will be quick to use such tools, once the network information is on-hand.”

The traditional means of acquiring and acting on network information--the manned station approach--was once favoured in Asia, due to the region's lower labour costs. This is losing traction in new-age broadcast, according to Dallimore. “The manned station approach does not best address the high-profile opex issues that impact broadcasters today, such as maximising network availability and minimising spare-parts holdings,” he said. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the legacy manned station approach cannot adequately address the complex operational needs of digital transmission.

“The old ‘The picture was OK leaving here’ manned-station response might have been acceptable in the days of analogue, but it does not wash in the digital age. You need to know a great deal more about the total network in digital transmission--a holistic view of the network is essential,” Dallimore said.

He cited two key digital network parameters that must be monitored and regulated across the entire network: timing and frequency drift of the signal, to ensure coverage is maintained in single frequency networks (SFNs); and modulation error ratio (MER), which provides an early indication of system noise problems that may lead to an increase in errors and, ultimately, complete loss of signal.

“Signal timing and MER are complex parameters to analyse, and must be analysed on a total network basis,” Dallimore said. A further challenge is found on the other side of the ‘network information equation’--the potential landslide of information that typically accompanies even the simplest of events at any one digital broadcast station. Managing this data traffic represents a core digital challenge.

“If implementing a broadcast monitoring system was easy, then everyone would have one!” Dallimore said. The devil, he pointed out, is in the detail--the provision of powerful information handling and logical filtering systems, tailored to support fast and effective network performance analysis and diagnostics, will be the ‘make-or-break’ factor for any NMS. “Engineered correctly,

such network information systems will provide enormous network opex reduction and service availability advantages for Asian broadcasters in the digital age.”

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Mike Dallimore, Vice President International Business Development, Broadcast Australia.

Company background

With over 75 years experience as the owner and operator of one of the most extensive terrestrial broadcast transmission networks in the world, Broadcast Australia provides end-to-end transmission services for radio and television (analogue and digital) broadcasters. The company’s core competencies include planning and network design, engineering design and project management, complex systems integration, site development and installation, operations and network management and in-house repairs and maintenance.

Broadcast Australia also develops world-class solutions and applications for new and emerging technologies—such as Infocasting, Digital Radio and Mobile TV—working with strategic partners throughout the Asia Pacific region. Subsidiary companies include Hong Kong-based confined space coverage group Radio Frequency Engineering Limited (RFE), digital media network/infrastructure specialist Singapore Digital, systems integration and product supply specialist The Bridge Networks, and critical application and hosting provider, Hostworks.

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Web site <http://www.broadcaustralia.com.au/>

Media enquiries

Relate Technical Communications Pty Ltd

Telephone: +61 3 9593 9973

E-mail: info@relatetech.com.au