

Viasat's SportN On Air In Seconds

The innovative integration of EVS and Final Cut into Snell's Morpheus enabled an extremely fast turnaround for Norway's new sports channel. By ARNE STENSTADVOLD

In the fall of 2005, Viasat approached Mediatec Broadcast with a project that would launch a new sports channel in Norway. While Viasat offered numerous themed and sports channels over multiple platforms in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, the well-established broadcaster sought to introduce a channel dedicated to sports for Norwegian viewers. We had already worked with Viasat and its parent company, Modern Times Group (MTG), for a number of years, providing OB units and live sports production services. For this new channel, named SportN, we created a simple automation and playout system operating from our facilities in Oslo.

As Viasat expanded its offerings in other countries to include additional sport-specific channels, MTG approached us and requested that we build a new playout platform for both SportN (now named Viasat Football), and a second Norwegian sports channel, Viasat Sport.

Viasat asked us to get Viasat Sport up-and-running in just a week, so we built a temporary playout system alongside the original SportN system – literally building the new system on a table in the same room – and started designing a sophisticated and far more streamlined

production and playout system to support both channels.

Working closely with Snell, EVS, and local broadcast systems supplier Video 4, we created a uniquely flexible, first-of-a-kind platform tailored to the demands of fast-turnaround productions.

Many broadcast facilities use Snell's Morpheus automation system, but no one uses it the way we do, integrated with EVS production and playout servers to enable an extremely fast workflow.

Whereas most playout operations rely on a three- or four-step process to get media to air, we've built a system on EVS, Final Cut Pro, and Snell that allows our operators to make a clip, turn it around, and play it to air in seconds. Morpheus plays out directly from EVS servers, even playing a recording-in-

progress with a delay of just a few seconds. If we need to make rapid changes, Morpheus allows for that. This fast turn around is critical in sports broadcasting.

Our primary goal as we built this transmission system was to achieve a much higher degree of automation for Viasat channel playout, and this required a flexible solution that would enable the transfer of files to and from our Final Cut Server SAN, as well as an efficient and reliable automation

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system capable of streamlining playout. Staff here at Mediatec had grown accustomed to the speed and functionality of the EVS XT servers, which provided rock solid performance over the previous three years to run SportN.

Though it had never before been integrated with EVS servers in this application, Snell's renowned Morpheus automation system was a clear choice for us. We had seen the Snell automation system in use for other premium sports channels, and we knew from additional research that it provided the type of operation we wanted for Viasat channels.

Integration of the Morpheus automation system was easy. Within the resulting workflow, the XT servers in the new installation handle all ingest and playout requirements for both Viasat channels. Ingest control, metadata management, and production content management for 10 recording inputs are executed through EVS IPDirector software and media metadata is then transferred to Snell's Morpheus. For shows incorporating live analysis and highlights packages, we use the EVS MulticamLSM application and its playlist editing functions.

The EVS servers are connected to a media sharing network that enables live and instant

sharing across the entire production platform, and to a Gigabit Ethernet network for bidirectional file transfers to and from a 20-TB Apple Xsan system with a Final Cut Server.

All material cleared for transmission is managed by Morpheus, which controls 24/7 playout of content on and between several servers in the system. Using Morpheus, one operator oversees regular playout of pre-recorded content for Viasat Football and Viasat Sport, and we simply add a technician to handle incoming feeds for more complex live broadcasts.

In bringing Morpheus automation into the demanding live and near-live sports production environment, we jumped in with both feet and wound up with a fast, flexible, and cost-effective transmission system that works just as we intended. If MTG and Viasat choose to expand their channel offering in Norway or to make the shift to HD, the state-of-the-art transmission system we've built can easily be adapted to meet those needs. ■

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