

Case Study

Snell's Kahuna™ Switcher Allows KEYC-TV To Control Its Digital Transition



Small Market Station in Mankato, Minnesota Uses Kahuna to Chart a Clear Upgrade Path to HDTV and Beyond.

The Customer

KEYC Television (Channel 12), a property of United Communications Corp., is a CBS affiliate serving the southern Minnesota market from Mankato, a city of about 35,000 people. Though its primary production activity centers on news, KEYC also produces a local religious program, a music show on polka, and provides video services to community businesses. The station's competitors include much larger broadcast facilities to the north in the Minneapolis-St. Paul market.

The Challenge

Like many television stations, KEYC found itself caught up in a swirl of fast-moving technological change. As a traditional analog broadcast facility, KEYC's engineers were confronted not only with the need to transition to a digital infrastructure, but also looming transitions to high-definition and file-based technology in the near future.

Planning a smooth, sustainable transition within the station's business model was a significant challenge.

With the help of Heartland Video Systems in Plymouth, Wisconsin, KEYC chief engineer Terry Rudenick and his staff decided to take control of KEYC's technology migration by choosing flexible, future-proof components that could adapt to the station's long-term needs.

The Snell Solution

KEYC's first major purchase in its facility upgrade was a Snell Kahuna production switcher. Kahuna, chosen to replace an aging Ampex analog model, was selected because it is the industry's first production switcher with the capability of simultaneous HD and SD operation.

With Kahuna, KEYC could begin doing its local news and entertainment programming in standard-definition and easily upgrade to HDTV when the station decided to make the transition. Because Kahuna can be fieldupgraded instantly via software, KEYC will avoid disruption to its facility and face no new learning curve for the production staff.

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KEYC Chief Engineer



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When Kahuna is used in its multiformat SD/HD mode, operators can mix existing SD camera feeds, graphics, handheld shots, and archive footage directly into an HD production with no need to purchase expensive HD upgrades or extra HD upconversion equipment.

Kahuna's unique operational functionality and ability to be upgraded in conjunction with the station's needs were major factors in its selection by KEYC. "We are a very small station, but like many other broadcasters we've been gradually upgrading to digital," Rudenick said. "At the same time, we need to be prepared for high-definition in the near future. We chose the Kahuna switcher because it's flexible, easily upgraded to HD, and very competitively priced."

According to its transition plan, KEYC expects to upgrade to a digital transmitter in 2007, new HD cameras in 2008, and then to full local HD production in the months beyond.

The Results

After installation of the Kahuna switcher in late 2005, Rudenick said the learning curve for his operators was surprisingly quick and easy.

"Our staff picked it up fast," Rudenick noted. "Because we are in a small market, many of our staff members are quite young and just starting out. They grasped Kahuna right away. Surprisingly, older employees who have been here for years did just as well. It was a very easy transition."

Beyond its state of the art features and flexible expandability, Rudenick noted that one of unexpected benefits of the Kahuna purchase was the station's improved standard definition picture quality. "Our picture now looks crisper and nicer," he

said. "I can see a visible improvement since Kahuna went on the air."

This boost in picture quality is very important to a small CBS affiliate that must compete head-on with images produced by much larger broadcast facilities in the Twin Cities market.

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For more information, go online to: www.keyc.tv.

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