

Case Study

Raycom Media Chooses Kahuna™ Production Switcher and IP Modular Infrastructure for HD Upgrade of U.S. Station Group



“We did a day of training and I couldn’t get them away from the board. They couldn’t get enough of it. They love it.”

Snell’s Kahuna Picked by Engineering Committee After Winning Switcher “Shootout” Between Competing Manufacturers.

The Customer

Raycom, an employee-owned company headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, is one of the nation’s largest broadcasters and currently owns and or operates 46 television stations in 18 states. Raycom’s stations cover more than 12 percent of U.S. television households and employ 3500 individuals in full and part-time positions. In addition to television stations, the company owns Raycom Post (a post production facility in Burbank, California), Broadview Media (a post production/telecommunications company based in Montgomery, Alabama), and CableVantage (a cable advertising sales group based in Columbia, South Carolina).

The company also owns Raycom Sports, a marketing, production, and events management and distribution company based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Raycom Sports owns and operates the Meineke Car

Care Bowl in Charlotte and the LPGA Longs Drugs Challenge in San Francisco, and controls all television and marketing rights to Atlantic Coast Conference basketball, as well as syndicated television rights for ACC football and Southeastern Conference football and basketball.

The Challenge

Faced with a high-definition upgrade for all of its news producing stations, Raycom needed to standardize on a single production switcher and infrastructure system. The new switcher had to easily handle both legacy 4:3 standard definition content as well as 16:9 highdefinition material. It also needed to be easy to operate and ultra reliable in operation. In addition, Raycom stations needed to upgrade their broadcast infrastructure. To make its choice, Raycom selected a committee of engineers from its stations to hold a shootout among competing broadcast equipment manufacturers in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Bob Thurber
Director of Engineering,
Raycom



The Snell Solution

Reports came back from the shootout to Bob Thurber, Raycom's Director of Engineering. "Wow, what a great box!, was what I heard" about the Kahuna, Thurber said. "It was new technology and a very, very powerful switcher. They recommended it to me."

No surprise, since Snell designed the Kahuna production switcher exactly for the needs of companies like Raycom. Kahuna's proprietary FormatFusion technology ensures seamless integration of SD sources into HD productions and vice versa, without the need for outboard conversion. Equipped with a DVE option, the Kahuna makes a user-friendly switcher for any television news operation.

With Snell's smart IP Modular infrastructure, the entire system is not only incredibly flexible for changing broadcast requirements, but it's ultra reliable due to its built-in Roll-Call intelligence. IQ modules are ideal "bridges" to interconnect "islands" of broadcast technology no matter whether analog, digital, high-definition or the most advanced file-based systems. It allows broadcasters to control its own path to change.

IQ modules handle analog and digital audio and video distribution, analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog conversion, video decoding and encoding, frame synchronization, audio conversion, subframe remapping, digital proc amp control, gamut legalization, and standards conversion for international program exchange. The RollCall Network Management System provides integrated monitoring and control capabilities of all IQ Modular products.

The Results

Brian Lester, Production Manager at Raycom's WMBF-TV in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina was on the committee that chose Kahuna. He liked the switcher's operational simplicity, quick macro settings, and easy-to-use graphical interface. "As far as I'm concerned, the Kahuna is the easiest, most user friendly switcher I've ever worked on," Lester said.

Those are the kind of comments that Bob Thurber, Raycom's director of engineering, has been hearing from his technical directors. "We did a day of training and I couldn't get them away from the board," Thurber said. "They couldn't get enough of it. They love it."

Thurber noted that the heart of any live local news production is the switcher. "We look for seamless SD-HD production, ease of operation, and reliability above all," he added. "I'd absolutely recommend (Kahuna) to other broadcasters. It's a very power switcher. It's easy to use and so far has been very reliable for us."

Snell's agreement covers Kahuna and IQ Modular, the complete line of infrastructure products, for all of Raycom's properties. Raycom stations will use Kahuna to produce local news broadcasts as well as other local programming. The upgrades will continue by station through 2011.

"Snell is a first-rate company with a long track record in our industry, and their infrastructure gear has generated very positive feedback from its users among the stations within our group," said David Folsom, vice president and CTO at Raycom Media. "Beyond being the premiere brand of infrastructure equipment, Snell is also the first supplier to offer a production switcher that works in both the HD and SD worlds seamlessly. Kahuna allows us to mix and match various definition sources effortlessly as the industry transitions to HD. From our point of view, Snell products deliver most value for the money of all those we considered."