

Teaming up for Comcast SportsNet

SAN FRANCISCO — Bay Area sports fans are cheering a newly expanded high definition cable channel delivering a mix of local games, sporting news and player interviews.

Comcast SportsNet Bay Area just launched its brand-new HD production facility thanks in part to teamwork by San Francisco-based Cutting Edge Audio & Video Group (www.cuttingedge-sf.com) and Avid.

"Live local sports production demands unparalleled performance," says Peter Schofield, Comcast SportsNet Bay Area's director of operations. "Our sports viewers want quality and immediacy. Cutting Edge and Avid worked seamlessly to design and deliver the exact solution we needed at a price we could afford."

THE GEAR

For Comcast SportsNet's demanding HD news production environment, Cutting Edge recommended Avid's NewsCutter, Media Composer and Symphony edit systems. Each of Comcast's nine edit rooms has instant access to 96TBs of Avid's ISIS system.



Working together, Cutting Edge and Avid made sure Comcast SportsNet was up and running with no hiccups.

Up-to-the-minute management of almost 700 online hours of HD media is handled by Interplay, Avid's nonlinear workflow engine. Comcast SportsNet's team of more than 90 journalists plan and produce several hours of daily programming using Avid's iNews newsroom computer system.

As Cutting Edge's Brian Botel explains, "We needed a solution [that would allow] Comcast SportsNet's producers to log, edit and prepare coverage while games were still

underway. While many manufacturers offer solutions, Cutting Edge's partnership with Avid in particular, gave us the confidence to promote a combination of integrated products that we knew the manufacturer would back."

While HD media files are being transferred directly from field acquisition media, incoming satellite feeds are being captured into Airspeed I/Os using Avid's DNxHD codec. Newsroom personnel log content at their desktops using the Interplay Assist app. As program rundowns and scripts take shape in the iNews newsroom computer system, HD stories, promos and graphics are transferred to playback under the control of Avid Command.

Putting all this together required precise planning and tight execution. System commissioning was coordinated by Cutting Edge's in-house Avid expert, Sig Knapstad, and Avid's professional services manager Larry Shenosky, both San Francisco-based HD production veterans. Cutting Edge's participation provided several benefits, including the ability to pre-stage and install systems while the facility was still taking shape. The entire facility went from concept to completion in less than four months.

"Cutting Edge was readily available for extra advice, night and day," notes Schofield. "Although they're right here in Northern California, we also benefited from their close working relationship with Avid."

Any television production system requires careful attention to end-user workflow. "Thorough workflow planning and effective training are the two secret ingredients we feel differentiate us from other local partners," Botel offers.

Through several live Web link-ups between Avid and Comcast SportsNet users, Cutting Edge facilitated several sessions so Comcast SportsNet could gain knowledge on how each system solved a real-world problem. Managers and producers interacted with the Avid professional services team to ask "what if" questions and begin understanding how to use the tools more effectively. Realtime demonstrations and feedback enabled Comcast SportsNet, Avid and Cutting Edge personnel to narrow down details on how feeds would be triaged and quickly edited for broadcast.

THE TRAINING

Early in the project, the Comcast SportsNet team determined that an operational and maintenance training program was essential to success. With a significant portion of the staff newly hired just prior to launch, Comcast SportsNet needed to be sure each member of the production team received individualized training before the new facility was brought online.



Peter Schofield: having 24/7 access to Cutting Edge was a big help.

Cutting Edge worked with Avid to devise a training plan that used Avid's ALEX online learning system, as well as traditional off-site and on-site classroom training. iNews training took place at Avid's Madison, WI, development center, giving Comcast SportsNet and Cutting Edge personnel an opportunity to create the newsroom computer system database while learning how journalists could make the most out of iNews' extensive capabilities. ISIS and Interplay management and maintenance training was via Avid's Burbank training center.

As the on-air deadline neared, Avid instructors began an intensive series of on-site operational classes. Two simultaneous classes were held in different areas of the facility to ensure that each member of the Comcast SportsNet team had a complete understanding of the Avid systems. Each class was taught to the specific workflow that had been crafted by the Comcast SportsNet, Cutting Edge and Avid project teams. "Avid even thought to have us bring some of our library media to the training sessions," Schofield recalls, "so we could learn how to digitize video while loading stock footage into ISIS."

"Working with Comcast SportsNet Bay Area has been a wonderful experience. The network created a world-class sports broadcasting operation that will serve as the center of the Northern California sports experience," says Botel.

"Great projects require careful planning, effective risk management and a certain amount of flexibility," he concludes. "We had all three here. Now our commitment to the long haul begins."

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