

SKY SPORTS

Using the K2 Solo media server for on-location graphics

CUSTOMER:

Sky Sports (BSkyB)

London, UK

**APPLICATION:**

OB truck graphics playback

EQUIPMENT:

K2 Solo media server

By using a file-based solution, Sky Sports' graphics become part of the solution to move to a completely tapeless production environment.

BACKGROUND:

BSkyB, the leading satellite broadcaster in the UK and Ireland, has long been a pioneer in its coverage of sports, bringing a new style and engagement to its audiences. Today, it has four full time high-definition sports channels, with the biggest events also being covered in 3D on the new Sky 3D channel.

One of the most important ways in which Sky Sports differentiates itself from the competition is with dynamic graphics, having developed a technique of rolling key and fill graphics controlled by the production switcher.

This technique is a striking use of motion graphics, which punctuates the coverage of all major sporting events, and marks the move from live action to replays and

comment. Its effectiveness, though, is balanced by current operational inconvenience: each sequence has to be prepared in advance at BSKyB's headquarters in west London. All the material then needs to be transferred to tape as key and fill, hand carried to the location, and then loaded onto whichever playout server the outside broadcast contractor is using.

BSkyB needed a better way of getting the Sky Sports' graphics material out to location—and to reduce or eliminate its use of tape—to get the best out of its graphics on the road.

SOLUTION:

BSkyB formed a workgroup, including its senior sports technical directors, to define an ideal workflow. This particular investigation took place at a time when BSKyB was working towards a completely tapeless production environment, so it was a natural part of the progress.

Although the workgroup looked into servers from a variety of manufacturers, the Grass Valley™ K2 Solo™ media

server—which was under development at the time—looked extremely promising. The workgroup was also encouraged by the willingness of Grass Valley to accept its input during the server's development, to make sure it really did do what they wanted.

The K2 Solo is a compact media server, designed for applications like Sky Sports'. It is designed to be very flexible, with the ability to link physical outputs into logical channels. Thanks to its ChannelFlex™ capability, a single K2 Solo can even support key and fill in 3D: as the four outputs from the device can operate as one channel.

"The K2 Solo is a very compact and a reasonably inexpensive system with serious amounts of storage capabilities. It gives us a huge amount of functionality and is a big boost to our plans to move to completely tapeless operations."

Darren Long, Director of Operations
Sky Sports



“We identified the need to get and change media quickly. If necessary, a designer can create new material at Sky headquarters and put it on an FTP site which the K2 Solo can download. It means we have one set of files in Sky, and any outside broadcast unit can quickly receive files and use them. We can change a graphics sequence, with new and complex replay moves, in a couple of hours with no need for a courier to site.”

Darren Long, Director of Operations
Sky Sports

Equally important for the Sky Sports application, K2 Solo is designed to be used in a file-based environment. Files can be carried to site on a memory stick. And even more important, the content can be changed at any time.

BSkyB and Grass Valley worked together to ensure that the file format was compact enough for FTP downloads to be practical, but with sufficient resolution that the impact of the graphics, along with the multi-channel audio, was not lost.

The final part of the process is to replay the sequences, on cue, from the switcher. As might be expected, there is tight integration with the Grass Valley Kayak™ and Kayenne™ switchers

installed in some outside broadcast trucks. But the K2 Solo has an open control interface, and again Grass Valley collaborated with BSkyB to ensure that operation of the graphics server is identical with other manufacturers' switchers as well.

Sky Sports defined this new workflow, but its successful implementation relied on the co-operation of partner companies: the outside broadcast contractors who provide the coverage. Businesses like NEP Visions and Telegenic needed to be comfortable with the solution.

Progress towards eliminating tape from the production process is already well under way, led by the Sky Sports

coverage of English Premier League football, and Heineken Cup and international Rugby. By the end of the first quarter of 2012, all Sky Sports outside broadcasts will be tapeless, with the Grass Valley K2 Solo media server delivering all replay graphics in a slick and seamless workflow.



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