

Community Broadcaster Raises Production Values with M-Series iVDR

TVTV Trades Tape for Digital Efficiencies, New Capabilities



For nearly a decade, Tualatin Valley Television (TVTV) has delivered public, educational, and government-access broadcasts, along with public affairs, arts and cultural programming, to more than 118,000 cable subscribers in the metropolitan area around Portland, Oregon in the Western United States.

But even as a small, non-profit, community-oriented broadcaster, TVTV wanted more out of its production process. Instead of serial, tape-driven workflows, it wanted the efficiencies and flexibilities of digital systems—assuming it could find digital systems that it could afford.

As an early adopter of the Grass Valley™ M-Series™ iVDR, TVTV has realized significant and, in some cases, unexpected benefits. Today, it uses a multi-channel iVDR for sports production and government-affairs programming. Gone is the reliance on tape; in its place is a digital workflow that is far more efficient, and that is enabling TVTV to enhance the production values of its programming in ways that were never before possible.

“In the M-Series iVDR, we saw an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of an affordable system that could make a substantial, positive impact on our operation,” said Sam Dana, an engineer at TVTV. “We are extremely pleased with the results so far.”

Sports Production On-The-Fly

With a familiar interface, removable media, and multi-channel playout and record capabilities, the M-Series iVDR does the work of multiple VTRs—all in a way that video professionals find easy and intuitive. But an iVDR can also do things a VTR can't, such as trim and create video clips and subclips, build playlists, and exchange clips with news, graphics, and other applications. And no matter how you use one, an iVDR fits right into an existing workflow.

“Installation is very easy,” said Dana. “You just review the wiring diagram, plug it in and you're ready

for action. It can be installed in systems ranging from the very simple, with just audio and video in and out, to very complex configurations with gen-lock, time code, SDI, external triggers, and remote controls.”

For covering Metro League high-school football, TVTV relies on an M-Series iVDR with two record and two playout channels. With a half-dozen games under its belt, the production crew is already more efficient and doing things impossible with tape, including slo-motion, instant replay and on-the-fly highlight clips creation.

During football games, TVTV uses an isolated camera shot to feed one of the record channels on the iVDR; the channel doesn't stop recording until the game ends. This channel then sends the feed to one of the iVDR's playout channels.

To capture highlights, an operator monitors the playout channel receiving the feed of the game. Every time the ball is snapped, the operator marks a digital “in” point. If the play results in a touchdown or significant gain, the operator marks an “out” point. Should a director call for a replay, the operator uses the Quick Cue feature in the M-Series iVDR to instantly jump to the beginning of the sequence for slo-motion playback.

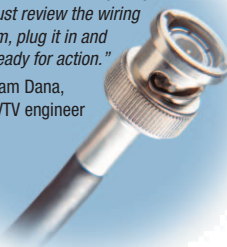
“Instead of taking the time to rewind to that point in the tape, we can instantly jump to the sequence using the Quick Cue feature,” said Dana.

At the same time it is readying sequences for possible replay, TVTV is building a highlight reel using the iVDR's other playout channel. The process is simple: during timeouts and other breaks between plays, an operator takes a captured highlight, labels it using a touch-screen keyboard, then drags and drops that label into a playlist on the second playout channel. This channel, configured as a playlist machine, holds all the highlight clips that TVTV plays behind its credit roll.

“With the iVDR, we get the performance of two or three VTRs with editing functions,” said Victor Barrios-Mata, production manager at TVTV. “Tasking

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Automated Playout of Unpredictable Events

As part of its government-affairs programming, TVTV broadcasts live council meetings from Portland-area cities of Beaverton, Lake Oswego, Hillsboro, and Tigard; meetings of Metro, the directly elected regional government that serves more than 1.3 million residents in the three counties and 24 cities in the Portland metropolitan area; and select meetings of the Oregon State Legislature. Thanks to the M-Series iVDR, digital files are now its primary source for doing so.

Live feeds of government meetings are always a challenge for any broadcaster and TVTV is no different. Legislatures, for example, work outside the confines of television timeslots and session start times do not match the traditional top and bottom of the hour.

"The beauty of the iVDR is that we can use it to time-shift sessions by several minutes," said Phil George, operations manager for TVTV. "Say we start recording at 8:45 a.m. for a 9:00 a.m. time slot, but the session starts at 8:50. We simply cue the player to the session start and wait for the top of the hour. We can play the beginning of the meeting, which is now delayed about 10 minutes—even pick up the live recording if the legislators take a long enough break."

City council and meetings like those of Metro are another matter entirely. While they start on time, their length is completely unpredictable. And the longer the meeting, the more likely it is to have multiple breaks.

While TVTV can't dictate the number and length of these breaks from its live broadcasts, it can and does use the M-Series iVDR to eliminate them from the repeat broadcasts it airs three times a week. That's because the iVDR's play list application, which mimics the experience of cut editing

with multiple tape decks, lets TVTV quickly select the sequences it wants to keep, discard those it doesn't. And unlike its tape-based environment, the digital capabilities of the iVDR let it make these edits immediately.

"Rather than waiting for tapes from the field, we can schedule meetings to repeat immediately or soon after a live event finishes," said George.

New Product Class Part of Digital Affordability Initiative

Since its introduction, the M-Series iVDR has garnered a host of awards. And with good reason: as a new class of product, it leapfrogs traditional VTR functions without sacrificing the familiarity of VTR operation.

By riding the price-performance curves of industry-standard storage, networking, processing, and operating system technologies, the iVDR is also setting a new standard for low-cost digital products that will reshape the way video professionals and broadcasters look at their facility investments. In fact, the M-Series iVDR is just one of a host of Grass Valley products launched by Thomson as part of a new digital affordability initiative.



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 —Victor Barrios-Mata, TVTV production manager

Part of this initiative is the Grass Valley TV Station in a Kit™ Series, a collection of pre-configured kits for studio, OB, and news production. In addition to iVDRs, the kits include Grass Valley digital cameras, network attached storage systems, switchers, routers, nonlinear editors, automated news playback systems, and modular devices—all priced to meet the fiscal realities of video professionals as well as small and mid-sized broadcasters.

More details about the M-Series iVDR and TV Station in a Kit Series are available from your Grass Valley products representative. You can also visit www.thomsongrassvalley.com/m-series/ for more information. You can see the complete lineup of Grass Valley products at www.thomsongrassvalley.com.

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