

SCRIPPS

Shopping List:

- ✓ HD editing graphics
- ✓ Archiving
- ✓ COFDM microwave gear

Taking digital further

Scripps extends the technology into newsrooms

The E.W. Scripps stations have been making the move to digital, with seven stations on air in digital and three more due to be up with DTV by the end of the year.

According to Vice President of Engineering Mike Doback, the financial resources committed to the DTV conversion have caused other station projects to be put on hold. But that doesn't mean that he'll be going to NAB without areas to investigate.

For example, the stations have been built for pass-through of DTV signals. Two, WPTV(TV) West Palm Beach, Fla., and KJRH(TV) Tulsa, Okla., also have HD cameras and production capabilities. KJRH recently worked on some HD commercials aired during the Olympics.

"We're replacing obsolescent analog equipment with HD hardware where the price differential is reasonable," says Doback.

Other HD gear that he will be looking for includes editing and graphics equipment.

"We've put in place editing systems that can be converted to HDTV," he says. "We really want to see where things are going in HD, and NAB is an opportunity to talk to our associates



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from other groups and see what implementations are working."

Scripps also has two digital newsrooms, WEWS(TV) Cleveland and WXYZ-TV Detroit. Doback says, although using different hardware, both are based on TCP/IP transfer architecture.

"We're very encouraged by the technology we've used in Detroit," he says. "The newsroom system talks seamlessly with master control, and that system talks to our commercial-playback system, which is on file servers. They all interconnect nicely with graphics and creative service for file sharing."

WEWS(TV) uses Grass Valley Group Profiles and Vibrant news-editing systems; WXYZ-TV is based on SGI servers, Panasonic NewsByte editors and, recently, Macintosh computers with Final Cut Pro.

One new technology he will be investigating for the newsroom is disk-based cameras. At NAB last year, he saw very promising demonstrations by Sony and Panasonic hopes to see products available soon.

"It does seem to be the market trend. It's a good one because it has a lot of implications down the road for the stations," he says. "That's especially true if it's a

compatible DVD format that could be viewed on office DVD players or DVD jukeboxes that are available and affordable."

With newsrooms making the move to digital, Doback says, inquiries for vendors change to questions of bandwidth or desktop architectures.

"Also, if you're integrating products from a number of vendors, you still run into the problem of tying those systems together," he says. "So it still requires third-party software to keep it running."

The move to computer-based equipment is a double-edged sword, he adds. Broadcasters can take advantage of technology that has been put through its paces by IT engineers.

On the other hand, as equipment is increasingly PC-based, broadcasters suffer the problems that people with home PCs deal with. "Unstable platforms and all those issues really impact reliability and how robust our systems are," Doback says.

Among other technologies to be investigated at NAB is COFDM microwave for transmission from news vehicles. Scripps is testing COFDM gear at WMAR-TV Baltimore, and Doback says the group is taking a hard look at what the various suppliers have so that the equipment can be implemented as analog gear needs to be replaced.

Archiving will also get a closer look. "We're interested in cost-effective systems for the stations," he says. "As the cost of storage has come down, the line between nearline and online has really blurred, and the model is changing as far as what we really need for nearline. The DVD jukeboxes are very affordable, and there's a lot of software that can be adapted to run those." ■

—Ken Kerschbaumer