

BskyB News Studio

The team at Sky News needed access to a large number of channels that could be fed to standard television displays or LCD screens. As well as requiring viewing facilities of services from local studios and editing suites, the team also wanted to access services from off-air and satellite receivers. British Sky Broadcasting called upon IVC to design and build a television distribution system incorporating all the latest digital age technology that would provide up to 150 TV channels from a variety of sources to their new News Studio.



In addition to the large and diverse number of channels needed, Sky News also wanted the facility to restrict and monitor usage of the services to groups or geographic locations within its West London building. A further complication was that the services were in a combination of differing formats with the majority of the local feeds being in serial digital format whilst all of the 'off-air' receiver outputs were in analogue format.

Following discussions about the limited number of solutions that could satisfy this requirement, IVC recommended a solution based on Cabletime's Mediastar Pro. This system is designed specifically for audio and video delivery over structured cabling, it is fully scalable and has a powerful feature set and comprehensive software management.

As the system required all feeds to be analogue, a number of Axon frames were provided to convert the SDI video to PAL 1 analogue format and to strip off the embedded audio signals.

In order to cater for the very large number of services, the dual coaxial-fed version of the Mediastar system was installed and a headend was built to provide an initial 112 channels split across the two coaxial trunks. The modulation equipment installed was Kathrein UFO compact, using dual frequency modulators which allowed a flexible system with minimal spares holding. The final outputs were amplified via groups of wideband combiners to eliminate signal failure points. On test and commissioning it was found that the noise and distortion figures on the output of the system were so low as to be virtually immeasurable even using laboratory grade test instruments surpassing all of the clients expectations.

The coaxial outputs from each trunk were then distributed to a number of Mediastar hubs. From the hub outputs, the signals were distributed to the users via a dedicated structured cable network, connecting to Mediastar Micro settop boxes (STB'S) at the user end. The STB's were line powered from the hubs eliminating the need for excessive power supplies at screen location. In order to have a large number of operators in close proximity without the danger of interaction from conflicting IR handsets, each STB has been provided with a cabled handset. The handsets were designed by IVC in conjunction with Cabletime, working closely with Sky throughout, and now have been added to their Mediastar product line further enhancing the flexibility of the product.

The whole system runs under the control of a central PC running Mediasoft controller and administrator software. This provides total control of the system from the naming and identification of services on the network, allocation of user groups, viewing rights and actual monitoring of usage. The system is set up in such a way that even a total control failure would not affect system users.

Given the very large number of channels provided, there was an obvious need for a channel guide system. In order to achieve this, SIPI, another feature of the Mediastar operating system was customised to work in the same manner as an electronic programme guide with any changes being automatic and unseen by the users. This also meant that the same information never had to be duplicated on different systems.



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