

CNN Headline News

Atlanta based CNN was founded in 1980. Owned by Time Warner, the news network division of the Turner Broadcast, CNN rates as America's number one cable news source. Broadcasting 24 hours television news coverage. CNN airs through CNN International and has combined branded networks and services that are available to more than 1.5 billion people in over 212 countries and territories. CNN Headline News presents news in a thirty-minute cyclic format.

The Challenge

CNN decided to develop one of its original cable channels to attract a larger audience. The channel needed to be targeted towards the youth market and capable of interactive operation from the start. These demands required a highly flexible system and one which was unlikely to fall within the orbit of a conventional control system.

Having worked with Pharos on a number of projects over the last three years, CNN's Project Manager, Keith Chandler, began discussions with Pharos around Christmas 2000 with the aim of having a fully operational system by summer 2001. By July 2001.

The Solution

CNN Headline is targeted directly at the 18-30 sgr demographic to achieve much of the pace and style typical of the internet. As well as wanting a channel that was able to change as the news changes, CNN wanted the layers from which it was made up to individually addressable. With items lasting typically less than a minute and with commercial breaks scheduled every ten minutes or so the channel also had to as slick as it was quick.

The current look of the channel involves a total of eight independent layers of video and divides the screen into three main zones. The major area of the screen carries the video of the anchor or of selected video reports, to its left is a screen for supporting text, which includes graphics elements, and running across the bottom are a headlines ticker, a clock, stocks and sports information and a weather panel.

With a staff whose focus has to be on the news value of the material they are presenting, rather than on the manner of presentation, achieving this complexity required a high level of automation both in transmission and in the news room.

To ensure maximum flexibility in transmission, facilities are designed with each on-air source – graphics, video and text – individually controlled via the network and its video connections made over a router. To complement this, Pharos put together a control system which provides 50 journalists with simultaneous access to all the stories on the existing iNews (formaly Avstar) newsroom system, with browse to copies of the available video and to a selection of graphics templates; all from the same desk-top station.

As well as changing the look of the channel into and out of breaks, the automation system also controls the changes in the look of the channel through the course of the day

Controlling transmission of such a complex and fast-moving channel is a considerable task and one best handled by a control system rather than a conventional master control desk. Instead Pharos has provided a bespoke panel which enables the operators to manage all aspects of transmission. Dedicated controls enable stories to be called to air, re-ordered, previewed and, if necessary, quarantined – effectively sent back to the relevant journalist for rework, and to control live switching between the studios.

Business Benefits of Playtime to CNN

- Browse for newsroom & prodcution staff
- Reduction in operating costs
- Reduced consumables such as tape
- Collaborative desktop workflow
- Minimum operational overhead
- Flexible platform to support future editorial changes

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Why Pharos?

"Achieving complexity in channels with a staff whose focus has to be on the news value of the material they are presenting, rather than on the manner of presentation, required a high level of automation both in transmission and in the news room"

"As broadcasters grow and expand, their operations become more complex and as temporal and financial burdens increase, the benefits of process automation and process control become all the more attractive"

"Improved utilisation of capital equipment, greater flexibility on staffing allocations and higher levels of dependability are just some of the benefits available from a well engineered press control system"

Key Functionality of Playtime

- Record segments for playback at a later time
- Seamless integration with live production
- Quick production of news stories and breaking news
- Template schedules provide framework for staff to work to
- Compose & produce onscreen graphics on desktop using low resolution video



Master Control room at CNN

This case study

PHCS-1004.01 CNN Automation

Related documents:

PHDS-1001 Playtime Automation

PHDS-1003 Playtime Modules

PHDS-1004 Playtime Overview

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