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AUGUST 2008

MOBILE PRODUCTION

News, Events, Sports

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plays a role as in events featuring politicians and cabinet members. 'Early' is a relative term in this case since Locked-On rarely gets more than 24-hour notice even for planned events.

Still, Hovell eked out time with client Bloomberg Television in advance of recent US-China trade talks at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. "We interfaced to solve anticipated problems like live shots that started at 7 a.m.," he recalls. "We needed to get camera crews in by 6 so they could be cleared and bussed onto the campus."

Hovell calls himself "a TV producer who happens to own a dual-path digital satellite truck," something he regards as "an important tool" in his toolbox along with access to experienced camera crews. A typical breaking news situation finds him getting a night call from *Good Morning, America*, for example, for the next morning. "It's not earth-shattering news, but they need the interview," he says. "They need a truck in Richmond at 5 a.m. and you go."

True breaking news stories, such as the shooting at Virginia Tech, causes "a dramatic explosion of need," Hovell reports. "We were rolling toward Blacksburg before anyone called us. With stories of national or international interest we know *everyone* is going to call," and Locked-On's truck responds on a first-come-first-served basis.

The transition to HD "is still a bit of the unknown" in the news field, he points out. "We've seen very little desire to cover domestic news in HD; the only network that routinely does that is Japan's NHK. It will be interesting to see how US news adapts. Will they be using lots of satellite space to transmit talking-head interviews or will an SDI 16x9 signal suffice for an over-the-shoulder box by the anchor?"

The Emmy Award-winning Hovell also produces for nonprofits like the Kaiser Family Foundation and AARP, is a consultant for the Voice of America, and still produces for ABC News on occasion.

Events to go

Corporate and educational events and entertainment programming require mobile



Paradigm Broadcast Services: Engineers in the control room of Paradigm's mobile unit

units with flexibility and customizable equipment rosters to meet the needs of productions which can vary greatly from one day to another.

Mark Yancey, president of **Satellite Digital Teleproductions (SDTV)** in San Diego, faced myriad challenges when his company

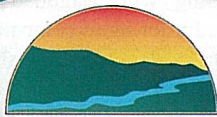
was tasked with a four-camera shoot for American Express (AmEx) which required encrypting and downlinking content to dozens of US locations and several more international ones.

The key was getting workers around the planet in sync. "It's important to have the right crew, right equipment and [do] the right planning," he says. SDTV boasts a new 40-foot HD Expando/combo production and uplink truck, a 40-foot SD Expando/combo and a 32-foot SD/HD combo.


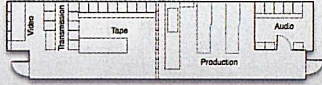
The AmEx company president "outlined his strategy to us and we outlined it to his audience of thousands of employees with graphics," Yancey explains. "That's often done with a simple PowerPoint presentation fed from a laptop and scanned to a converter behind them. However, this time [the content] was also keyed into the mobile unit" so SDTV could encrypt and downlink the content.

continued next page

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The interactive setup afforded AmEx employees the opportunity to ask questions from each location via a phone bridge; the president answered via the TV feed from the Phoenix regional office. Getting that interaction between the point of origin and the receive locations entailed "using a 12-foot antenna with a technician and digital receivers," Yancey says, "then a minimum of two phone lines at the receive locations for a technical phone bridge, plus a question-asking phone bridge to ask questions live."

Unlike sports coverage, which has well-defined parameters within each sport, events and entertainment present "a lot more variables" to mobile firms. "Is it an awards ceremony? A new product release? Pure entertainment?" asks Patrick Hollowell. "Do you need multi-cameras, a crane, IMAG to multiple screens? Are you recording for later distribution or are you doing a live webcast or streaming? Or all of that at the same time?" Hollowell and Jeff Terrell are co-owners of Charlotte, North Carolina's **Paradigm Broadcast Services**, which has 48- and 30-foot analog TV trucks.

One constant in the events and entertainment field is the importance of preproduction.



STS (Satellite Technology Systems): Blenco, IA, tornado coverage with the STS Super Truck in between Indy Racing events

"Ideally, you want to interface with the client and event company as early as possible," says Hollowell. "You're going live and often dealing with non-professional talent so you want to get them comfortable with what you're looking to achieve."

Of course, there's only so much prepro you can do when one of the participants in a teleconference is in Iraq. Davidson College, in Davidson, North Carolina, staged a student-to-student meeting with Baghdad University which required a lot more components than a typical broadcast. Paradigm furnished produc-

tion facilities for the campus location and outlets to news entities; Total Event Production and university staff provided additional lighting, audio gear and plasma screens to display pre-produced content inside the conference room and at the Student Union.

"The 10-second delay caused by the satellite hops back and forth were a big challenge" to interactive communication, notes Director of Broadcast Operations Chuck Lowery.

On the entertainment front, Paradigm and other media vendors teamed on a town-hall meeting in a Charlotte theater tied to A&E's

Intervention series. Total Event Production built the set and supplied lighting, sound and projection and plasma screens while Paradigm crewed and provided production facilities for the show. The environment was both controlled, with a pre-produced roll-in to set up the show, and spontaneous with local people interacting with a local TV station moderator and the *Intervention* host and the audience posing questions.

"The local people were not accustomed to being in front of cameras talking about drug and family issues," notes Lowery. "It took some



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