News through collaboratio

A tapeless Integrated News Editing System (INES) is being deployed across RTL's facilities in Germany. **Reinhard Wagner** looks at the new infrastructure and workflow built around open standard technology

News, entertainment shows, archiving, ingest, ad bookings, acquisition, distribution, production and graphics — each of these departments is hooked in to the new Integrated News Editing System (INES) deployed by German broadcaster RTL at its headquarters in Cologne. INES was built around the workflow and production process in use at all of RTL's facilities and comprises a new infrastructure and NLE/server architecture based on open standards. It has in-built scaleability to allow for upgrades as well as RTL's future requirements.

Tapeless production and playout are no longer just a dream. INES comprises various applications such as ingest, editorial viewing and browsing, archiving, editing and playout — and allows journalists to preview, browse and rough-cut material from different RTL sites and bureaux across Germany. RTL's Cologne HQ and its local facilities in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Frankfurt also benefit from local storage systems and databases which are all connected together in order to facilitate a collaborative nonlinear editing process when putting together news bulletins.

Fleuter: "We can now speed up the whole news creation process"

A CLEAR CHOICE

At the very beginning of the project, RTL evaluated a number of different NLE and server systems on the market, some of which had already been in use at its facilities. In close cooperation with Pinnacle Systems, an evaluation of the Liquid Blue test platform in 2002 led to the decision to purchase several Liquid Blue systems. Key factors for RTL were support for existing open standards such as Avid Log Exchange (ALE), SDTI, OMFI, MOS and MXF as well as for various file and server systems such as PAFS, SANergy, RTFS and GPFS.

In addition to this, Pinnacle was able to tailor the workflow to suit the needs of RTL's current and future customers. "We listen to our clients and look into whether their requests will benefit all of our customers," explains Alain Polgar, Pinnacle's VP sales for Central Europe, commenting on the software enhancements requested by RTL.

Currently the RTL Group uses more than 70 Liquid systems (including 14 Liquid Blue and Edition systems at Cologne). "We integrated INES into our existing workflows with a view to optimising various processes and migrating from existing technology to future systems based on our requirements and availability of the technology," explains Andreas Fleuter, head of technical engineering, at RTL. "In doing so, we have seen significant cost reductions compared to our old production methods and the system integrates fully with our existing databases and applications. As a result, we can now speed up the whole news creation process."

"To allow collaborative work on a central storage system, the storage capacity had to be incrementally increased from 100 hours to the current 550 plus hours. Also, remote offices needed high speed, high bandwidth transmission lines of up to 100Mbps for file-based IP connections," adds Friedemann Wetter, from RTL's engineering department.

"To allow collaborative work on a central storage system, the storage capacity had to be incrementally increased from 100 hours to the current 550 plus hours" — *Friedemann Wetter, RTL Engineering*

TRUE BLUE

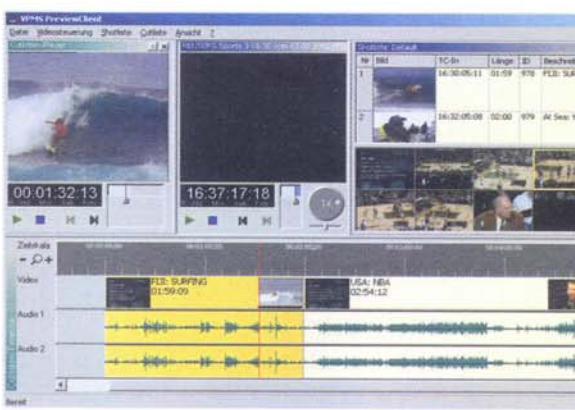
Expansion work on the edit suites began in 1003 with the installation of Liquid Blue, followed by a period of evaluation on the audio post production capabilities of the system. The project is due for completion in 2005.

"Although Liquid Blue needs some enhancements to meet RTL's requirements for audio post production, we are confident that Pinnacle will deliver a solution for us. Our tests show that the new version of Liquid Blue (launched at IBC2004) will do just that," Fleuter says, commenting on the collaborative work between the R&D departments at Pinnacle and RTL.

Tapeless production is currently in operation at RTL's facilities in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin using Liquid products, with decreased tape needs seen across the board — despite a parallel increase in the amount of recorded material.

"The Video Production Management System (VPMS) from S4M offers browse and editing tools for journalists and an advanced content management system which is tightly integrated within the new workflow," concludes Fleuter. "Together with Liquid Blue and the central storage system we have reduced the throughput time on the editing side by about 30%."

RTL also uses a storage area network (SAN) with centralised storage from Data Direct Networks, which fulfils the broadcaster's huge data throughput requirements.



S4M's Video Production Management System (VPMS) offers browse and editing tools for journalists

The storage — comprising two fully redundant systems — was implemented in collaboration with RTL's engineers and German company Yello. The storage set-up is fully redundant and features mirroring software, which ensures that data files, including editing data, metadata and media recorded simultaneously both storage systems. The SAN provides a total width of 800Mbps, capable of supporting up active data streams at once.

The final INES configuration will have around 50 editing connected to it (compared current 27). The strategy is on two DNS to allow R neering to service and ma system while it is on-air ingest all media files are as MPEG-2 files at 25M concurrently MPEG-1 p (for preview and browsing tions) are generated at 1.5

The system provides i access to the recorded mater newsroom system, which n editing can take place while is still in progress. Metadata

be done during either the in view or edit stages and EDLs are saved on the centr so that the editor can acces finishing the high resolutio at a Liquid Blue workstatio in an editing suite.

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