

BBC Belfast and Cinegy: News, Collaboration and Production for the Digital Northern Ireland Initiative



In the heart of Belfast, County Antrim, sits Broadcasting House, home to BBC Northern Ireland, the primary public service broadcaster providing television, radio, online and interactive television content to the Northern Ireland region. With a history of social and political turmoil, the accessibility of regional news and current affairs has always been paramount to the people of Northern Ireland. The BBC Northern Ireland regional news service provides lunchtime, evening and late night bulletins. They offer several political programmes, such as, Spotlight and Let's Talk, as well as local arts programmes and weekend chat shows. In addition to local programming focusing solely on a Northern Irish audience, the Belfast facility also features a large production unit that generates content that is broadcast on the BBC's channels across the UK.

Challenge

While the news team at BBC Northern Ireland has a reputation for cutting edge journalism and original programming, they had been relying on aging technology. The newsroom was working on obsolete equipment which was passed its serviceable lifetime and the old tape-to-tape workflows required more effort and expensive equipment than modern software-based technology required.

Problems and shortcomings in the pre-existing production workflow were becoming increasingly apparent, unsustainable and expensive. The lack of a centralised media archive led to missing tapes and data, delays in digitisation particularly for multi-camera shoots, problems with multiple tape formats, inconsistencies in logging, as well as media security issues. The inability to browse and search the archive often led to a duplication of acquisition and research. Production bottlenecks arose frequently, especially as producers and journalists competed for time in a limited number of craft edit suites.

Additionally, BBC Northern Ireland faced delivery requirements that were increasingly multi-media and multi-platform. Such requirements were difficult to fulfill through the existing linear workflow.

BBC Northern Ireland also faced a generalised need to reduce costs while maintaining or extending the quality and quantity of its production output.

Solution

BBC Northern Ireland elected to resolve its dilemma by transitioning to a file-based production environment with a centralised digital asset management system, based on Cinegy Workflow.

Principal Cinegy components installed at BBC Northern Ireland include Cinegy Ingest, for real-time, uncompressed HD-SDI encoding; Cinegy Archive, a server-based, centralised digital asset management system, and the Cinegy Desktop NLE, deployed on client workstations for managing ingest, logging, browsing, editing and other operations. The BBC Northern Ireland installation also includes Cinegy Convert for automated transcoding to enable integration with Avid and FCP.

This file based workflow technology represented a sharp departure from the way television was formerly produced at BBC Northern Ireland. While the engineers spent considerable time in mapping out the production workflow, they applied even more effort to assessing how the new technology would impact the people using it.

This Cinegy solution was selected for its ability to provide the following:

- Flexibility and scalability allowing adaptation to productions of varying size, scope and delivery requirements.
- Improvement in production efficiency while reducing costs and without dictating a particular workflow
- Integration with existing processes and technology thus easing migration while enabling the possibility for third-party components to be updated and replaced as time and budget allow
- A pathway for future growth in terms of size and functionality, and to meet evolving content delivery needs
- Seamless integration with BBC on an enterprise wide basis

“The workflow has been streamlined in all sorts of ways that we didn't anticipate”

BBC NI Technology Portfolio Manager, Kieran Morgan



BBC Belfast facility

Success

As a result of implementing Cinegy Workflow, BBC Northern Ireland accrued benefits in terms of cost reduction and cost avoidance, and in terms of less tangible creative benefits. Through such things as less time spent in craft editing suites and the elimination of tape transfer equipment, BBC Northern Ireland has seen overhead costs shrink. It has avoided costs by implementing a system based on standard PC hardware rather than more expensive file-based solutions that require proprietary hardware, or by taking an ad hoc approach toward investing in new technology.

Cinegy Desktop is currently installed on more than 100 desktop systems, with over 300 users, with this number continuing to expand. Creative benefits derive from empowering journalists with greater hands-on control over the content of their stories, providing the means to distribute news more quickly via television and online, and through the creation of a more accessible digital archive for future production purposes.