

TVG Networks Case Study

Premier Horseracing Network Revitalizes Broadcast Facility with Imagine Communications

Customer Profile

TVG Networks, a subsidiary of Betfair Group plc, is among the most widely distributed horseracing networks in the world. It televises races from more than 150 tracks in the US and abroad to horseracing enthusiasts and e-gamers. TVG's stable of on-air experts provides viewers with news, commentary and free handicapping information.

Challenge

When it comes to wire-to-wire coverage of the horseracing industry, TVG Networks is without peer. With feeds coming in from more than 150 racetracks around the world and on-air personalities delivering expert commentary to thousands of enthusiasts and gamers daily, the Southern California-based broadcaster is the undisputed leader in its field.

Still, the decade that had passed since the last major upgrade of the broadcast facilities had TVG executives feeling that their standard-definition and analog based operations were growing a bit long in the tooth. Frank Geraty, vice president of broadcast operations and engineering at TVG, was brought aboard to put the company's existing facility out to pasture.

"Having last renovated in 2003, we needed to do a forklift upgrade," says Geraty. "Everything had to change."

Horseracing is renowned for its stunning visuals and raw speed. TVG executives quickly recognized that a less-than-cutting-edge technology foundation was inhibiting the broadcaster from delivering the best possible experience to its viewers.

Millions of horseracing enthusiasts flock to tracks annually to soak in the atmosphere and to make up-close assessments of conditions, jockeys and, of course, the four-legged main attractions. For bettors who rely on this type of empirical evidence, standard-definition resolutions don't deliver enough detail to encourage online wagering, which is how TVG generates most of its revenue. By upgrading to HD, TVG saw the opportunity to spur additional

Customer

- TVG Networks

Industry

- Sports & Live Production

Challenge

- Modernize facilities
- Upgrade from SD to HD
- Upgrade from tape- to file-based workflow

Solution

- Nexio® Media Management
- Nexio Production Playout Center
- Platinum Routing and Multiviewers
- 6800+™ and X Series processing and conversion
- ADC™ Automation
- IconMaster™ MC
- Nexio Ingest Control Manager
- Magellan CCS™ Navigator
- Professional services

Benefits

- Richer visual experience to increase online wagering and generate new revenue
- Streamlined delivery of clips and highlight shows to grow viewership, increase value of advertising inventory and enrich social media engagement
- Error-free operations since completion of project
- Simplified workflow leading to increases in agility and employee productivity

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– Frank Geraty, TVG vice president of engineering



online betting – and increase revenue – by providing viewers with more of an “as if you were there” experience.

The time it took TVG producers to deliver feature segments to fill airtime between races or support on-air commentary with video footage was also a growing concern. With as many as 50 Sony tape decks chugging at a time, TVG had accumulated a tape library of thousands of races since 2003. But in a classic case of “water everywhere but none to drink,” the lack of rich metadata and the ability to retrieve information quickly made it almost impossible for producers to utilize TVG’s extensive archive to create timely features or support live commentary with visual imagery.

“Radio with pictures” is how Chris Lee, a TVG senior producer, describes the unscripted nature of the media company’s race coverage. Unlike most televised sports highlight shows, which are scripted in advance, a typical TVG broadcast often contains off-the-cuff banter and on-the-fly references to previous events. TVG was prevented from adding significant value to their broadcasts, says Lee, due to the inability to pull up relevant clips from the tape archive before commentators had moved on to a new topic.

Overcoming these shortcomings to deliver live race action in high definition and better utilize the company’s massive video vault would require more than a quick fix.

“We needed to build the broadcast facility from scratch,” says Geraty. “We had to change the way we do business.”

Solution

After originally awarding the project to multiple suppliers, TVG, working with systems integrator Diversified Systems, ultimately selected Imagine Communications as its primary solution provider. The massive undertaking included equipment and software from across Imagine Communications’ network, playout and distribution portfolios. TVG called on Imagine Communications to replace its media asset management (MAM) system, routing infrastructure, production servers, and master control operations, as well as tightly integrate with third-party editing, graphics and logging systems.

At the heart of the transformation was Imagine Communications’ MAM technology and solutions, which enabled TVG to realize significant agility and performance improvements by replacing tape-based operations with state-of-the-art file-based workflow. To create even a 60-second clip in the past, says Geraty, the team would need to pull a tape and jot down notes on paper while watching the entire race – before handing off the tape to an editor to create the clip.

The Imagine Communications’ Nexio™ asset management equipment delivers nonlinear workflow that automates and enhances the operation. In addition, metadata that was rarely stored in the past, such as details about the horse and jockey, track conditions, location and time of day, is now automatically logged at ingest, enabling huge improvements in speed and efficiency. Clips can now be assembled and aired in seconds, resulting in features and live commentary that are much more engaging and entertaining than what TVG could deliver in the past.

“The process has improved to the point where we can now spend more of our time focusing on the creative, rather than the logistics of how to get the job done,” says Geraty. “The logistics are now all handled in software. What used to take two hours is now handled in 10 minutes.”

Forming the backbone of TVG’s transformed facility is Imagine Communications’ Platinum™ routers with integrated multiviewers. Designed to support high-quality routing of all audio and video, the Platinum routers enable TVG to future-proof its facilities by supplying ample overhead to introduce additional channels, support 4K and eventually 8K resolutions, as well as provide a foundation for a transition to IP, should TVG go that route in the future.

In fact, the future flexibility of the new facility was tested before the dust had even settled. Shortly after upgrading its facilities, TVG acquired its major competitor, requiring Imagine Communications to expedite the addition of a new automated master control channel and expand the infrastructure to house the full second live studio production capabilities for the newly added network audiences.

Geraty stresses that as important as Imagine Communications’ equipment was to the overall outcome of the project, the crucial competency that the supplier brought to the engagement was its ability to understand TVG’s business objectives. “It was imperative that Imagine understood what our people do,” he added.

Results

TVG executives feel they hit the trifecta through the station’s engagement with Imagine Communications. In addition to modernizing and optimizing its entire operations, the facilities overhaul created the opportunity for the broadcast specialist to enhance existing monetization models, as well as introduce new ones.

“You will always see an improvement in viewership if you focus on the quality of video and audio,” says Geraty, adding that he attributes an uptick in TVG’s performance to the recent SD-to-HD upgrade. “We had a great year.”

The Imagine Communications Difference

Media companies with big projects turn to Imagine Communications, the industry’s only end-to-end video infrastructure and advertising management solutions supplier. TVG Networks not only faced a big job, the first major renovation of its broadcast facility in more than 10 years, it was under a tight deadline to complete the upgrade in time for the spring racing season. Eliminating the complexity of dealing with multiple suppliers was a major contributor to TVG meeting its deadline, say company officials.

In addition to “single throat to choke” peace of mind that the job would be done to their expectations and on time, TVG officials cite several additional unique capabilities that Imagine Communications brought to the project:

Openness and interoperability: Though TVG’s modernized facilities are comprised of roughly 75% Imagine Communications solutions, the horseracing broadcaster required a partner that could interface with third-party systems and processes.

Design and support excellence: TVG officials cited Imagine Communications’ design and support teams for their professionalism and persistence. In a short timeframe, say TVG officials, Imagine Communications was able to meld various discrete elements and systems into a unified solution.

Business focus: Rather than tunnel visioning on technology, Imagine Communications was committed to helping its customer make its businesses better. In addition to a state-of-the-art broadcast facility, TVG now holds the reins of a business that is more agile, productive and profitable than ever before.



The added agility that comes with moving to a modern file-based workflow has also created additional promotional opportunities. In the past, says Lee, creating a buzz in a social media outlet like YouTube was extremely difficult. Social media thrives on immediacy. If something interesting happened at the track, TVG producers, hamstrung by antiquated workflow, were often unable to create a clip that could be posted immediately to drive viewers to the company's web site or television broadcast.

Now, says Lee, a clip can be captured and posted to social channels in minutes. "If someone says something interesting on a show," adds Lee, "we want to get that out on YouTube."

Additional outcomes of the overhaul were dramatic improvements in reliability and ease of use related to the automation of production and asset management processes, says Geraty, adding that reliability and error-free operations will always be top priorities of a broadcast facility.

"Our people left a linear, tape-based work space and stepped into a completely modern nonlinear work space," says Geraty. "They haven't made one on-air error as a result of the conversion."

Lee sums up the outcome of TVG's collaboration with Imagine Communications by borrowing from the lexicon that's native to his industry. "Imagine has been helpful, supportive and thorough every step of the way," says Lee. "It's been a great process — from start to finish."