



No Kidding Around: Sinclair Broadcast Group Works with Imagine to Deliver Children's Programming from Public Cloud

Customer Profile

Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc. (SBG) is one of the largest and most diversified television broadcasting companies in the country. Sinclair owns and operates, programs or provides sales services to more television stations than anyone and has affiliations with all the major networks.

Business Challenge

With the introduction of KidsClick, a national and multiplatform programming block aimed at children, Sinclair Broadcast Group (SBG) was set to reenter a content area that has long been a staple of broadcast television. But rather than rely on traditional means for delivering content to its affiliate stations and other distribution destinations, SBG desired an approach to playout that would enable the broadcaster to better customize content and more precisely target advertising to the needs of individual affiliates. SBG also required a technology foundation for the project that would prove economically feasible for provisioning resources that would only be in use for a few hours a day, and would easily adapt to changing market dynamics and technology refreshes. SBG's on-air plans called for an incremental rollout of KidsClick to a large share of its nearly 200 affiliates, making the ability to quickly scale distribution operations another must-have attribute of the operation.

This stringent set of economic, productivity and technology requirements led SBG to select a fully virtualized approach to playout and content delivery that relies on resources located in the public cloud. SBG worked closely with Imagine Communications and a public cloud provider to move workflows related to its KidsClick programming to a geo-dispersed and highly scalable environment that leverages cloud elasticity to optimally balance resources with required workloads. The new, cloud-native installation, which recently began to distribute KidsClick's three-hour block of age-appropriate programming to a number of broadcast stations, enables SBG to reach cost efficiencies and service velocity milestones that would be nearly impossible and cost prohibitive using traditional playout technologies.

"The scalability and customization capabilities that the public cloud approach offers are unlike anything we could do using a traditional, on-premises model," said Del Parks, CTO, SBG. "And since we're only delivering this programming for a few hours a day, the flexibility of originating in the public cloud is a far superior alternative to purchasing traditional equipment that would sit idle for many hours at a time. We also gain experience and confidence in this operating model that we can use for future cloud deployments."

Customer

- Sinclair Broadcast Group

Industry

- North American broadcast company

Challenge

- Construct a flexible and versatile playout operation in the public cloud that will enable the broadcaster to improve efficiency, better customize content and more precisely target advertising to the needs of individual affiliates.

Products

- Versio™ Platform
- EPIC™ MV
- SelenioFlex™ File
- Nexio® Motion™

Business Value

- All-IP, standards-based playout operations designed to seamlessly scale and evolve to assimilate technology advances and meet future business requirements
- The ability to tap into operational benefits of a virtualized environment, including near-limitless scalability, resource elasticity and rapid service velocity
- Allows transition from capital-intensive to operational business model, which greatly simplifies provisioning and eliminates large capital outlays often required with the launch of a new service
- Enables customizing of content and commercial payload for each affiliate, exposing the SBG-owned stations to new opportunities to increase customer loyalty and generate new revenue through richer ad targeting

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Technology Solution

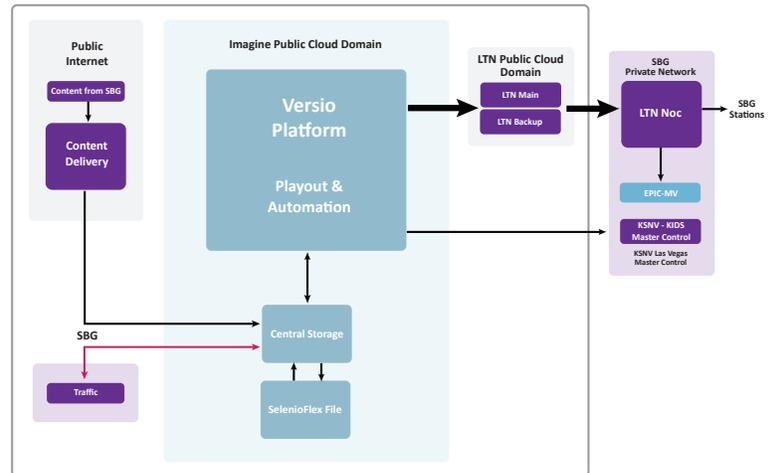
Classified by media reports as the most advanced commercial deployment of cloud-based playout by a broadcaster to date, SBG’s KidsClick operations break new ground in terms of scalability, flexibility and operational efficiency. In addition to tapping into the geo-dispersed benefits of the public cloud, including resource elasticity, SBG derives significant agility and speed-to-market capabilities from Versio™ Platform, Imagine’s modular, software-only and cloud-native playout solution. Versio Platform is designed for fully virtualized environments, both private and public, but is also portable to a premises-based model. In the KidsClick model, an instance of Versio Platform, capable of running a unique playlist, content and ad load, is assigned to each affiliate, allowing SBG-owned stations to customize programming and target advertising to a specific time zone.

Needed resources are automatically allocated in the public cloud, and then released when no longer needed. Powered by Zenium™, Imagine’s pure microservices platform, Versio Platform, which tightly integrates with SBG’s existing installation of Imagine’s LandmarkOSI™ traffic and scheduling software, is designed to be futureproof. Its microservices architecture enables SBG to incorporate new capabilities and features as they become available, as opposed to the forklift upgrades that a hardware-based solution often requires.

The deployment also utilizes Imagine’s SelenioFlex™ File, a file-based processing solution that is also running in the public cloud. SelenioFlex File resources can be applied to any of the pre-produced KidsClick content residing in the cloud that requires transcoding, format conversion, bit-rate adjustments, audio processing or any other modifications before being distributed to affiliates.

SBG has centralized operations for KidsClick at its Las Vegas Network Operations Center (NOC). SBG operators keep tabs on feeds coming out of the Azure cloud using EPIC™ MV multiviewers from Imagine Communications. Also powered by Zenium, the UHD-ready EPIC MV enables SBG to monitor from its Las Vegas NOC the quality of program content as it is being distributed to SBG affiliates.

The solution also relies on technology from LTN Global Communications to provide a managed and secure path from the public cloud to the individual stations, helping to ensure a successful and timely delivery of content to the SBG affiliates.



All playout and processing operations supporting SBG’s Kidsclick programming reside in the public cloud.

Business Value

The business benefits of this boundary-breaking installation are primarily derived through the migration of traditional applications to a virtualized environment and include near limitless scalability, resource elasticity and rapid service introduction. The almost-instantaneous provisioning of a new instance of Versio Platform is key to enabling SBG to eventually customize content and commercial payload for each affiliate, exposing the broadcaster to fresh opportunities to increase customer loyalty and generate new revenue through richer ad targeting. The software-only approach also allows SBG to add new affiliates to the KidsClick distribution system without the costs and investment in time that are required with a hardware-based solution.

From a financial standpoint, the virtual nature of the new deployment enables the broadcaster to transition its business model from capital-intensive to operational, which greatly simplifies provisioning and eliminates large capital outlays often required with the launch of a new service. SBG essentially pays for only the resources it uses, significantly increasing the cost effectiveness of a service that is operational for only a few hours each day. By outsourcing much of the operational overhead, SBG engineers and other media professionals are now free to focus on technical tasks that have a greater impact on customer loyalty and revenue growth.