Local TV cuts the Mustard...

by Neil Hutchins

Monday 24th March was a notable date in the roll-out of Local TV across the UK, as it saw the successful launch of the second of the new channels. Mustard TV, based in Norwich and named in recognition of an historic connection with the local Colman family, followed Estuary TV as a new broadcaster on Freeview Channel 8. Transmitting from the Tacolneston tower and available to around 162,000 homes, Mustard now provides four and a half hours of local output every weekday evening.

Mustard, as part of the Archant publishing group, is located in the offices of the Eastern Daily Press and Norwich Evening News. Existing areas of the building were adapted to provide new broadcast facilities, including newsroom, studio, gallery, green room, make-up and technical areas. The newspaper operation shares some of its journalism resources with Mustard, which provides a strong foundation for their new television news production.

News, sport and current affairs programming form the backbone of the schedule. A 15 minute news bulletin, including sports and weather, is broadcast live each day at 17:30 and then repeated during the evening. A magazine programme - The Mustard Show - is pre-recorded in three parts, approximately 30 minutes in total, and then uploaded to Comux for playout from their Network Operations Centre. A number of sports programmes, including 'Three Up Front', which focuses on Norwich City FC, are also produced each week, along with other documentary and local-interest material.

Mustard's technical infrastructure was designed around a Tricaster 8000. A green chromakey studio, with 'soft' sofa position for sports and magazine show presenters and a desk for the news presenter, is equipped with three studio cameras – one with an Autocue on-camera unit and two smaller PTZ units. There are several edit workstations, using a mixture of Final Cut Pro and Premiere Pro software, and an EditShare storage network for the shared content.

During the weeks leading up to their on-air date, Mustard faced a number of technical challenges in finalising a complete and effective workflow. Without a newsroom system it was proving time-consuming and inefficient to transfer individual scripts to the prompter and difficult to obtain accurate timing for the live and pre-recorded shows, which had to fit slots of pre-defined lengths. Without any automation, caption preparation was difficult in the short periods available between different production teams using the gallery. Access to recorded content, and play out of new material (e.g. breaking news), was awkward because items could not be copied on to or off of the Tricaster during live operation. Transcoding to the particular format required for upload to Comux was

difficult, because although an edit suite could be used for conversion, the process took a relatively long time and prevented the edit suite from being used for other purposes whilst underway. Similar issues relating to accessing, converting and uploading content also affected the web-based catch-up service. After reviewing these separate challenges, aQ Broadcast was able to offer solutions for each one, by installing, configuring and, in some areas, developing two systems: the QNews newsroom computer (NRCS) software and AVS video server hardware.

QNews provided a single point of integration to the prompter, immediately removing the need to transfer multiple individual files manually. It also provided full rundown management facilities, allowing programs to be planned and produced with the benefit of extensive timing information. Caption transfer was addressed by extending the existing QNews export capabilities to allow the CG templates required for a particular program to be loaded and populated automatically within the Tricaster GFX bin. This interface communicates directly with the Tricaster and does not require third-party MOS components to operate.

The QNews and caption automation utilised existing functionality and only involved configuration, not special development, in order to resolve the technical challenges. By contrast, other elements missing from the workflow were addressed by introducing the AVS into the technical infrastructure and then carrying out appropriate development work.

The architecture of the AVS has been designed to allow content to be transferred in to and out of its media volume while it is running, making it ideal for providing network