Autocue meets the University Challenge with first full production suite functionality

By David Stewart

Autocue is a company synonymous with teleprompting, but its product range has long included end-to-end newsroom, automation and video server systems. The company's solutions and price points are designed to appeal to major networks and smaller broadcast stations alike, including a number of UK colleges and universities that specialise in broadcast journalism media training.

Most recently, the University of Bedfordshire's Luton campus became the first site to deploy Autocue's new video server 'production suite' functionality. At the core of the production suite is Autocue's Linux-based video server, which provides the usual ingest, storage and playout functionality but also includes a vision mixer with simple transition effects; an audio mixer with manual and audio-follows-video fades; simple caption generation and a still store.

When combined with any of Autocue's scripting, newsroom, media management and automation elements, the video server provides the ability to create a comprehensive studio system without the additional broadcast hardware and associated costs normally required to achieve a similar result.

Because the Autocue system is almost entirely software-based, it is typically more cost-effective than Channel in a Box systems that predominantly rely on hardware components. Moreover, each function within the newsroom or production workflow can easily be split into multiple client/workstations, thereby creating a true multi-user environment for simultaneous learning rather than forcing students to crowd around a single piece of hardware for instruction.

Part of the University of Bedfordshire gallery and newsroom system by Digital Garage and Autocue

With its teleprompting, scripting and newsroom production heritage, Autocue can also offer a broad production workflow, as Richard Satchell, Autocue business development director, explains, "We are the only manufacturer to provide a single solution for newsroom, scripting, automation, media management, video servers, broadcast monitors and teleprompters with complete, scalable local TV packages," he says.

"In this case, the university also installed a 46-inch S-series broadcast monitor, a 24-inch E-series monitor, and two Professional-series 12-inch teleprompters, all from Autocue. It's not surprising that academic centres are finding our solutions so appealing once they learn that the successful systems already implemented by mainstream broadcasters, corporate entities and other academic institutions can be obtained from a single supplier."

The installation at Luton was led by Autocue reseller and systems integrator Digital Garage. The Autocue system at the university is specifically designed to support the university's broadcast journalism degree course, which provides an opportunity to gain experience in television production and journalism within a dedicated newsroom.

According to Digital Garage Managing Director Michael Whelan, "We looked at systems from a range of well-known newsroom computer system manufacturers. What clearly set Autocue apart was that it did not offer the newsroom system in isolation, it also offered all of the components necessary to create a comprehensive workflow. And because all of the elements came from a single manufacturer, it met the university's requirement for a low cost solution from a single provider."

The university's multi-disciplinary broadcast journalism courses include those designed to provide a complete understanding of the requirements for multiplatform delivery. The Autocue system's vast number of configurable options enables the system to be customised to suit specific environments, including radio, and any number of production workflow styles, which provides practical multiplatform experience across a broad range of contemporary delivery platforms.