

Panellists: Training a key enabler to going digital

KUALA LUMPUR – “Do not treat your suppliers as enemies but as someone who can help you,” declared Phil Nottle of Sony Australia, towards the end of the industry debate on *Enabling broadcasters to make the digital transition*.

Indeed, too often have buyer-seller negotiations taken on an adversarial

stance as broadcasters facing budget constraints tried very hard to squeeze their suppliers for better pricing or extra services.

Nottle noted that suppliers of broadcast equipment could be of great help to TV stations making the transition to digital broadcasting. “For example, we have helped an Asian broadcaster to produce a live *Idol* show,” he said, adding that training remained a key enabler of broadcasters wanting to get the maximum value out of their new digital system or workflow.

APB publisher Andrew Yeo, in his opening statement, stated: “Training is the key in the adoption of new advanced technologies.” He said that this statement was not his but from industry veteran Phil Laven, former chairman of EBU and now chairman of

DVB Steering Council.

As an industry observer, from the outside looking in, Yeo noted that broadcasters sometimes paid “lip-service” to the importance of helping their staff to upskill themselves. He said that it was Neville Lane, former general manager of TVNZ, who brought home the importance of proper training.

“Neville said at one of ABU general assemblies: ‘For every dollar we spent on hardware, we spent at least another dollar on training’.”

Prompted by Neville’s statement, APB set up DigiWorkz, a small broadcast training facility at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore, to provide two- to three-day skills training courses. And since 2002, it has been providing Asian broadcasters hands-on production and engineering courses, such as Non-linear Editing, Capture & Edit Workshop on Digital Workflow as well as Satellite Up-link courses.

To reduce the cost of attending the popular two-day ‘DVB Fundamentals Course’ in Singapore, DigiWorkz has converted it into an online course, thus enabling broadcasters adopting the DVB

standards to upskill themselves in “their own place and at their own pace”. And at a fraction of the cost of sending staff to Singapore to upgrade their knowledge.

Nottle, urging broadcasters to pay greater attention to training, said: “Training, like old age, will sooner or later catch up with us.”

Sharad Sadhu, ABU technical director, chairing the debate, also agreed that broadcasters wanting to get the best out of their production workflow should help their staff to upgrade their skills.

“With the convergence of technologies, broadcasting has become more complex. Going forward, how do broadcasters view systems integrators (SIs)? Will the role of SI become more critical in the transition to digital TV?” asked Yeo.

The chairman directed the question to Ashad Bagharib of Singapore’s MediaCorp, who said most SIs have vast experience and expertise that broadcasters could tap on. He added that a key question for commercial broadcasters going digital was how much the migration would cost and when they would see a return on their investment.

Shailendra Nigam of India’s Technomedia Solutions said that indeed industry service providers



Panellists on the *Enabling Broadcasters to Make the Digital Transition* session identifying the key ‘enablers’ that will help broadcasters go digital.

were in a good position to guide broadcasters through the move to digital.

Fellow panellist Jishun Mei of Harris agreed. He said: “The time is right and the manufacturers are ready to help you.”

On setting up a digital network, Shakunt Malhotra of GlobeCast advised: “It is important to choose the right-sized network. A network with too many features that are seldom used will not be cost-effective.”

The session also discussed other important ‘enablers’ such as spectrum planning, conducive regulatory framework and maximising the digital dividend.

Chris Jaeger of Broadcast Australia, firmly believing that going digital is no more an option despite the costs and challenges, said: “If you don’t go digital, then ultimately your business will fail.”

To ensure successful transi-

tion, he said that planning should cover spectrum issues, new business models and how to deliver content to new devices; and it should be done in close consultation with regulators and other broadcasters.

During question time, Javad Mottaghi of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development said broadcasters should develop a strategic plan on how to migrate because the structural changes would affect all aspects of their work.

Broadcasters should learn from one another, he advised.

Agreeing, Shelten Neth of Pohnpei Public Broadcasting Corporation, Micronesia, who was on the panel, said that smaller broadcasters need the help of broadcasters that have already gone digital.

He urged: “Please leave the door open for us to communicate with you!”

Broadcasters need their governments to set digital direction

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progress, Astley added. “Challenges will continue to grow, and with the pace of technology change, it is going to get more complex in the years ahead.”

To reflect how far technology has progressed, this year’s plenary sessions, industry debates and workshops at the ABU Digital Symposium, were focused on new and emerging broadcast trends; the 40-booth exhibition also reflected the trends and it provided opportunities for the participants to have a first-hand look at what the broadcast manufacturers and service providers have to offer to the industry.

The participants, mostly ABU broadcasters, also had the opportunity to witness a demonstration on 3D post-production process. This was made possible by systems integrator Benchmark Broadcast Systems, which brought in its Scratch demo artist Mithun D’souza to show how 3D content is post produced today.

Broadcast equipment provider Sony also made its presence felt in the conference hall as well as on the exhibit floor.

Phil Nottle, Sony’s technology manager, Business & Professional Products Asia Pacific Company (BPPA), presented insights into the challenges of live broadcasting of 3D programming.

Globally, top-of-the-mind awareness of 3D technology is gradually increasing both among broadcast professionals and consumers, Nottle noted.

Following the announcement of its partnership with FIFA to capture some World Cup soccer matches in 3D, Sony said it now offers a range of 3D solutions — from professional content creation and acquisition and production to distribution and presentation in theatres — and to the home!

Another key area that Sony was addressing via its booth at the show was HD.

The company maintains that investing in HD will future-proof broadcasters’ systems to deploy 3DTV in the future.

This being the case, Sony displayed its latest range of HD broadcast and production technologies, including cameras, multi-format production switchers and professional LCD monitors.

Paul Maroni, Sony’s assistant general manager, head of Live Production Marketing, BPPA, said: “Similar to HD, Sony is at the forefront of 3D technology and well positioned to address the needs of customers who want to explore the possibilities this technology can provide for their business.

“Although the presence of 3D is minimal in Asia, it is definitely a technology which will materialise in the future and we would like to share some insights with our

customers now.”

The annual ABU symposium, which took place on March 9-11 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, attracted a large number of broadcasters and other players in the industry. It has established itself as an effective forum for the exchange of information and expertise.

The event offered a total of 11 conference sessions covering most of the important areas of broadcasting, and were supplemented by 10 workshops which

focused on prominent topics, ranging from ASO issues to content protection and automated workflows.

The symposium attracted major industry players as sponsors and they included Broadcast Australia, Sony, Harris, Ministry of Information Communications and Culture Malaysia, Radio Television Malaysia, GlobeCast, Plish, Conax, Centre for Content Protection, Dalet, Rohde & Schwarz, Ikegami, Tektronix, Media Broadcast, Net Insight, Radio Frequency Systems, LS telcom, OmniBus, Kathrein, Gencom, Benchmark, Nautel, T-VIPS, RF Mondial, Fraunhofer IIS, Measat, NHK, Solid State Logic, Broadcast Communications International, BroadcastAsia, Telairity, Digital Radio Mondial, Digidia, Sistem Televisyen Malaysia and, of course, APB as a media partner as well as a sponsor.

More than 60 eminent speakers graced this year’s ABU symposium, addressing a wide range of timely topics covering the entire gamut of radio and TV broadcasting and issues facing the broadcast industry in Asia today. They provided much food for thought.



Malaysia’s Minister of Information, Communications and Culture, Dr Rais Yatim, checking out one of Sony’s camcorders.