

by Chris Ferris

ISP Sports Scores with the AudioVAULT™

[WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina] ISP kicked off the past football season with a new Broadcast Electronics' AudioVAULT™ digital audio system, and our sports network has not been the same since.

A FULL SCHEDULE

Saturday night football was always a daunting experience at our radio studios in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. A typical Saturday during football and basketball season can mean seven or eight of the colleges we represent have games going on at the same time.

That is eight play-by-plays. Eight broadcast feeds. Eight uplinks to over 300 broadcast stations all over the United States. While we are covering the Virginia Tech Hokies for an audience tuned into over 30 stations in Virginia, we are also covering the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets for another 33 stations in Georgia. Multiply this complexity by a factor of eight, and you pretty much have an idea of the challenges before us on a typical Saturday.

Did I mention we also supply sports coverage to Yahoo and RealNetworks for Internet streaming as well as XM and Sirius for satellite radio? It is like having eight different radio stations in the same building for seven to twelve action-packed hours, one or two nights a week.

HANDLING SPECIAL NEEDS

Our previous system worked, but would require an extensive set-up each week before we would run the Game Day broadcasts – not just for one game, but for each and every game. With this many balls in the air, we do a great deal of on-the-fly production – not the sort of operation typically supported by most digital audio systems designed for radio stations.

That level of operational complexity is why we stayed with a “sneaker” network for so long, until we got the Broadcast Electronics' AudioVAULT.



I discovered the AudioVAULT and Broadcast Electronics at the NAB convention. The folks at BE seemed to understand what we were trying to accomplish. Not only did they take the time to understand our operation, they seemed knowledgeable about the solution. Criss Onan, BE's representative, always came back with, “We can do that.”

But what really locked it down for me was a visit to Auburn University. We had just acquired their athletic department's multimedia rights and I noticed that their network operation was completely integrated with a BE AudioVAULT. I had the opportunity to go there and see the AudioVAULT functioning; I was impressed, and decided to get a system for our studios.

SMOOTH OPERATIONS

This past season was the first when we could record a commercial, drop it into AudioVAULT storage, schedule it for each

sports event, and forget about it. We need not spend hours entering in spots for billing purposes, one of many manual operations we have eliminated, thanks to the AudioVAULT.

During game time, the on-site engineer sends event coverage over ISDN from the stadiums into one of eight mini-studios – or boards with AudioVAULT workstations. Our main AudioVAULT server is set up to receive nine inputs, one for each college plus a spare, as live programming. Pre-recorded interviews, liners, and commercials are stored by the AudioVAULT server and can be mixed in at any time.

Before each of the eight board operators is a dual screen – one a preview/record screen, the other the AVAir screen of program that is currently airing live.

AUDIO CAPTURING

On one side, BE set up two separate record events, one to roll through the game for archiving and another to capture actualities from the game, so our guys can edit them on the fly and make them available to other operators in the building for scoreboard updates throughout the game broadcasts.

We set up unique tabs for each of the eight sports teams, so any operator can click on a tab and download a highlight whenever they need it. Archiving the complete games gives us the ability to chop up the audio into smaller segments or create a CD of the entire game at a later time.

During the week, ISP is using the AudioVAULT's AVProd module for commercial production; on weekends, announcers and board operators use it to edit out snippets of the game for use by others in the network as actualities by adding voice-overs to the piece, or run as-is. As for the Web access, all files are already saved as .wav files and are good to go.

This setup is probably something you might never see in a radio station, but it sure works for us. We have noticed a lot more interplay between the games, such as cross-promoting games and being able to ad-lib liners, or pull up “takeouts.” This system's archiving feature alone is worth its weight in gold; no longer do we have to buy cassettes in bulk!

Chris Ferris is the Chief Engineer for ISP Sports in Winston-Salem, NC, a multimedia marketing company serving many major Southeast intercollegiate athletic programs. He can be reached at: cferris@ispsports.com



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