INTERNATIONAL DATACASTING

Fairfax Radio

IDC Reliability a Deciding Factor for Australia's Fairfax Radio

Fairfax Radio is a major distributor of live audio to radio stations across Australia. The company first began radio operations in 1925. Fairfax Radio Syndication Pty Limited (FXRS), the entity that currently provides the live radio service, was organized in 1985. Today, it delivers more than 3,000 hours of audio per week to radio broadcasters throughout Australia, including major sporting events, major news bulletins, music and talk radio.

Background

FXRS first installed International Datacasting (IDC) FlexRoute receivers and head-end equipment in 1994. After 18 years of reliable service and with the new technologies available, FXRS decided to update to its new complement of IDC SuperFlex® Pro Audio receivers and head-end equipment, including Net Manager and Event Manager. The operation uses 12 Event Managers and one Net Manager, and approximately 120 receive sites using IDC's SuperFlex Pro Audio receivers.

The move to SuperFlex Pro Audio, Net Manager and Event Manager gave FXRS greater flexibility in the choice of audio formats and data rates. In addition, the new system dovetailed with FXRS's goal to move from an off-site uplink facility to an on-site system, which improved efficiency and eliminated several possible points of failure in the signal stream. Adoption of the DVB-S2 standard permitted more efficient use of satellite spectrum, and the new system's IP capabilities gave FXRS new content delivery options.

Fairfax Radio Syndication is the recipient of three ACRAs (Australian Commercial Radio Awards) which recognize excellence in all areas of radio broadcasting. Its radio distribution system is now considered to be the industry standard.

CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT

Customer
- Fairfax Radio Syndication

Industry
- Distribution of live audio to radio stations across Australia

Business Challenge
- Serving a diverse group of broadcasters across Australia with complex program booking needs

Technology Solution
- International Datacasting (IDC) products including:
  - SuperFlex® Pro Audio Receiver
  - Net Manager
  - Event Manager

Business Value
- Investment in a solution that delivers both flexibility and reliability — backed by strong engineering support

Business Challenge

Serving broadcasters across Australia is a significant challenge, both in terms of size and quantity of audio feeds. This diverse list of broadcasters had complex program booking needs which meant the system needed to be customized for FXRS's unique needs. The customizations included adding Mayah audio encoders, Newtec modulators and Advantech serial terminal servers. In particular, the Mayah encoders' well-documented control protocol enabled many of Fairfax Radio's required features, and the Advantech servers allowed the existing control equipment at content creation locations to work without modification.

The customized hardware is controlled by a management system developed by FXRS, which allocates resources and provides the optimum path for each customer. The program booking interface lets customers easily view schedules and make booking arrangements. At the receive end, customers can seamlessly switch among various unrelated program sources.

Technology Solution

"The new system gives more flexibility; however, the reason we stayed with IDC is reliability," said Bill Barrington, General Manager of Fairfax Radio Syndication Pty Limited. "Above all else, it is IDC's reliability that mattered. When you're on to a good thing, you stick with it."

The support provided by IDC and its local agent in Australia (Omnicast) was also a big motivating factor for FXRS. Strong engineering support meant there was a smooth transition to the new SuperFlex Pro Audio receivers and the new system. FXRS directly credits this to the support provided by IDC and Omnicast.

"We knew we would need solid documentation and technical advice on how best to integrate the new system into our work flow," Barrington continued. "The combination of IDC and Omnicast proved to be a powerful combination, providing us with the support we needed through the critical transition phase. With our first year of the new system behind us, we continue to work with IDC and Omnicast to leverage the benefits the system provides by exploring potential new services. We're confident we have made the right decision — the system just works, and that is the most important thing."

Business Value

This reliability led to real savings by reducing support requirements. For example, the few issues with satellite reception that occurred are due to factors outside of the SuperFlex Pro Audio receiver, such as incorrect dish alignment and LNB configuration.

At FXRS, the SuperFlex Pro Audio's on-screen display helps stations quickly identify and eliminate problems by showing vital information such as signal quality. The display of the audio level is particularly helpful to non-technical operators who need to confirm audio is being received properly.

FXRS can drill down into more detailed receiver data, which allows for much deeper problem solving and network monitoring. This capability proves popular with networks that have stations at diverse sites across Australia.

The company recently secured exclusive distribution rights to Australia's Melbourne Cup horse race — the race that "stops the Nation" (akin to the Kentucky Derby in the U.S.). This exclusive arrangement is due in large part to the reliability of its IDC distribution equipment.

Learn More

To learn more about International Datacasting solutions, please visit **www.datacast.com**.

To learn more about Fairfax Radio Syndication, please visit **www.fxrs.com.au**.