

ESPN STAR Sports

About ESPN STAR Sports

ESPN STAR Sports is a 50-50 joint venture between two of the world's leading cable and satellite broadcasters. As Asia's definitive and complete sports broadcaster and content provider, ESPN STAR Sports combines the strengths and resources of its ultimate parent companies — Walt Disney (ESPN, Inc.) and News Corporation Limited (STAR) — to deliver a diverse array of international and regional sports to viewers via its encrypted pay and free-to-air services.

ESPN STAR Sports showcases an unparalleled variety of premier live sports from around the globe 24 hours a day to a cumulative reach of more than 310 million viewers in Asia. ESPN STAR Sports has 17 networks covering 24 countries, each localized to deliver differentiated world-class premier sports programming to Asian viewers. This includes ESPN Asia, ESPN China, ESPN Hong Kong, ESPN India, ESPN Malaysia, ESPN Philippines, ESPN Singapore, ESPN Taiwan, MBC-ESPN (Korea), STAR Sports Asia, STAR Sports Hong Kong, STAR Sports India, STAR Sports Malaysia, STAR Sports Singapore, STAR Sports Southeast Asia, STAR Sports Taiwan, and STAR Cricket.



On the ground, the ESPN STAR Sports Event Management Group manages and promotes premier sporting events around Asia. ESPN STAR Sports aims to reach consumers at any time, any place, and through all new media platforms, both Internet and mobile. The multilingual online platforms espnstar.com, espnstar.com.cn, espnstar.com.tw, and footballcrazy.tv interact with millions of users providing them with in-depth sports news, results, and competitions. Developed for the sports fan that is constantly on the move, *mobileESPN* and STAR Sports Mobile deliver differentiated mobile content targeted at its various audiences. *mobileESPN* enables the serious sports fan to follow their favorite sports more closely than ever before with a combination of specially produced video news clips and in-depth news coverage and analysis. STAR Sports Mobile aims to provide interactive and entertaining opportunities to engage with sports, delivering exclusive video excerpts from leading football clubs Arsenal and Liverpool, as well as highlights from STAR Sports Mobile's original programs covering opinions, instructional tips, and the latest online game reviews.

The Challenge

As Asia's biggest sports broadcaster and content provider, ESPN STAR Sports' success has brought its own distinct challenges when searching for the next generation of broadcast technology given the nature of the production process, coping with sports rights issues, and having a tight integration with the company's business management system.

ESPN STAR Sports had tens of thousands of hours of unique and irreplaceable footage captured in a variety of formats. To catalog the content, ESPN STAR Sports used a business management system that only allowed indexing according to basic information including sport, date, and teams playing. Tapes were logged on paper, which was inefficient.

With no consistent way of storing, viewing, retrieving, and repurposing its assets, ESPN STAR Sports journalists, producers, and others working with archival materials wasted valuable time searching for what they needed, loading tape into VTRs, and reviewing and identifying desired content. The tapes also took up space, making organizing and tracking them resource-intensive. Additionally, tapes have other disadvantages as they age poorly and are subject to wear, tear, and depreciate with every manipulation.

Ultimately, ESPN STAR Sports recognized its needs and sought a content storage management (CSM) solution provided by vendors with proven success and experience within the broadcast world. The solution had to give ESPN STAR Sports the ability to customize rules to manage content, and it had to interoperate cleanly with other systems.

The Solution

Because of its scale — delivering multiple sports events, often live, in multiple versions and multiple languages, and with different in-vision sponsorship — ESPN STAR Sports has a unique and complex production workflow. It has recently been working with UK systems integrator TSL to create a new tapeless server-based environment which will allow the broadcaster to continue to grow.

ESPN STAR Sports initially purchased Front Porch Digital's DIVArchive™ in 2004 as a means of giving near-online capacity to its transmission server. In 2006, ESPN STAR Sports along with systems integrator TSL began implementing the phase-in of Project Homerun, the digitization of the entire production system. The second phase, which relies on DIVArchive for speedy, seamless inter-operation among multiple sophisticated systems, was commissioned in winter 2007.

DIVArchive incorporates software and hardware components that are integrated and tested to meet the specific needs of an individual operation. At ESS, content ingested to an Omneon Spectrum™ media server is moved by OmniBus Opus automation to an Omneon MediaGrid™ active storage device. For production, ESPN STAR Sports uses Apple Final Cut Studio workstations set up to enable edit-in-place from the MediaGrid. Eight of the workstations are installed as craft edit suites and the remaining 16 are on desktop, in voiceover, or available to production control rooms.

Content archiving is automatic. Opus coordinates with DIVArchive's Storage Plan Manager, using customized business rules to monitor content, to decide what is to be archived, as well as where and when. These decisions are based on metadata that identifies the media clip type. For example, ESPN STAR Sports has specific rules for clips of Barclays Premier League (BPL) football games, holding three copies of each game throughout the current season, and then automatically purging all but one on the first day of the subsequent season.

Because of the bandwidth afforded by the Omneon MediaGrid, content can very quickly be migrated via DIVArchive to archival storage, located on a Sun StorageTek SL8500 library with five T10000 drives. The only limitation on the speed of file transfers is the Giga-Ethernet.

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ESPN STAR Sports' DIVArchive installation consists of one Manager, the component that maintains the database, processes requests from applications, and controls storage resources; and seven Actors, which move content between the tape libraries and the video servers.

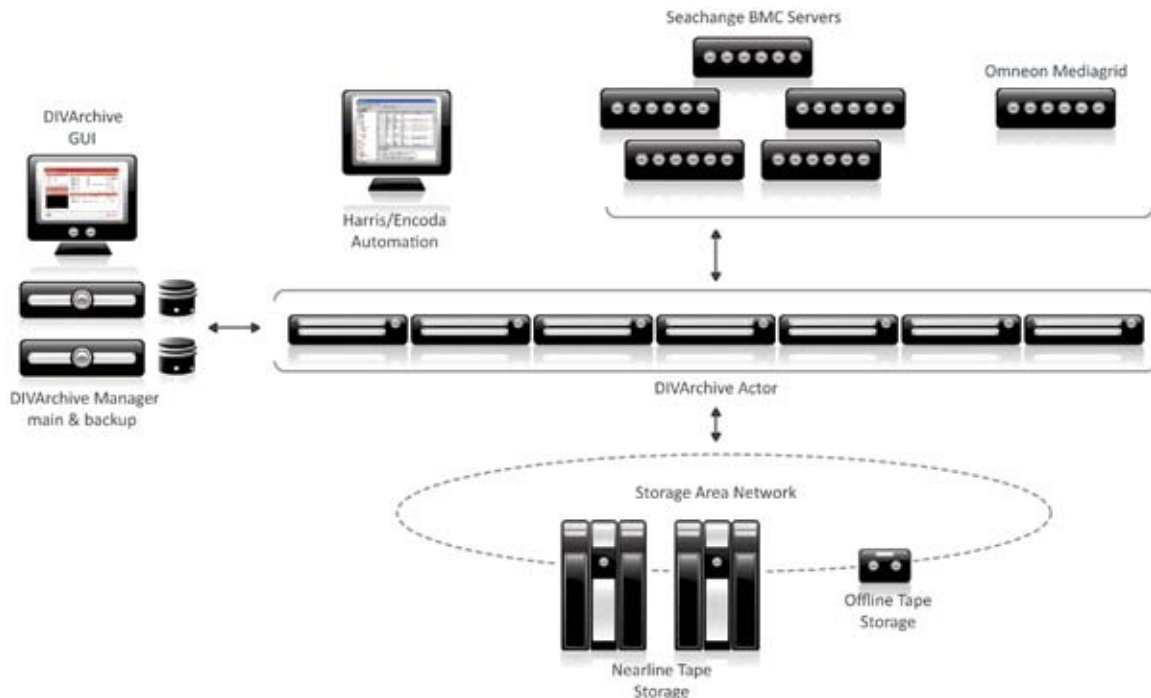
Content is retrieved in two different ways. If it is currently set for playout in a studio or for transmission, it is located in a cache list and is restored automatically to the MediaGrid under Opus control. Content required in preparation for an edit session can be requested manually using the OmniBus Opus desktop application.

Features, Advantages, Benefits

The use of the asset management system allows ESPN STAR Sports to perform detailed and precise logging of content to timecode for frame accuracy. The DIVArchive partial restore function saves time and resources in cases when only a small piece of a large file is required — for example, the game-winning run, not the entire baseball game. With deadlines always looming, the speed of DIVArchive operating with the Omneon MediaGrid is critical. DIVArchive minimizes delay by enabling content to be restored on the fly, even as it is being read from a datatape. Any media present in the ESPN STAR Sports system is available for use within minutes of selection, and retrieval from the archive is automated — thus eliminating the need for a staff member to pull tape off a shelf.

Previously, it was difficult to identify specific content, meaning the archive was not used as extensively or as efficiently as it could have been. With MAM and CSM in place, ESPN STAR Sports producers and editors can readily identify content for use in a production, which means they can choose the best footage available, improving production quality and diversity.

ESPN STAR Sports Network Diagram



The Future

ESPN STAR Sports' Project Homerun is a technologically innovative project that positions the company as a leader in the region's broadcast industry and remains a work in progress. The chief driver for Homerun was to boost the capabilities of ESPN STAR Sports production department by making it quicker and easier to access sports content. It succeeds in doing so by enabling simultaneous access by multiple users to work on a single feed in a collaborative manner the instant it is received in order to produce various packages, as well as for other programs.

Like any remodeling job, it has required significant closet cleaning. Some 30,000 hours of unnecessary or redundant odds and ends stuffed into the tape library — or under the table legs — have been purged, leaving almost 100,000 hours to be identified, cataloged, and ingested into the system.

The anticipation is that all those hours of digitized content will fit into a cart machine about the size of an edit suite. ESPN STAR Sports' archive grows at a net rate of about 10,000 hours per year, but the size ebbs and flows with changes in broadcast rights. In view of growth over time, the modular format and scalability of DIVArchive is important to ESPN STAR Sports.

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