



Sky Racing Australia's Sky Racing Takes Live Sports Production onto the GV STRATUS Platform



CUSTOMER

Sky Racing, Australia

World leader in multiview, multichannel race broadcasting

Televised/streamed more than 83,000 races in 2011

CHALLENGE

To support a growing number of delivery platforms (TV, Internet and Mobile)

To transition from an existing disparate infrastructure to a fully networked environment where everyone can access and work with any piece of content

To implement this without affecting day-to-day operations

SOLUTION

End-to-end solution — cameras, replay control, switchers, routers, media servers and applications software

Dovetails with existing MAM/NRCS

BENEFIT

Increased workflow efficiency and faster turnaround times

Opening up new possibilities for improving efficiencies in the future

Easily scalable and upgradeable

Background

Among the services that Sky Racing offers both broadcasters and the wagering public in Australia is real-time thoroughbred, greyhound and harness racing coverage aggregated from a large number of venues disparately located across the country and internationally. The aim of the presentation is to be clear and for it to be easily understood. Last year alone, it helped televise and stream online more than 83,000 races. To do this requires a vast amount of staff coordination and the most advanced live video production and distribution technology.

Carl Petch, Chief Engineer at Sky Racing, based in Frenchs Forrest (north Sydney), said with the ever-growing number of platforms — TV, Internet and mobile—his staff has to support, the need for efficiency and fast turnaround times has never been stronger. To do this cost-effectively, the company has become the first commercial customer for the new GV STRATUS software-based media workflow application framework from Grass Valley, a Belden, Brand, that brings a number of Sky Racing's content creation departments under the same graphical user interface. It's an idea that Petch said he knew he needed two years ago, but couldn't get the right pieces in place.

A "Closed Production Circle" Approach

The fundamental goal is to link disparate pieces of Sky Racing's sports replay equipment with its asset management system and have it all work in harmony with minimal human intervention. This allows the staff to use the content not only for sports replays, but also to move that media more freely and deploy it across a wide array of users on the network. This also enables them to repurpose content easier and much faster than they could previously.

Fulfilling Petch's previously stated "closed production circle" vision, staff members at the company are now testing the new GV STRATUS Media Workflow Application Framework in Sky Racing's studios, incorporating 20 Grass Valley K2 Summit servers, yielding 80 individual ports (channels). Thirty of those ports are under MAM control for recording and the other 50 are for live replays, studio control and other types of recording. Some of those recorded feeds — used for highlight packages, and replays for all types of race coverage, and studio shows — come from the new production trucks onsite at various venues, while others come from venues across the continent.

The plan is to go live with it by the end of April. That's when Petch will oversee the transition from the existing infrastructure of separate pieces to a fully networked environment where everyone can access and work with any piece of material on the SAN, and they can begin working as soon as video feeds begin to come into the facility. There's no waiting around. Two or more people can work simultaneously on the same content.

The key for Sky Racing is to implement the GV STRATUS system without affecting Sky's existing day-to-day operations. To do this successfully, the engineering team is using two separate signal paths: one for the existing operations and the second for the GV STRATUS workflow. During the test period, the two paths are running in parallel, redundant paths. The use of metadata (specific embedded information about the content) is also a huge part of making the transition successful.

"The circle is now joined," said Petch. "Metadata has always been used in MAM systems, but it's never been used extensively for live collaborative production in the way that we're now implementing it."



"I've always said that technology drives efficiency. GV STRATUS is exactly what large media creation organizations like ours need to keep up with consumers and viewers of our content. In many cases, we don't get a second chance to do it right and make our customers happy. They have a lot of choice now."

Carl Petch, Chief Engineer, Sky Racing

Beta Testing To Go Live

During the series of tests, editors in the studio using GV STRATUS systems have complete access to all materials through the same (although customizable) GV STRATUS GUI and a new race replay workflow that incorporates the Grass Valley K2 Dyno Replay Systems as well. Petch said testing has gone well.

The variety of logging features found on the K2 Dyno Replay Controller (part of the Grass Valley K2 Dyno Replay System, with the K2 Summit production server used to store and retrieve recorded clips) are used to get footage of that day into the GV STRATUS environment, with appropriate information (metadata) tightly linked. Each day, Sky Racing's databases produce an XML feed of all of that day's content (jockey name, horse name, presenter information) and feeds it into K2 Dyno and GV STRATUS. Then it's just a matter of clicking the right buttons to marry the right content with its associated metadata.

Before they used GV STRATUS, Sky Racing managed materials with its existing media asset management system, which they also used to archive content. Now the two systems are joined and available as one for every member involved in the production process. So, when material is archived, the associated metadata travels to the Ardendo MAM system as well — making audio and video clips easily searchable. Using GV STRATUS, additional metadata can be added all along the production chain.

A Game Changer

"We think GV STRATUS is a real game changer for us," said Petch. "We can have staff members writing their own interfaces, or we can create a template that they can use, depending upon their needs. And they all feel part of something larger, which was my goal from the very beginning."

Indeed, Petch said getting the staff on board with the idea of using GV STRATUS was critical to a successful implementation.

"This is also about winning hearts and minds of the staff and getting them involved in this process all along the way," he said, adding that each staff member underwent a week of training and are now fully up to speed. "If you don't have that buy-in from the staff, you are destined to fail."

At the end of the day, what Petch said he likes most about GV STRATUS is that it addresses so much more than typical broadcast equipment and workflows. It makes every tool available to every approved staff member and allows Sky Racing to add software modules for more features and functionality when they need them, and it makes it easy to keep the platform up to date with the latest networking technologies as they emerge.

Sky Racing has also equipped its production studios with five Grass Valley Kalypso Video Production Center switchers and a large (512x512) Trinix NXT router. There's also a large K2 platform-based storage area network (SAN) and collaborative workgroup environment. All of these systems and more will be incorporated under and controlled GV STRATUS.

"We see all kinds of possibilities for GV STRATUS and how it can help to improve our efficiency," Petch said. "It's all about navigating the user experience to make sure that the staff can work the way they like to work, yet deliver projects fast and efficiently for the benefit of the entire team."

The team at Sky Racing understands the value of implementing such IT-centric technology today. Leveraging GV STRATUS to its fullest potential provides Sky Racing with a unique competitive advantage that will keep its customers coming back for more.