Harris Broadcast

STAN'S SCOOP
ON THE BROADCAST INDUSTRY

Subject **Why pay for bad content?**

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Why pay for bad content?

By: Stan Moote, Vice-president of Business Development

Back in the “good old” days, it was easy to know if a tape wouldn’t play out during the ingest process. With a limited number of playback devices and a consistency of encoding and delivery, the tape-based era was arguably a simpler time for assuring content quality.

Today, content comes into our facility in many different ways. We continue to see a shift towards file-based workflows as tape-based environments rapidly become a thing of the past. At the same time, the increase in the number of software CODECs and the myriad of file formats now presents new and unique sets of challenges. In a file-based paradigm, facilities can expect to receive content with all manner of encoding and packaging in various forms — all using a range of essence types and variations for formatting ancillary and metadata.

Further complicating matters, the switch to digital distribution, along with the change to HD sets, allows our viewers to see and hear more glitches, compression artifacts, encoder hiccups — and just plain poor quality. While the newer breed of larger flat-screen TV sets makes a good-quality standard-definition program look great (albeit not as fantastic as HD), poor technical quality displayed on these larger screen sizes causes viewers’ eyes to easily tire, resulting in viewers changing services.

Complaining to your program suppliers about content quality often results in zero action. This is because until recently, there has been no inexpensive way to report unacceptable or out of spec parameters for video and audio. The main reason for this is that early file-based Quality Control (QC) tools were a luxury that offered a questionable return on investment (ROI).

Today, with the proliferation of file-based workflows and the explosion of content for a variety of platforms, what was once considered a luxury has now become a necessity. The good news is that as the number of file formats and essence-types continue to multiply, QC technology is also maturing. In fact, the leading file-based QC products have already evolved into serious analysis engines delivering useful reports. Now, you can have a ‘best-of-breed’ solution for a modest investment — one that will provide solid ROI early on and continue to pay dividends for years to come.

The secret to good quality control is to verify program content at various places in your workflow (Figure 1), hence catching problems quickly and avoiding expensive, last-minute corrections.

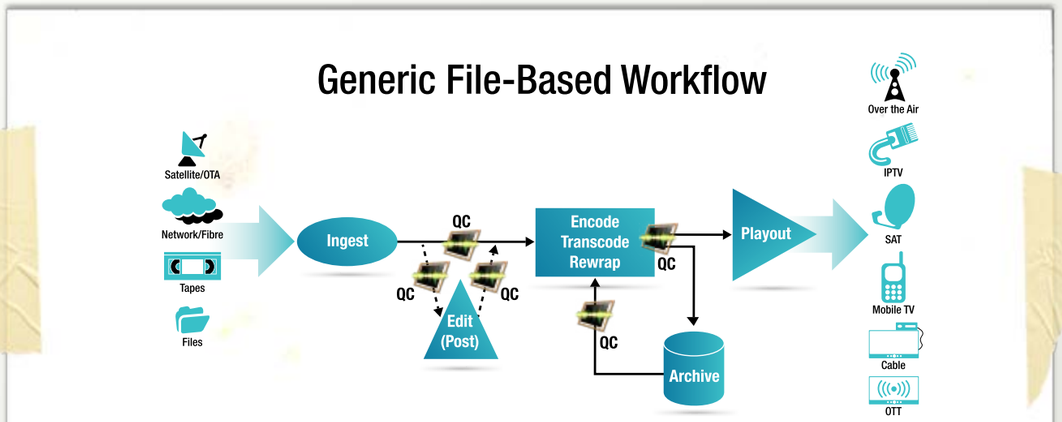

Figure 1: Affordable QC can now be performed at various stages in the workflow — catching costly errors.

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There are many touch-points where file-based QC tools can improve efficiency and provide peace of mind:

- Check files just after linear or file ingest
- Verify program integrity after any creative edits or sub-titling processing
- Ensure files that are transcoded for multiplatform delivery or come from archive are good.

Field Order Swap detected, which indicates an interlacing artifact that will likely appear on both a CRT display and a progressive scan display.		Stream - 0 (PID - 0x0002) - MPEG-2 video Start at 00:01:33.480 | GOP 195 | Frame index 2335 | TCR 00:01:33:10 Continues for 0 Frames Ends at 00:01:33.520 | GOP 195 | Frame index 2335 | TCR 00:01:33:10
Consecutive Black frames exceeds template threshold of 1 frame		Stream - 0 (PID - 0x0002) - MPEG-2 video Start at 00:02:52.159 | GOP 359 | Frame index 4302 | TCR 00:02:52:02 Continues for 21 Frames Ends at 00:02:53.040 | GOP 361 | Frame index 4323 | TCR 00:02:52:23
Color gamut is out of range per EBU R103-2000, due to the luma being 6% below , chroma being 21% below the tolerance levels		Stream - 0 (PID - 0x0002) - MPEG-2 video - Low Luma: 6%. High Luma: 0%. Low Chroma: 21%. High Chroma: 0% Start at 00:04:00.240 | GOP 501 | Frame index 6004 | TCR 00:04:00:04 Continues for 7 Frames Ends at 00:04:00.560 | GOP 502 | Frame index 6011 | TCR 00:04:00:11

Figure 2 - QC tools generate reports with thumbnails and error details indicating problems to be corrected before airing and paying suppliers

Best of breed, file-based quality control tools running 24x7 supplement the operational staff, providing you with high-volume content checking, at a variety of touch points, on a wide range of objective parameters and a growing number of subjective measurements. Tools that provide easy-to-read, concise reports (Figure 2) with actionable results allow you to react quickly to potential issues. Remember no file-based quality control tool can completely remove the human element. However, the right file-based quality control tool scours your systems for poor quality or non-compliant files before they go to air or are delivered downstream assuring you are paying for quality programs — and that you keep your viewers hooked to your service.

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