

The television landscape has altered drastically in recent years, as TV has been reimagined

across different networks, technology platforms and devices. This is the greatest period of innovation the industry has ever seen, but innovation comes at a price. Launching or relaunching a TV service was never simple, but these days operators face a whole range of new and increasingly complicated technology decisions in order to reach multiple devices with multiple video formats, security systems and operating systems.

Even when it comes to just adding premium SVOD services, it is no coincidence that Android TV, Netflix, DAZN and more recently RDK have initiatives to make the app on-boarding process smoother and less-costly.

At the same time, the industry is going through an unprecedented content revolution, which is putting an extra burden on operations.

As Tom Morrod, who works for analyst and consulting firm Caretta Research, points out: “Anecdotally, we get a lot of feedback from pay TV operators and others that because of the incredible amount of money that is being thrown at content from the big streaming services, pushing up the cost of rights, that there is pressure on the technology budget. And there are more things they have to do with technology, there are more platforms, more complicated things to install like programmatic advertising.”

Grass Valley, for instance, estimates that over 25% of total technology spend in the media industry goes just on integrating and stitching multiple different solutions together as today’s customers have to build complex and IP-based broadcast workflows.



System Integration – the key to perfect running video platforms

Today’s TV environment is characterised by ever growing complexity, which introduces a new set of challenges when launching or upgrading a TV service. But there are steps you can take to mitigate some of the pain points along the way, with system integration being one of the most important ones, says CSI editor Goran Nastic.

Another frequently cited challenge by broadcasters and service providers is the ability to hire qualified staff in a market where an understanding of IT, IP and broadcast is at a premium. Understanding and easing the pain points – and budgetary pressures – that plague the industry as complexity increases has, therefore, never been more valuable.

As a result, many media technology suppliers have over the years tried to reposition themselves away from product manufacturers to ‘end-to-end’ solutions providers, bringing integration services to create a one-stop shop approach working closely with a select group of partners, in some cases pre-integrated.

However, while everybody wants to avoid complexity, true end-to-end

solutions from traditional vendors are still very limited. This is because software and/or hardware development is their main area of expertise - not integration. In addition, operators often prefer not to be dependent on one vendor and its development roadmap, but instead want to be more flexible and leave options open for future changes instead of the fixed roadmap of one single end-to-end solution provider.

It is also worth noting that turnkey end-to-end solutions in most cases are not the appropriate solution since most operators will already have legacy technology that they have still to return on their investment (some operators are sitting on 10+ year-old boxes).

Historically, projects used to be based on bespoke solutions with monolithic ‘big integration’ and big prices to

match. Those days are gone. Media companies are much more focused on supporting a multi-vendor environment and ecosystem as opposed to an end-to-end philosophy of the past.

For those that may not have the knowledge or budget for complex integrations, the focus is also on concepts like OpEx-based multi-tenant SaaS delivery models and agile DevOps methodologies. The notion there is to address the new needs of customers with cloud and software-based solutions, where things move quickly and features are released on a very frequent, sometimes even daily, basis (often referred to as ‘feature velocity’), which radically changes the way they test and accept software.

All of this requires a different integration approach from a business and technical perspective, whether that is hardware or software, on prem or cloud. In addition, it means new ways of customer support: requiring dedicated and ongoing support, which affects not just engineering but other departments too. And this applies equally to smaller companies and big Tier 1 providers, whether they are greenfield deployments or migration projects replacing old systems that are having trouble keeping up with innovation. In almost all cases, these companies are looking for ease of integration into their environments. It opens new opportunities that now exist for system integrators who focus on video distribution.

Choosing the right partner

The video distribution ecosystem consists of many different technologies and components that all have to work together perfectly. Video quality starts and ends with system integration and that it is a very important factor determining the quality of the whole system.

To be clear: system integration is more than different components that are connected to each other. System integration is about getting the most out

of the chosen technology; and should include training as engineers will also need to know how to work with the different components and on how to use the data from these components to increase overall performance of the whole platform/ecosystem.

Whether it is ensuring the same quality of service across multiple STB suppliers or migrating functionality to the cloud (according to one estimate, only 10% of all broadcast infrastructure has moved to the cloud), teaming up with an experienced and trusted systems integration partner can make a real difference in the cost and smooth running throughout the lifetime of a TV project, including ongoing systems and operational support.

An independent expert is needed who is outside of the daily routine and who can spend the time needed without having to fight any of the daily operational fires, who also knows what to do with the data generated and how to utilise that to get more out of the technology.

Leaving systems integration to an expert third-party helps reduce integration costs, speed up timelines and ensure the whole process runs smoothly. If your integration is wrong, then you have a non-functioning system, so it is critical to get this part right.

One example of a company that is innovating and showing results in the field of system integration is Divitel in the Netherlands. Selected by the WEF as a Global Innovator, the Dutch company will consider every possible entry to deliver the best possible solution through a personalised and more joined-up approach.

Not many video system integrators are truly independent (ie, both vendor and technology agnostic). Uniquely, rather than pushing its own in-house solutions or preferred ‘best of breed’ vendors into the mix, Divitel customers are guaranteed to receive the technology, brand or vendor that best fits their specific requirements – from headend to client device, whether that

is DRM, video processing, video storage, middleware or front end. In this way, service providers can avoid being locked-in while remaining flexible and future proof.

System integration could also benefit greatly from a data-driven approach, with a partner who works based on data and facts instead of guesswork. Another of Divitel’s USPs is the ability to transform data into insights that can provide knowledge of how well the new integrated component works within the ecosystem, during the integration process and before going live.

The same proactive data approach applies to the day-to-day management of a video platform once live, where adding a new feature or even discovering a bug can mean a change in the platform. Changing a tool or integrating a new tool is often what needs to be done as part of the change and release process (known as ITIL, which aligns IT with business needs). At Quickline, for example, Divitel provides both SI-As-A-Service and managed services because the two are interlinked parts of continuous platform management.

Technology has a vital role to play in day-to-day operations and it is changing faster than ever, driven by cloud and software innovation. But it is also creating new pain points for operators that need addressing. In this changing new pay TV world, providing the best quality of experience has never been more important, as competition intensifies, and consumers expectations become more demanding. As they upgrade their systems to survive and thrive, pay TV providers would do well to embark on their transformation journey with a partner they can work together with at all levels of the process. Because ultimately, what operators need to do to service their customers is have a TV platform that works efficiently and offers a high quality. A good system integrator can help with that, allowing them to focus on their core competence and ensure end-user satisfaction. **CSI**