BROADCASTING AND THE ESPORTS PHENOMENON

The esports opportunity is enormous, with an eager audience and appetite for new technology; but there are challenges, including the fact there is no physical field of play and the need for replay, graphics and multiple streams. Key players and suppliers explain their roles in getting content to fans

The esports gaming and event industry is expected to generate revenues of $1 billion this year. Live events in stadiums and arenas regularly attract audiences in excess of 60,000 spectators and are broadcast and streamed live to many more globally.

Futuresource has recently researched this expanding market. Adam Cox, senior market analyst for imaging and professional video, says: "With a growing fan base of over 450 million viewers globally this gaming revolution is now as legitimate as any other of the more traditional sports. Total global spend on AV equipment, including rental and purchases, reached $227m in 2018 and will increase to $324m by 2023."

Jonas Gundersen is CCO at North A/S, an esports organisation founded by Danish football team FC Copenhagen and Scandinavian media firm Nordisk Film. He says: "The broadcast production quality and delivery of esports events is crucial to the success of live esports events. In terms of attracting a wider audience, it's vital that the commentator, analyst and general viewership experience is top class while having a low barrier of entry. Collaboration between tournament organisers and broadcasters is of the utmost importance in creating the best possible product for fans."

Esports: Expected to generate revenue of $1bn

CREATIVE PRESENTATION

Solenne Lagrange, marketing and creative director at esports TV production company GINX Esports TV, says: "We use standard broadcast equipment based on a multicamera setup and traditional ingest and edit software. Capturing the game itself is straightforward as we directly ingest video from the game computers. Programmes are broadcast using a cloud-based playout system (Veset) distributed via open internet using the Zixi platform and streamed over different platforms using Intinor's direct encoder."

Esports broadcasting leverages storytelling concepts to relay the gaming action to viewers. Ramon Ramos, Vizrt's global head of esports, explains: "The greatest challenge in esports coverage is the absence of a physical field of play. It is becoming more important that the creativity used to present gameplay, live statistics and player reactions on screens in the arena, or broadcast live, is well thought out."

An event may have tens of players and several critical threads that need to be amalgamated and contrasted in real time and then reviewed and analysed in summary.

"The overall complexity means that for each event we will deploy a team of creative producer, show/line producer and additional associate producers," explains Simon Eicher, director of broadcast esports services and executive producer for ESL. "We focus heavily on historical data. Fortunately, major games have an API so we can tap into live game data."

Jens Fischer, global esports specialist and account manager DACH at EVS, explains what is needed to manage a major esports event: "Unlike traditional sports broadcasting in which a single clean feed is provided by a host broadcaster, in esports it's quite common to create several dirty feeds on site in parallel. Separate streams have dedicated branding information for different markets which conflict with each other and must be produced to comply with local legislation for each one."

There is also a need to incorporate non-broadcast signals from gaming consoles into the transmission path; but this is not a simple task.

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Natacha Jones, project manager at British Esports Association, says there are challenges in capturing the live game feed from observers' or players' computers: "Some games, like *PUBG*, require at least five observers, so you have to factor that in when building your broadcast setup, as well as replays and graphics and live camera feeds."

Simon Hawkings, technical solutions manager with Ross Video (EMEA), agrees: "Gaming systems also use different formats to broadcast, so there are some technical issues to resolve there too. The dynamic nature of advertising and second screen interaction also adds a challenging angle to live esports production."

Combining computer systems and broadcast technology into a single environment has led to the development of a new frame rate converter within the IHSE Draco KVM matrix switching system. Mark Hempel,

product manager for IHSE explains: "Esports events run two workflows in parallel. There is one for the arena presentation system, covering the player consoles, large screens and scoreboards and another for the broadcast system. In the esports environment these are interlinked, but there has been difficulty in the past in combining the 144Hz/240Hz and 60Hz streams.

"The new esports KVM extender manages conversion in real time between these frame rates and enables both workflows to be integrated together. The result is that we can now manage both workflows in a single system using a KVM matrix switch. It means that it is now possible to distribute gaming action over-the-air, online and through social media channels simultaneously. The same content can also be presented on the large arena screens."

Social media interaction is a prerequisite, and new concepts, like augmented reality, can offer even more.

Esport's evolution will rapidly encompass new technologies. Indeed, the demand for technical capability will push companies to develop products at a faster rate than for the television industry, says Ramos.

Hawkings also expects major changes and sees opportunities: "The industry is still getting to grips with what its audience wants and the production models will look quite different in five years' time. That may involve some specialist third-party production companies handling a variety of esports events or an expansion of the existing in-house capabilities. Either way, there will be more content and more pressure to produce that content efficiently and cost-effectively."

> **Visit the Esports Showcase from 09:30 in E102 and 14:00 in the Auditorium**