

Swansea City AFC

Upgrading to HD and exceeding Premiership standards with Blackmagic Design

Having finished in the top half of the Premiership and qualified for the UEFA Europa league, Swansea City decided it was time to update their media infrastructure in order to give fans, pundits and their analysis team the best possible coverage of each game. Using Blackmagic Design's production gear, they were able to update their network to HD, increase the number of video feeds they can deal with and how quickly they can be dealt with.

During summer 2013, Swansea City's senior multimedia officer, Mark Williams, decided to update the AV system at Liberty Stadium. "It's a relatively young stadium, and at the time there was no idea that we'd have Premiership football straight away, so everything was done in the most economical way possible. This only included provision for analogue systems throughout the stadium, as opposed to the digital we all know today."

At the end of the 2013 season, Liberty Stadium could only send a single camera feed from their OB facilities to the rest of the stadium, and were struggling to keep up with the Premiership's requirements.

"When we first came up to the Premiership, there was a requirement for 80 different cable runs between the stadium and the OB compound, whereas at the start of the season there needed to be 240 in place [to cater for more overseas television]," explained Mark. "We wanted to make sure that we took the specification from the Premier League and at very least we matched it. We were hoping to future proof the system for years to come."

Managing feeds centrally using ATEM Television Studio

As well as increasing the stadium network's capacity, Mark wanted to improve the efficiency of the media team's workflow. They decided to centralise their entire system by creating a Fibre bridge between the control room and OB compound using a pair of ATEM Studio Converters and an SDI-to-Fibre converter.

"The ATEM Television Studio has been fantastic," said Mark. "It gives us the ability to switch the video between different sources, and monitor all the various sources [which is important because] in addition to the video feeds coming in from the game itself, we've got cable runs going down to a couple of interview areas – two in the tunnels and one in our press room. So it's allowed my desk to become a mini television gallery; I can monitor all the feeds, make sure everything is running smoothly and then switch stuff to the live TV in the concourse, or between the various computers that we've got in the office to record things."



In a nutshell...

Who are they?

Swansea AFC have been running since 1912, and are currently Capital One Cup winners and the Premier League's first Welsh team. They got in touch with us in 2005 after moving to their current home, Liberty Stadium.

What did they need?

An HD AV network that would let the club support more broadcasters and meet Premiership standards, and at the same time let them use those broadcasters' HD feeds in their own media, commercial and analysis departments.

How did we help?

We've been providing Swansea City with their Macs since 2009, and when they needed to update their AV equipment, they got in touch with our broadcast department to get the right technology at the best prices.

What were the benefits?

- The Swansea City AFC analysis team now have more comprehensive coverage of every game.
- The media department can support more video feeds for press, pundits and the team's commercial department.
- In the next phase of stadium expansion, the team are installing a large screen to broadcast live in-match content.

Helping analysis teams make the most of every game

Once broadcasters supply the feeds to the control room, Mark and his team use a pair of 16x16 Micro Videohubs to route the signals to over 130 press seats, 54 commentary positions, the team's analysis department and their commercial arm.

"The strange thing about football analysis is that they need video in order to do their work, but that's the one thing that they never get taught. We've had a lot of interns and new graduates, and they've learned a lot about the tactical analysis side of things, but not what they need to do in order to get that video content in the first place. So we worked with the coaches and the analysis department to make sure they get what they need, because regardless of what we do with the press, ultimately it's what goes on on the pitch that's key."

In order to help the analysis team further, Mark's next job is to move them from their current analogue system to an H.264-based one that allows them to capture HD feeds during international games, where no analogue signal is available.

"We use one of the Blackmagic Design's H.264 Pro Recorders, and the great thing about them is that you can take any of the various formats that are out there, whether they be HD, SD, analogue, composite, you name it, and convert it into a feed that literally just goes into [any computer] via USB cable, which almost any machine can handle," explained Mark. "It allows the team to have an entire game in full HD quality in a fairly manageable file size, which they can feed off to the coaching staff, copy to laptops or stick it on hard drives, so when they do their more detailed analysis afterwards, they've got the best quality that they can."

Improving efficiency and speeding up recording workflows

"I realised one of the things we needed to do was make our workflow more efficient," explained Mark. Because they never know how much time they have between two managers coming in to be interviewed after a game, the media team can't work on the first interview until the second is complete – "we don't want to waste time filming and recapturing, so we capture while we're filming."



Mark and his team now use Micro Videohubs to direct one interview feed to each of the media department's Mac Pros, enabling them to record both independently while recording the OB compound's post-match broadcast to an Atomos Samurai. "We've got multiple systems that allow us to keep working rather than sitting and waiting for something to happen. At the last game it went from an hour and 15 minutes from when the interview finished [to us having processed it] to something like 15 minutes."

Finding an IT provider to help with the transition

"The very first Mac bought by the club was bought from Jigsaw24," Mark said. "All the analysis software was on PC, but all the editing software was on the Mac, so we needed the flexibility of working between the two [which is only possible on Mac]."

"We saw it as a good opportunity to build up a lasting relationship, because not only do Jigsaw24 do Macs, but they also do all the Blackmagic Design kit, they do camera equipment, and it made sense for us all to look for a company that was able to cater for all the various aspects of what we did."

"The sales team have been really helpful, and really patient with me as well, to be totally honest! And I spent hours on the phone with them, because they were our main go-between with Blackmagic Design, and were instrumental in being able to stretch our budget further than it was originally going to go."

Continuing to move to digital

The system at Liberty Stadium is still evolving, and future developments include plans to add a giant screen to the stadium so that they can stream content to fans mid-game and, behind the scenes, to replace their analogue-to-digital converters with HyperDeck Shuttles, which will allow them to record ProRes straight to SSD.

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Mark Williams, senior media officer, Swansea City AFC.

For more information about managing your live broadcasts, get in touch with our team on the details below.