

HybridCasting: A Dynamic Approach to Centralization –

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Since the advent of broadcast automation, broadcast groups have been seeking ways to reduce operating costs by capitalizing on the strengths of the group. Centralization has evolved throughout the years spawning variations on the Centralcasting model. Many broadcasters have boasted significant operational and capital savings from centralization efforts. So, the question remains, *why isn't everyone doing it?*

History of Centralcasting Models

Previous centralized broadcast systems can be categorized into one of three basic models as defined by who controls the broadcast automation and the location of the storage system. Each method has its own set of advantages and disadvantages which can be summarized as follows:

Centralcasting New York Times first implemented this model in Virginia. The Central Control/Local Storage model used *PC-Anywhere*™ to control equipment at remote stations. The advantage of this model is that it requires very little capital investment to consolidate operations in a central location. The disadvantage is that spoke sites are not able to operate independently if connections to the hub are lost.

Localcasting On the other end of the control spectrum is the Ackerley system which controlled a large video server storage system located at the hub to produce a program stream for their regional stations. Although normally, streaming video through a broadband connection is prohibitively expensive, Ackerley negotiated favorable broadband contracts and reduced both the estimated capital costs for going “digital” and the operations costs per channel. Unfortunately; however, when the broadband connection was down, regional stations were off the air.

ShareCasting ShareCasting is a more recent model of distributed broadcast automation. The hub controls the automation but the regional sites can directly edit on-air schedules. The hub generates the program stream for the regional stations. Each regional station has a modest sized video server, local ingest workstation and small routing switcher. Local newscasts and breaking news cut-ins are aired live from the local studio. Regional stations insert commercials stored at the central hub by switching the

regional routing switcher to the hub feed. When the commercial break is complete, control is returned to the local studio. With ShareCasting Spoke stations required less streaming video from the hub and were able to run stand-alone in emergency situations.

So Why Not Central Cast?

Of the three central casting models, the New York Times model has generally proven to be most cost effective and reliable model because it does not rely on streaming video. Unfortunately, remotely logging into a PC via a third party analog software is cumbersome and the remote desktop display lags real-time. The thought of running a frame accurate operation in a time-lag environment is less than appealing.

HybridCasting: A Better Model

The basic idea behind the HybridCasting model is to take the best of the New York Times model and adds a reliable way to remotely access the automation systems while allowing regional stations the ability to broadcast locally. This gives stations independence for a “local flavor” while taking advantage of the synergy of their group. Additionally it gives the broadcast group a simple way to introduce a station into a centralized (i.e. hub) environment without a major technical infrastructure change or disruption of the operation and immediately, mutually benefit from the acquisition.

HybridCasting is best described as a dynamic sharing of resources (hardware, software and personnel). The concept is based on advances in access to automation systems through a secure, “smart client” web server. The Smart Client uses a web http connection and does not require installation of software on the workstation pc. In fact any employee with access to the corporate LAN and with appropriate user rights can now log into the automation system remotely. This is significantly different than a “remote desktop”. It is direct access to the automation software through a LAN connection.

This opens the door to a myriad of operational opportunities. Master control, Traffic, ingest and software support duties can be shared among stations dynamically. High market-share stations enjoy the ability to pool resources while smaller stations and PBS sites find that “lights out” operations are much easier to manage. With Smart Client based software, the operational options are endless.

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