Grass Valley
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CASE STUDY

AMPP Use Case: Rural Media Group

Interview with Mike Sacci, Director of OTT services

Introduction

Rural Media Group operates RFD-TV and The Cowboy Channel with their associated apps. As part of their mission to connect city with country and to serve the needs and interests of rural Americans, Rural Media Group broadcasts hundreds of hours of live rodeo content from arenas across the United States. Their recent Rodeo Championship Finals had an audience of 100,000 paid subscribers.

The rodeo content is a multicam shoot locally produced for the audience watching the video screens at the venue, but it is also sent over low-latency video streaming to a master control production team for centralized distribution via CDN to their various channels, website and mobile apps. The quality of the on-site program varies widely as the rodeo production crews range from high schoolers learning their craft to professional freelancers. So, in addition to providing graphics, the master control team fixes audio levels, channel assignment and other issues as these are frequently not correct for broadcast when they arrive from the arena.

The Rural Media Group audience has been growing rapidly. What started out as streaming one or two rodeos quickly grew to 10 or 12 events a night. Two and a half years later, with as many as 16 rodeos to cover at one time, the production team had outgrown the hardware and automation system they were using and needed a better alternative.

Mike Sacci, Director of OTT Services at Rural Media tells how they have been able to grow so quickly.

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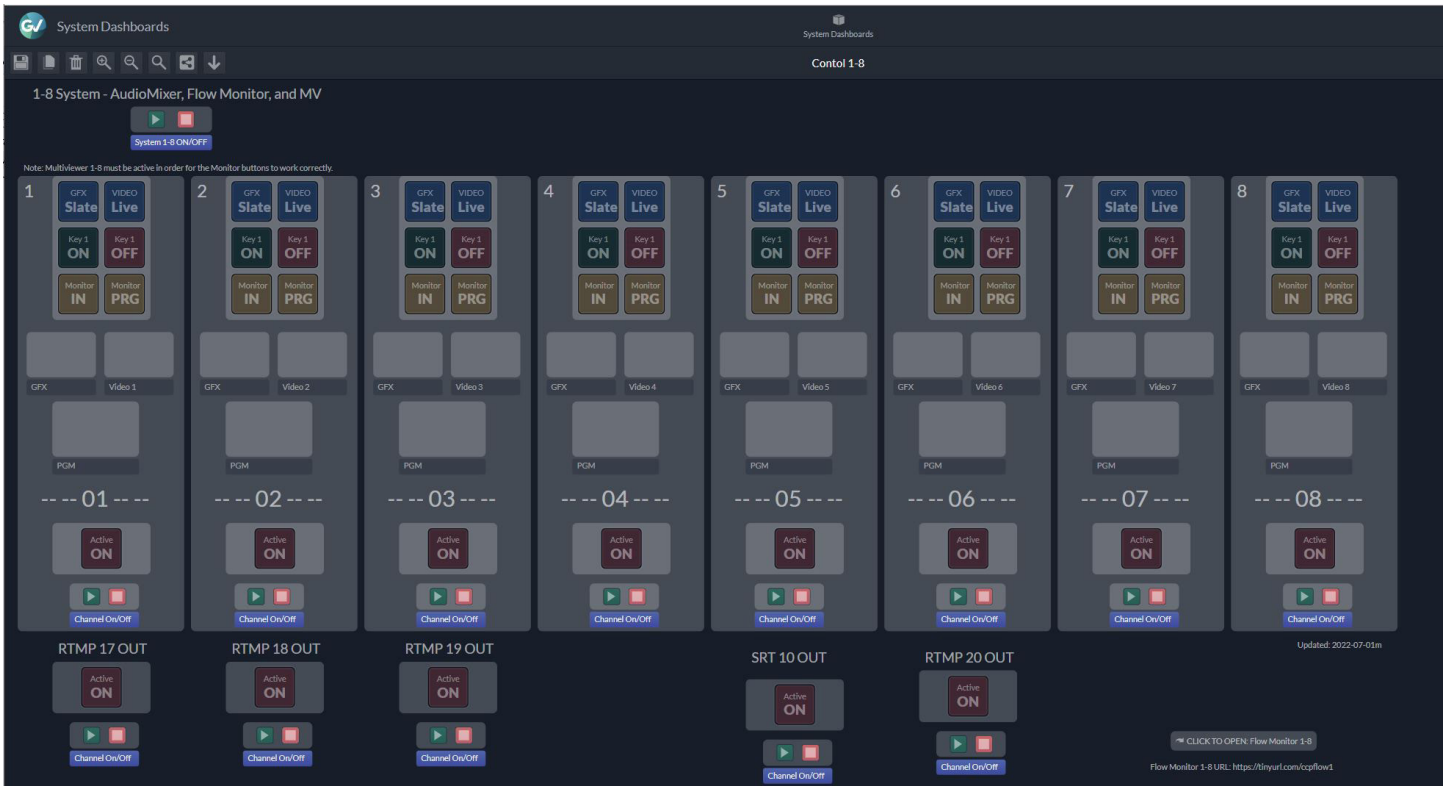
Mike Sacci, Director of OTT Services at Rural Media Group



The previous system

Our production team is scattered all over the U.S. and Canada. For them to work, they had to use VLC to set up a remote desktop to a dashboard on another computer that controlled a hardware switcher in Fort Worth, Texas. That two-step connection made things difficult for us both for control and return monitoring.

The other issue we were having was scaling the system. As more people were added to the production team and more outbound destinations were coming online, we needed a lot more encoders to transport signals around. When we looked at our plan for the next year, we figured it would require another half rack just of encoders. We didn't have the space.

Exploring alternatives

So, we started looking at solutions for cloud switching. We found some cloud switchers, but they were really designed for cutting one show with a single program output. We have a lot of events going on at the same time and they are all going out to different sources. When we started planning these other switcher configurations as multi-in multi-out systems, it started to get ridiculously expensive.

Grass Valley® was the only company that had a solution that we could easily scale to a large switcher. After we deployed AMPP®, we had a couple of days where we did 16 or 17 rodeos. There just wasn't another solution out there that fit so well with what we needed to do.

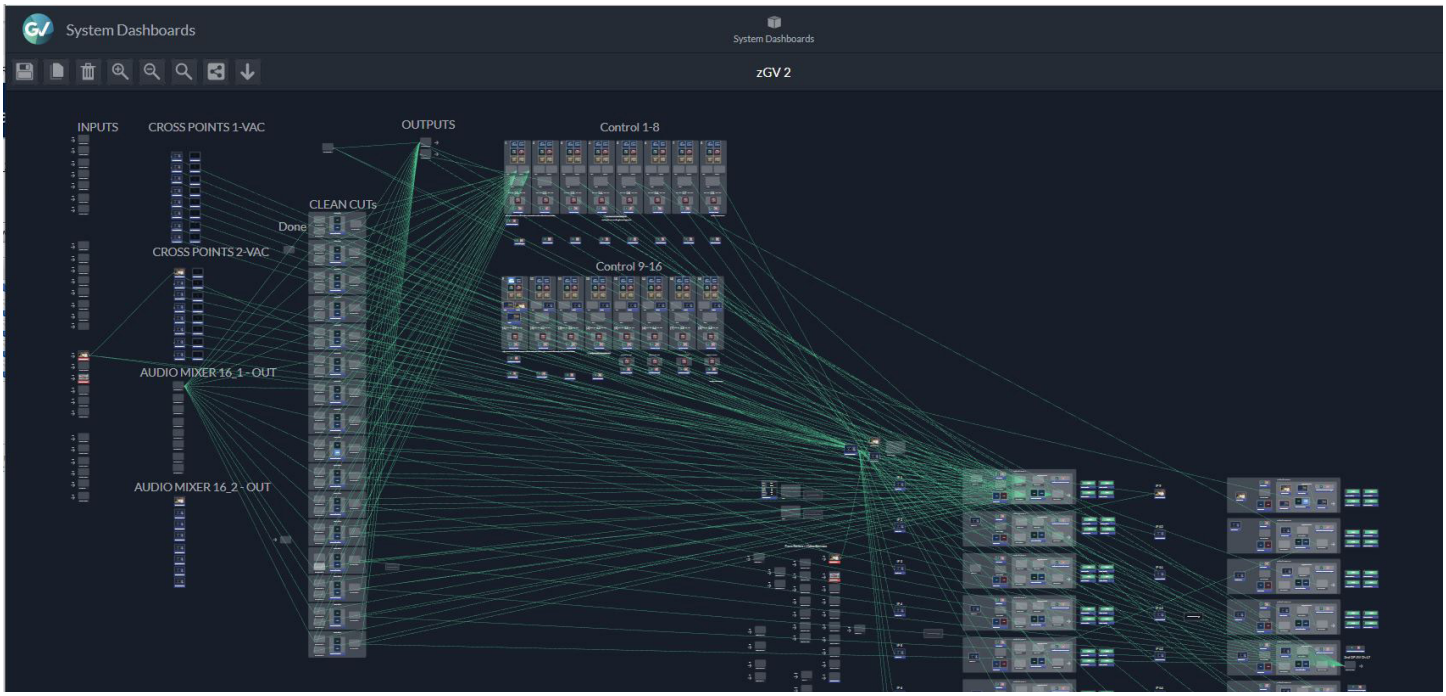
Adopting AMPP

With AMPP, any of the directors have a clean workflow. They get access to monitoring, a mixer with audio controls, a RAM player for graphics, and routing. Even if you're running 16 rodeos, you've got very few screens to look at. The directors can easily flip between events, hear what the audio is doing and watch the meters and quickly fix any problems. That's important because probably 80% of the shows we have to adjust the audio.

Routing control is also important because we have about 30 encoders that go out all over the country. Making a change is just a drop down or drag and drop so we're able to patch easily.

AMPP gives us a clean interface that any director can pick up and use. They don't really have to know what's going on behind the scenes. One of the problems with the previous system was that the operators had too much access on their dashboard. They could get themselves into trouble. Now there are only three of us with full administrator access and we give the rest of the team just what they need.

The setup of the remote workspaces is also cleaner. Before we had to send the directors a hardware encoder for their monitoring and they'd have two different screens, one for the dashboard and one for the multiview monitor. Now they can open a couple of browser windows on one computer and it's all there.



Up and running in two weeks

Once we made the decision to go with AMPP, we wanted to be up within 2-3 weeks. And we were. We had some issues at first. For example, I think you were looking for too perfect of a signal coming into the frame sync. But the requirements got backed off a little bit and it's been fine. You guys respond extremely well to problems. Things were quickly solved even without anyone on site.

After the first few hiccups it's been rock solid and continues to get better. I'm kind of an upgrader. I like to keep equipment on its latest revision, but once our company buys equipment, we don't like to upgrade it as often as we need to. One of the nice things about AMPP is that we can leave that to Grass Valley. The updates are built into the service. Grass Valley has been providing regular updates and I usually deploy them within a couple weeks of their release.

Recruiting a distributed team

One of the things AMPP has simplified for us is recruiting. There's only one person per night that's handling all the rodeos and it's not easy to find people who will pay attention to detail the way we need them to. But it's much easier to find people if I don't have to look just in my local area. As long as you have good internet, that's the only thing that matters.

Rodeos normally start anywhere from 6:00 to 10:00 o'clock at night, so they're working late hours. If you're on the East Coast and you're running a West Coast rodeo that starts at 10:30 your time, it's just nice to be able to work it at your home.

What's next?

Looking to the future, everybody wants to monetize. We'd like the ability to insert ads, but we've never done that. One of the reasons we went with AMPP is because it could insert SCTE markers. We've tested that on a couple of things with us setting the markers and our CDN inserting the ads. That's worked well. So, we see possibilities for adding new features. AMPP is ready to go when we are.

Grass Valley's AMPP made moving to a new master control environment quick and easy to adopt. As a result, Rural Media Group has found their growth simpler to scale and manage, both from a technical and human perspective. AMPP's ability to spin up new functionality as needed places them in a good position to create new revenue opportunities to support their future growth.

This product may be protected by one or more patents. For further information, please visit: **www.grassvalley.com/patents**

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