

The Tennis Channel

CASE STUDY



Harmonic Serves Up an Ace for Tennis Channel

The Challenge

The Tennis Channel's 24-hour linear television channel and online outlet, www.tennischannel.com, are dedicated to the professional sport and lifestyle of tennis. Carried by nine of the top 10 video providers, the channel delivers the most concentrated single-sport coverage in television, providing telecasts of the US Open, Wimbledon, Roland Garros (French Open), Australian Open, and a host of other popular tournaments. The Tennis Channel's HD technical operations facility in Culver City, California, also supports U.S. broadcasts of South Korean music channel Mnet, production and editing of the Tosh.0 program for Comedy Central, and origination of the West Coast feed of Al Jazeera America.

Recently, as the Tennis Channel infrastructure neared its end of life, the network took another look at its options for transmission servers. Its operations required a stable and scalable new server system for main and backup playout. While Tennis Channel needed a solution that would streamline and simplify the migration of the broadcaster's massive content library to one providing a more open structure and format, its engineers also wanted a solution that would enable them to continue working with its existing third-party automation system.

"The Spectrum systems worked as advertised from the moment they came in our door. They didn't require an enormous amount of configuration or attention; we put them into position, driven by our automation system, and they just worked."

Randall Heer,
Tennis Channel, Vice President of Broadcast Operations



SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGE:

The Tennis Channel technical operations center originates a 24-hour broadcast channel that makes the world's most notable tennis tournaments available on televisions across the United States, and it also supports production and playout for South Korean music channel Mnet, production and editing of the Tosh.0 program for Comedy Central, and postproduction services for the West Coast bureau of Al Jazeera America. In 2013, when the facility's playout equipment began nearing its end of life, the Tennis Channel needed to identify

and install a stable and highly scalable new server system that would ensure reliable main and backup playout under the control of an existing automation system.

SOLUTION:

With their high interoperability and modular, open architecture, Harmonic Spectrum™ media server systems have made it easy for Tennis Channel to replace aging playout devices with scalable, reliable playout systems. The installation of a mirrored playout system has enabled the network to transition

smoothly to a more flexible file format while continuing to work with its existing automation solution. The option of adding a Spectrum ChannelPort™ integrated channel playout system to the solution will enable Tennis Channel and its customers to launch new channels and services — broadcast or over-the-top (OTT) — quickly and to improve the visual look and feel of new and existing channels.

APPLICATIONS:

- Ingest and playout

Because the Tennis Channel facility supports multiple productions and channels, its engineers also desired the ability to play out distinctive branded content not only for over-the-air channels, but also for mobile and Internet-delivered services. Looking ahead, they also wanted to make sure that they kept open the option of adopting shared storage to support an Adobe Premiere edit-in-place workflow.

The Solution

Tennis Channel Vice President of Broadcast Operations Randall Heer had a successful history working with Harmonic and the company's Spectrum media server systems in his previous roles with other leading broadcast channels, so consideration of Harmonic systems for Tennis Channel was logical. Working with Harmonic channel partner and systems integrator DigitalGlue, based in Laguna Niguel, California, he determined that two Spectrum MediaCenter™ media servers with integrated storage in a redundant configuration with Spectrum MediaPort 7000 real-time video encoder/decoders would meet Tennis Channel's requirements while supporting the broadcaster's plans for further enhancement of its playout systems.



Heer and his colleagues made this decision knowing that they could deploy the Spectrum ChannelPort integrated channel playout system as part of the Spectrum installation to realize independent channel branding for current and future channels. The simple addition of the ChannelPort module to the Spectrum system will make it easy to use stored content to create, brand, and play out new versions of the Tennis Channel, as well as any additional linear channels, via terrestrial broadcast, IP, over-the-top, and on-demand services.

Today at Tennis Channel, one Harmonic server operates as the main playout server, and the other as backup. Each server includes eight playout channels and four record channels. The Harmonic Media Application Server (MAS) asset management platform mirrors both playout servers to provide additional redundancy. The Harmonic gear integrates with a wide array of automation systems, including Harmonic's Polaris™ playout management suite. As the result of this compatibility, the Tennis Channel is able to continue managing playout through the system with which its operators are familiar.

"Almost as quickly as we could get content transcoded and pushed to them, we began with the Harmonic playout servers in a backup configuration, testing the systems and then beginning to transition them into a primary position," says Heer. "The Spectrum systems worked as advertised from the moment they came in our door. They didn't require an enormous amount of configuration or attention; we put them into position, driven by our automation system, and they just worked."

The Result

All 24 hours of Tennis Channel programming, including more than 2,500 hours of live tournament coverage every year, is now played out by the Harmonic equipment. The interoperability of Spectrum media server systems with other leading broadcast solutions, as well as the flexibility yielded by their modular design, has enabled Tennis Channel to make this substantial change to its video delivery infrastructure without significant disruption or alteration of its master control operations. At any time, the broadcaster can go ahead and perform a quick ChannelPort upgrade, giving each of its customers a cost-effective option for improving the look of its on-air product.



The Future

The Spectrum media server installation is part of a phased upgrade project at Tennis Channel. With this first phase completed, next steps will include the deployment of a Harmonic MediaGrid shared storage system, along with updated MAM and edit platforms, to support the broadcaster's production and edit-in-place workflows.