APAC Region – Feature

We spoke with five IABM member companies either based, or with operations, in the APAC region about the business environment, trends and requirements of this diverse market – and what effects the coronavirus pandemic is having now, and likely to carry forward into the 'new normal' world.

What markets do you cover and what changes are you seeing in the way your customer base is operating?

For Abdul Haleem, Director of Strategic Accounts – Asia, at Accedo, which helps the world's leading video service providers deliver and grow engaging video experiences across Broadcasters, Content Owners & Aggregators, Pay TV and Telcos, the answer is very much tied to its core business – "The transition into OTT and Monetization of it," says Haleem. Headquartered in Stockholm, Haleem adds that, "Accedo is a truly global organization, having worked with over 400 customers on deploying more than 1000 video apps worldwide. Over the years, we have formed open and unbiased partnerships with a wide range of expert video technology vendors, and this enables us to help our customers scale and customize their offerings as the market and their needs evolve. We currently have offices in 16 locations across the globe, including a number of cities across North America, Asia, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America."

Etere is also a worldwide operation providing broadcast and media software solutions. "Backed by our mark of excellence in system design, flexibility and reliability for TV stations and media enterprises, we sell globally and we have a network of customers, partners and distributors from all around the world," says Fabio Gattari, Director at Etere. "Some of our biggest and more established markets include Europe (Italy, Russia, Estonia, Netherlands, Portugal) and Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia). In recent years, our emerging markets include Africa, Middle East and South America where we have expanded our partnerships and distribution channels."

OTT all the way

Etere's Gattari also very much sees the growth of OTT as the main market driver. "OTT content is the new frontier of media consumption that has gained traction in recent years. Etere OTT Delivery is a software solution that enables you to get a quick and easy way to export your content to over-thetop platform providers, meet all contract terms and media formatting requirements while ensuring the protection of your premium assets. The solution has been powered with workflow technology to provide automated and accurate transfer and transcoding capabilities that will allow you to make your media suitable to match the requirements of any OTT video delivery platform. OTT Delivery can be seamlessly integrated with your existing broadcast workflows to easily expand your multiplatform product offerings.

"Additionally, there have been demands for cloud compatibility and Etere has responded with an integrated cloud support," Gattari adds. "Etere's integration with Microsoft Azure and Amazon Cloud allows users to access the cloud storage directly, without the use of third-party tools or drivers. Etere systems are designed to promote connectivity and collaboration across distributed work environments. Etere playout and archive solutions are cloud-ready; it supports a hybrid cloud setup that allows you to use a combination of public and private cloud services."

Bitmovin's headquarters are split between Klagenfurt, Austria and San Francisco, US – however, the company has "Multiple offices around the world and support nearly every region you can

think of," says Joshua Shulman, Digital Marketing Specialist at Bitmovin. "Built for technical professionals in the OTT video market, Bitmovin's software solutions are designed to optimize customer operations and reduce time-to-market, resulting in the best viewer experience imaginable. "We have sales support in the Americas, LATAM, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia – at the moment the US is our largest market, with European countries coming in at close second. Broadly speaking – the Asian Pacific market is showing some of the largest growth – specifically in places like China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia. These are all markets where traditional broadcast has always been king – however, with the growth of streaming services like Netflix (and now Disney+) more and more content distributors are looking to enter the streaming market – especially as a result of Covid-19," Shulman adds.

Bitmovin's customer-base ranges widely across the video streaming and OTT industries, offering solutions for broadcasters, streamers, and most content distributors alike – including media outlets, sports broadcasters, and eLearning platforms/services. "Our customer base has seen a large increase in streaming impressions and shifts to the cloud – with a special focus on reducing costs (especially in terms of bitrate expenditure and general delivery). Traditional broadcast media is still important, but online content is growing at an exponential rate," Shulman says, reflecting on the effects of the pandemic lockdown.

The pandemic "Is a huge opportunity for Bitmovin, we operate at the infrastructural level for many streaming organizations, and working with us is an opportunity for these organizations to reduce their costs of content delivery and/or to monitor their current performance – thereby yielding great opportunities to optimize their workflows," says Shulman. "We're taking advantage of this by getting the word out there about our solutions and how they're slated to help! In fact, we're running an Asia Pacific-focused virtual event series that displays this information specifically.

"Fewer people than ever are available to meet in person and come up with solutions to their streaming or development issues," Shulman explains. "Supply chains are looking towards cloud and remote-based solutions. At its core, this is what Bitmovin offers – as such we've thrived under quarantine as our teams have been able to

operate at 100% capacity and we've had 0 lay-offs as a result."

Digital DNA

Because of the nature of its business, Etere and its customers are well-placed to weather the storm too, according to Fabio Gattari. "The unprecedented Covid-19 situation has halted travel all around the world and as a result, many trade exhibitions have been cancelled and business meetings have crossed over to the digital arena. Etere has been diversifying our marketing strategies since 2010 and going digital has been a part of our company DNA. This year, we will continue to focus on our digital marketing strategies and enhance our cloud and web solutions. In this first quarter, we have rolled out our upgraded remote demo, training and installation solutions. On top of that, our web platform, EtereWeb allows our users to drive their workflows and manage their media files from anywhere in the world on

any internet browser. Etere offers a full range of digital solutions that allows our customers to achieve their business goals no matter where they are. These include: Remote Installation and Testing; Remote Training; 100% Software Solution; Brand Independent and High Interoperability; Full NDI without the need for SDI cables; and EtereWeb.

"The Covid-19 situation has redefined the way we work, in some way or another. Our supply chains have responded and adapted well to our remote offerings."
Fabio Gattari, Etere

"The Covid-19 situation has redefined the way we work, in some way or another. Our supply chains have responded and adapted well to our remote offerings. While we do not schedule meetings or conduct on-site training and installation at the moment, we have been conducting them remotely over the internet and the feedback has been positive so far. We have rolled out Etere demo web interface that works on any internet browser and this has allowed our new contacts to evaluate Etere software effectively with the aid of a remote training session. As a software company, we will continue to enhance our digital solutions that will run with your business, even in the face of geographical boundaries. We make it easy for our users to install, manage, maintain and be operationally ready through

our 24/7 worldwide support channels," Gattari adds.

Into the cloud

Harmonic styles itself as "The worldwide leader in video delivery and virtualized cable access solutions, enabling media companies, service providers and broadcasters to deliver ultra-highquality video streaming and broadcast services to consumers globally," according to Tony Berthaud, Vice President, Sales and Services, APAC at Harmonic. "We have seen our customers more ready and willing to move their services to the cloud because they understand that this is the way forward for delivering high quality video in a smarter, faster and simpler way.

"With offices across the globe Harmonic's reach is worldwide, covering all regions including APAC, North America, LATAM, and EMEA," Berthaud continues. "In terms of APAC, we have customers across the entire region, served by our teams located in more than 10 offices in various locations. We are organized in six sub-regions and our business is well-balanced among these different localities.

"We have a strong and committed team of pre-sales engineers, sales managers and service engineers focusing on the customer experience and customer success. We also work closely with local partners to help design, deploy and support complex and optimized media delivery infrastructures all over the APAC region. Each market in APAC has its own specificities and sometimes its own technology standards. We consider that it is our responsibility to ensure our solutions also adapt to the local

market requirements. In order to support this effort, it is important to note that we do have one of our largest R&D centers located in APAC. Overall, we strongly value the relationships we have built with our partners and customers and place their satisfaction and success at the center of our strategy," Berthaud continues.

How has the coronavirus pandemic affected the industry? It's accelerated the move to the cloud according to Harmonic. "The media and broadcast industry landscape has certainly changed as a result of Covid-19," Berthaud adds. "There is now a more holistic view to create dynamic workflows and architectures, with the purpose of guaranteeing scalability of delivery to every device at any time, even during peak hours. This is much more easily achieved when a cloud-native solution is used.

"Perspectives on redundancy and disaster recovery have also changed," Berthaud continues, "and to ensure that quality of service and experience is maintained we've seen many of our customers adopt a cloud-based solutions strategy that will not only help them now, but in the future too. We also see content providers developing a more Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) approach to diversify the way they address and engage audiences, typically leveraging OTT delivery. Covid-19 has also influenced an increase in pop-up channels emerging for very specific purposes, including news, entertainment and education."

Harmonic has been actively supporting its customers during the coronavirus pandemic. "As a global technology leader that has pioneered connected and cloud-based broadband and streaming

video solutions and deployed associated 24/7 DevOps capabilities around the globe, Harmonic has been uniquely positioned to serve our customers and partners during this challenging time," says Berthaud. "Through our global cloud and IT infrastructure, we are able to assure the highest level of availability and reliability for media services, helping customers to think about how they can better protect their service offerings and build for the future with cloud playing a much greater role.

"We have collaborated with customers who need to quickly turn around new channels during this pandemic. Cloud is the perfect way to launch new services remotely and efficiently. Being very elastic by nature, the cloud also helps to address the variable needs that our customers may have, for example to launch temporary pop-up channels for entertainment or educational purposes," Berthaud adds.

IP and streaming

Magewell, the China-based developer of video interface and IP workflow solutions, designs and develops hardware and software solutions for media capture, conversion and streaming. The company has a very diverse customer base that spans both the professional production market and Pro AV. Notably, in addition to end-users, Magewell's customer base includes many OEM customers who are incorporating its video interface devices in their own broadcast and production solutions.

International sales are key to Magewell. "The majority of our business comes from outside China. We sell exclusively through channel partners, with key specialized distributors in each major region who in turn work closely with our extensive network of systems integrators and resellers," explains Nick Ma, CEO and CTO at Magewell. "Our biggest markets are the United States, followed by Europe (collectively) and China. Note that we track Europe as a whole, rather than individual countries, as our distributors in the region cover multiple countries."
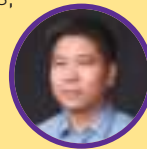
While the majority of its sales are international, it's not a one size fits all approach to world markets for Magewell. "The distribution of sales is partly a reflection of how mature our sales channel is in each region, as we focused on particular regions first before developing the others.

"The shift to IP-based production continues to accelerate not only for large broadcasters but also for smaller and mid-sized media organizations."
Nick Ma, Magewell

"But an overarching factor is the varying pace at which different countries are adopting new technology trends. For example, the transition to IP is happening faster in countries such as the U.S. and U.K. than others, while the growth of live streaming in each region depends on the available consumer delivery infrastructure and non-technical factors such as the degree of government regulation," Ma adds.

Ma identifies two key changes taking place in world markets. "The two main trends affecting our customer base are the transition from baseband signal infrastructures (such as SDI) to IP workflows, and the mainstream adoption of streaming – not only for premium content but also for supporting content via social media and other digital-only outlets. The shift to IP-based production continues to accelerate not only for large broadcasters but also for smaller and mid-sized media organizations, while on the streaming side, more companies and individuals are creating live-streamed programming than ever before."

For Magewell, the pandemic lockdown has accelerated business in its Pro AV products, while throttling it back in other areas. "We have seen a significant increase in orders across all of our product lines, with sales in certain vertical markets slowing down but others ramping up," says Ma.

"With events such as sports and concerts currently on hold and many facility upgrade projects (such as conversions to IP) slowed by work-at-home mandates, demand has decreased from the professional production and entertainment side. But that has been more than made up for by significantly accelerated adoption in the Pro AV side of our business, where worship, education, government, and corporate customers are using our capture devices with web conferencing tools and leveraging streaming as a key communications medium. We are working hard to ramp up production to meet this rapid growth, which of course we could not have forecast."

Covering the world

Interra Systems is a global provider of enterprise-class solutions that streamline the classification, quality control (QC) process, and

monitoring of media content across the entire creation and distribution chain. "Our products are used by the majority of the Tier-1 media companies – telcos, broadcasters, cable and satellite companies worldwide," says Bibhas K Samanta, Management Staff at Interra Systems. "Today, in North America more than 70% of the content that's broadcast goes through at least one of our products. Interra Systems' solutions are deployed globally by large and smaller organisations across a range of markets including APAC, North America, EMEA, and LATAM regions. With our customers' needs differing throughout the world, we see all of these markets as important for us, and key in continuing to offer our solutions and services globally and improve QoS and QoE with assurance." Interra Systems is responding to the coronavirus pandemic with a flexible approach to support its customers. "This is a challenging time for all. Interra Systems is accommodating the new situation in multiple ways by proactively providing flexible licenses where applicable, so customer projects are not adversely affected. We have also increased resources for customers, in particular around tech support and scheduling online meetings as and when they need us to," Samanta explains.

For Accedo, while the lockdown has undoubtedly had an effect, it is taking steps to protect itself and its customers, and sees a potential upside for the OTT business.

"Accedo, like most other companies, follows the recommendations and guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as the national health agencies of the countries where we operate," says Abdul Haleem."Over the past few months, we have worked to develop a solid plan to safeguard the continuity of our business, the safety of our employees and contractors, and the commitment to our customers. As an industry, video streaming is considerably less affected than many other sectors; some even argue that this will accelerate the adoption of streaming, especially on big screen devices."

What will be the long-term effects of the pandemic on the broadcast and media industry – and the technology vendors that serve it?

"We are seeing an increase in media consumption overall, as users want to stay informed but also turn to OTT services to pass time, seek comfort, and connect with family and peers," says Accedo's Haleem. "This increase in viewership is naturally good for the video services industry; however, times of chaos and unease can have significant and long-lasting effects on the entire streaming ecosystem. For example, AVOD models might experience a decline in advertising revenue from badly affected sectors (such as travel and hospitality). SVOD providers may be faced with increased competition as users have more time to explore and compare new services.

"Sports as an entertainment form has been particularly badly hit by the pandemic as it is hugely dependent on the release of new content. If this content is no longer available, one could argue that live sports providers have little value to their customers. If there is nothing new to watch, many users will no longer want to pay for their

subscriptions and this will force these providers to re-think their business models and priorities," Haleem explains, adding that "A diversification with regards to content availability and the emergence of E-Gaming and E-Sports," will be occupying vendors' minds in the future.

Mitigating risk

For Harmonic, the pandemic has clearly demonstrated that cloud is the future of the broadcast and media industry. "Covid-19 has revealed new risks for streaming and linear channel delivery. Its impact has accelerated the adoption of cloud computing in the broadcast and media markets, and the many benefits this brings. It has become the catalyst for a smarter way to process and deliver media content," says Tony Berthaud.

The global health crisis will accelerate cloud adoption for service continuity applications as well as for any video workflow that is needed temporarily."
Tony Berthaud, Harmonic

"Also, the spotlight has firmly been placed on service continuity. The global health crisis will accelerate cloud adoption for service continuity applications as well as for any video workflow that is needed temporarily, such as live sports

events, based on how easy and fast it is to deploy cloud workflows. Harmonic is helping the industry understand the capabilities of the cloud for service continuity – ensuring that video services and channels are available to viewers all the time. We've found our software- and cloud-based solutions strategy is resonating well with customers during this time.

"Companies like Harmonic are at the forefront of the changes taking place in the media and broadcast space because cloud-native solutions are key for the industry to offer the content consumption diversity, and quality of experience that consumers demand, from source to screen.

Leveraging the flexibility of cloud infrastructures will help service providers meet the demanding and complex requirements for media processing and delivery," Berthaud continues.

"The rapid growth in network traffic has put a strain on broadband networks. Broadcasters and service providers are adopting different approaches to meet the demands, such as reducing resolution or using AI- and ML-based content-aware encoding to deliver OTT services at a lower bit rate. This prompted us to support our customers during these unprecedented times by providing our EyeQ™ content-aware encoding

(CAE) technology free for a limited time to help alleviate the extra burden placed on networks. EyeQ technology leverages artificial intelligence to reduce streaming congestion on broadband networks by up to 50% without impacting quality," Berthaud concludes.

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Interra Systems

For Interra Systems, the outlook remains unclear until some certainty over the return of 'normal' happens. "For the short haul, the media and broadcast industry has weathered the storm; however, if the global health crisis continues for another two or three quarters, there could be industry cuts, cancellations, and changes in projects," says Interra Systems' Bibhas K Samanta. "There seems to be no absolute consensus regarding the Covid-19 outbreak and what the outcomes will be specifically for the industry. We can only guess as to how long different countries and regions of the world will continue to implement strict lockdown measures and what impact this will have. In general, there is a feeling of uncertainty because nobody knows exactly what is going to happen. Things will become clearer over the coming months.

"Also, the lack of active sports

leagues has meant a drastic reduction in live events taking place during this lockdown period, and therefore ad-based revenues have slowed. As sports events begin to reemerge over the coming months, this will hopefully tip the balance in terms of a positive for adbased monetization, although there is not a clear-cut path as yet," says Samanta.

QoE the key
Looking forward, for vendors the goal has to be helping to deliver excellent QoE to the end-viewer. "There is no absolute certainty in where we are going and how things will change," Samanta adds. "I would say however, for broadcasters and video service providers to stand out, now and moving forward, they will always need to deliver an exceptional quality of experience (QoE) across all screens. The spikes in volumes we have seen put an additional burden of managing streams for quality. Problems need to be fixed quickly, and therefore monitoring tools that provide visibility and troubleshooting of streams will become more critical. In OTT streaming there are multiple hand-off points and therefore trying to navigate the performance of OTT platforms or figuring out the severity and root cause of a problem manually is just not practical, especially for providers that have recently launched streaming apps.

"No matter how relevant or popular content offerings are for subscribers, a poor streaming experience will have a negative impact on ROI, customer retention, and reputation. In the long term, a smart monitoring strategy that offers the flexibility to customize monitoring based on various stream

types and audience, for both live and VOD content, will be imperative in assuring efficiency and economy of operations while maintaining a high level of quality," Samanta concludes.

No going back

In line with Harmonic's outlook, Magewell also notes that Covid-19 has speeded up already-in-motion trends, with things not returning to how they were pre-pandemic. "In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated trends that were already in progress or emerging, which we believe will have long-term effects," says Nick Ma. "For example, work-from-home requirements and the current need for productions to be created remotely rather than in a studio are speeding the transition to IP-based workflows. Since companies are already needing to put new tools and infrastructures into the remote locations, they are often choosing flexible, cost-effective IP-based solutions rather than investing more in SDI-based architectures. IP-based workflows can also be extended more easily across multiple locations than their legacy baseband counterparts. Overall, while productions will eventually return to studios, we believe that a higher percentage of production will be performed remotely than it was before the pandemic. Media enterprises that were previously hesitant about remote product workflows have now been forced to try it, and their successes will have a lasting impact."

As to the future, according to Magewell's Ma, "It really comes down to how well a particular vendor's solutions and roadmaps already aligned with emerging trends such as IP workflows and

remote production prior to the pandemic, and for vendors who weren't already on the right path, how quickly they can adapt to the "new normal". In most parts of the content chain, the industry had already been transitioning from dedicated hardware to IT, IP, software, streaming, and the cloud for many years. Vendors such as ourselves, whose roadmaps already focused on those new paradigms, should continue to thrive."

Final words on the future go to Bitmovin's Joshua Shulman. "There will always be a place for traditional broadcast – however, the pandemic has really shone a light on how important streaming really is. We foresee significant growth in this

particular sector and that it won't just fade once things return to normal. Consumers will likely expect to view content online at the same time as another viewer might view it via cable." For vendors, "It's adapt or die. Using the old model of broadcasting won't work alone anymore – broadcast and media vendors MUST shift to a mixed strategy of digital and standard broadcast to succeed," Shulman concludes.

For a full run-down of the products and services offered by the contributors to this feature, go the Knowledge Hub on the IABM website and select the standalone version of this article.

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