

Starfish Get To Grips With Regional Insertion

By Steven Preston

Starfish Technologies, well known for their innovative systems for captioning, subtitling and audio description, has scored notable successes in developing complete regional insertion systems.

In terms of integrating regional insertion systems, Sales and Marketing Director Peter Blatchford said that Starfish is involved in three main areas: "The first one is ad insertion, sophisticated ad insertion, and programme replacement. So we call the whole thing regional insertion, because what we are doing is regionalising a television channel, be it local ads, news, programme replacement, potentially even live events.

"There is a lot of discussion around that at the moment in the UK where it has been dubbed local TV. In the past there has been a lot of this form of ad insertion in the US and they are very familiar with the idea of having local commercials on their TV channels. But in Europe that's not common. One of the

issues was that the systems were not terribly reliable in terms of playing the right commercials at the right time, maintaining the schedule correctly, and remaining frame accurate.

"The technology has moved on and we are building very sophisticated systems now with minimal disruption to the existing broadcasting infrastructure, systems that enable this sort of capability to localise TV channels.

"We build a range of systems from a single opt-out – say if you are transmitting to one part of the world where you want to carry local commercials, and if there are programmes where there are rights issues, then we can mask those with other programming.

"At the other end of the scale – where the real value add comes in – we can build multi-channel systems. We have a couple of systems operating in Sweden, including TV4 which is the biggest independent broadcaster in the

country. Geographically Sweden is relatively large with quite a small population and they have 30 regions. What they have almost achieved is almost town level TV."

"The main independent TV channel can therefore localise ads and localise news."

Blatchford emphasises that commercially this has proven enormously successful multiplying the potential revenue by a sizeable factor.

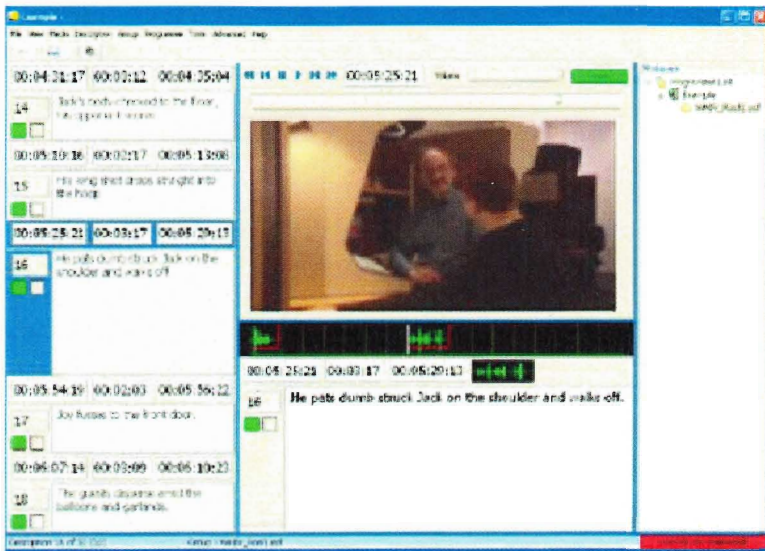
"The whole system is heavily automated and we were able to integrate with the existing systems with very few changes, therefore the investment from the broadcasters' perspective was primarily additional advertising sales and news editorial staff."

Another area where Starfish Technologies is involved is audio description (AD) systems that provide an enhanced experience for those with a visual impairment. This has been in use for over 10 years in the UK which leads

the world in the use and implementation of AD in television programmes.

Blatchford said: "Starfish was involved in this technology very early on and have a very complete product range. In the UK where there is a lot of AD being prepared and transmitted, we are the main supplier."

He said that at IBC, Starfish had seen a lot of interest in AD as it is in the process of being rolled out across Europe.



Starfish Audio Description workflow

