

Next generation playout, by Peter Hajittofi, CEO, coralbay.tv

Linear playout systems have been around for a long time and one would be forgiven for asking the question “Why would anybody want to develop a new one?” Viewing habits are changing, especially amongst younger generations who are watching more and more on-demand TV. Netflix, Amazon Prime, Sky and many others are offering On Demand services that are affordable and are providing an ever increasing range of content, some of which is exclusive to their platforms. Such services do not require linear playout systems; there is no schedule or running order to maintain as it is the user decides what they want to watch and when.

However there are still a large number of linear playout services all over the world and it is these channels that generate most of the revenue for TV broadcasters. Many are run using traditional playout systems which are located on premises and are made up of discrete specialist hardware products controlled by an automation system. So why change these systems when they are working?

Many of the traditional systems are reaching end of life and support is limited. Running costs are also high, when you add up the cost of all the service contracts for each device and the power and space consumed. Also, new standards, such as UHD, mean that broadcasters have to constantly adapt their playout systems in order to keep up with new trends. Many older systems simply cannot continue to be adapted in a reliable and cost effective manner. There are also other challenges that face broadcasters, such as how they can run temporary pop-up services in a cost effective way and how they can set up affordable business continuity systems that they can utilise in an emergency.

These are some of the reasons why coralbay.tv decided to embark on the development of a new playout product. The company felt it was important to produce a new product that replicated in software all the functionality of the traditional hardware products, but with added flexibility in where it could be hosted, the ability to offer a wide range of I/O and to play out a wide range of wrappers and formats seamlessly. If this could be done there could be significant cost savings for customers and if the software could run in the cloud it would be the ideal platform for temporary pop up channels, OTT services and business continuity systems. The flexibility in hosting also gives customer choice, portability and “future proofness”. For example, customers could choose one cloud service provide today and move to another in future if a better price or service is offered - It’s a bit like moving to the best and cheapest utility supplier for your home.

coralPlay uses the latest software development technologies, including microservices, docker containers and kubernetes for deployment and orchestration. The software is event based, rather than clock based like a traditional real-time playout system. This means that it is cloud native and much more efficient in resource usage, which is an important consideration for reducing running costs, especially when hosting in the cloud. Many of the company’s competitors claim to have cloud solutions when all they have really done is run their traditional real time system in the cloud. Although these systems may run in the cloud, running costs are extremely high. coralPlay has been carefully designed so that it optimizes resource usage and can be hosted anywhere, either in public clouds such as AWS, Azure, Google Cloud, OVH or on premise on a Virtual Machine or on bare metal servers.

In the last few months, the company has secured some significant orders from tier one broadcasters in South America, Europe and Africa and has added staff to its software development department to keep up with the demands. These tier one broadcasters not only want the cost savings that coralPlay offers, but also the full feature set that they are used to from professional broadcast automation systems. The company has recently added support for live inputs, 2110 I/O, automatic loudness control, html5 graphics, Azure Blob storage, direct playout from AWS S3 storage and 608/708 closed caption DVB subtitling. We are currently working on SCTE 35 triggering, a multi-channel timeline view, comprehensive counters and statistics, search and replace and many more features.

The company has many other opportunities around the world and interest in its products continues to increase. It seems that the company's decision to develop a new generation of playout solution was a wise investment after all.