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USER REPORT

KKDA Makes the iMediaTouch Switch

OMT Suite Offers Audio Library; Cart-Faithful Ask, 'Why Didn't We Do This Sooner?'

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DALLAS This past August, KKDA(FM) "K104" had the unique opportunity to broadcast live from the 2004 Athens Olympics. Also unique was that our DJ felt right at home even though we were eight time zones away. What made the difference was displayed on a notebook computer in the Coca Cola Radio booth.

The identical iMediaTouch screen in the Dallas control room was glowing in front of us. Not only were the current and upcoming events visible, our iMediaTouch system enabled us to make real time changes and take full control.

A secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection was established through the Internet from the K104 studio to the DSL line in Athens. Just a few years ago this scenario would not have been possible.

Service Broadcasting 1 Ltd., the parent company of K104, was among the first broadcasters to venture forward and deploy digital on-air playback. It turned out to be a costly learning experience.

The hot then-new system — from a manufacturer that is no longer in business — was proprietary, difficult to use and kept breaking down. After several total failures, the return to CDs and carts was inevitable.

This retreat to tape could not go on indefinitely. Audio quality issues and lack of cart machine parts mandated a change,



The author poses with the iMediaTouch system in the Coca-Cola Radio Booth at the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

but on-air talent did not want to give up control of physically pulling carts and CDs. We hoped to conquer this issue, and also improve upon our previous digital experience. As the leading station in a major market, we could not compromise the on-air product by another inferior digital system.

I evaluated the current variety of digital systems for ease of use, maintainability and reliability. One company always ended up on the short list, **OMT** and its iMediaTouch system. With OMT's long history and experience in the field, a clean intuitive interface and use of standard hardware made iMediaTouch the most promising contender.

Committing to rollout

iMediaTouch is an integrated suite of software including on-air studio, audio content capture and management and scheduling tools. It provides radio station and non-traditional audio broadcasters with a complete broadcast system.

A single iMediaTouch On Air and Production package was purchased to evaluate before committing to a full-scale rollout. After setting it up, I invited the staff from each station to come in and take a test drive. A quick introduction with five minutes of instruction and they were making music on their own. The consensus was a resounding "No problem, I can do this" attitude.

Trials continued with various configurations and backup scenarios. It didn't take long to conclude that the iMediaTouch was dependable and had the features we desired.

The order for the software was initiated and our engineering department planned the hardware and installation details. The final arrangement consists of a primary and backup IBM eSeries RAID server hosting the database and audio files. Further security is achieved by sending the files off-site to another server. This was conveniently handled using the Ethernet WAN port of the spread-spectrum STL.

Each control room is equipped with a Dell Optiplex computer and two Antex LX-44 audio cards, providing four stereo playback channels. The computers are drive-mapped to the main server. If the server fails, redirecting the playback com-

puters to the backup can be accomplished in seconds. In one exercise, an on-air computer was mapped directly to the off-site backup, which successfully played the audio files stored at the transmitter site.

Loading the large quantities of audio was the biggest challenge for the staff; this went faster than expected. The Production software allows ripping of one or many CD tracks at the same time. After trimming the beginning of the selection for a tight start and placing the fade and end markers, the song is done. After a week of steady effort, the music libraries for three stations plus commercials had been loaded. We were ready to go.

The transition went smooth with an iMediaTouch support representative present. Shifts are live and the talent can select their IDs, beds and other elements from the library or customized hot button sheets. Most of the worries subsided after

a few days. I was now hearing "Why didn't we do this sooner?"

The iMedia suite also includes iMediaLogger, which replaces maintenance-intensive equipment used for logging, time-shift recording and skimming, such as DAT, VCRs, reel-to-reel and cassette tape recorders.

OMT also offers version 2.2 of iMediaTouch, including a "Non-Stop Broadcasting" feature that allows stations to avoid downtime during broadcasts.

For more information, including pricing, contact OMT in Canada at (204) 786-3994, in New York at (888) 665-0501 or visit www.omttechnologies.com. 

