

New Production Technologies for Building Broadcast Brands

Background

When you ask your friend to pass a Kleenex or tell someone to FedEx a document, you are witness to a major accomplishment – the building of such a strong relationship between an audience and a brand, that the brand itself is incorporated into our very language and culture.

Advertisers insert their products' identities into our culture by employing the strategies of branding. Nike, for instance, goes far beyond the “swoosh” logo to employ a branding strategy that creates in their target population a desire to be part of an action/health oriented lifestyle. The Nike swoosh isn't effective because it's artistic. It's effective because it reminds customers that Nike products make them feel successful, energetic and empowered.

Nike employs a branding strategy because the athletic apparel business is highly competitive. Television broadcasters, similarly, must advance beyond logo bugs and channel IDs to succeed in an increasingly competitive market, as more video channels are introduced, audiences become fragmented and entertainment technology continues to change consumer-viewing habits.

New business initiatives are driven to all levels of the broadcast enterprise as the need to brand television franchises becomes more critical. Inevitably, the production department must successfully interpret the directives of the marketing team for branding efforts to succeed. At the production level, broadcast branding requires the creation and delivery of a comprehensive “look and feel” which influences substantial aspects of how production is done.

This paper provides broadcast producers and engineers with the tools they need to understand the marketing director's brand goals, and how to institute methods and criteria for success. Broadcast marketing directors may also find it of interest as an expression of the methodology by which their vision is executed at the production level. This paper provides a brief introduction to branding concepts in order to provide a framework to understand production implications.

- **Branding – Beyond the Bug:** Branding is more than logos and slogans.
- **A Brand-Savvy Production System:** What is needed at the system level?
- **Case Studies of System-Level Branding:** Real life engineers applying system-level tools and strategies to successfully build brands.
- **The Future of Broadcast Branding:** What lies ahead and how to prepare.

Branding – Beyond the Bug

The signs and symbols of a brand are most familiar to us as logos emblazoned on popular products like the Nike “swoosh” or the pair of white wires that lead from an Apple iPod to the listener’s ears. But the logo is just tip of the iceberg. Below the surface lies an enduring relationship between a brand and the audience - a relationship that is built with great care. How is this done?

David Aaker in his book “Building Strong Brands” (Free Press, Dec. 1995) says that a brand is maintained by an individual in a kind of “mental box” which defines a particular brand’s equity as "A set of assets (or liabilities) linked a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service." In other words, a brand can help build business or hurt it, depending on what the audience believes about it.

A good marketing executive wants to fill the audience’s mental box with favorable impressions. To do this, the marketing department employs a vast range of techniques to build a strong emotional relationship between an audience and the product.

In television, the elements which the marketing department defines as necessary to establish and maintain the brand inevitably must be created in the production department. This task often lands on the video producer’s desk in the form of “brand directives” that may include the pacing of edits, the style of shooting, the use of sound effects and music, the look of graphics, the use of 2D and 3D animation, and video effects. These directives in total create the look and feel of an on-air brand. When blended into a complete brand program, they hopefully influence the target audience to build a strong, positive relationship with the content.

A Brand Savvy Production System

At the production level, the task is to evolve a more sophisticated production system that can respond to the branding needs. New technologies can make this evolution feasible using existing resources and labor. Once established, the brand-capable production department will be able to meet four critical requirements that are essential in deploying a successful brand.

1 – Brand Consistency: Regardless of the size or diversity of the enterprise, a brand’s magic can only be realized if the brand is delivered consistently throughout all production facilities and the content they produce. This most often means placing design responsibility, control and execution solely in the design department. Those who rely on the output of the design department - producers, reporters, editors – must be able to *automatically* access the work of the design department, adapt it to their specific needs without changing the look and feel, and deploy the results simply and quickly.

For instance, the Pinnacle Deko real-time graphics system and Pinnacle DekoCast automated edge graphics system both automate the process of brand consistency through their advanced technology, which includes file associations, shared graphics templates and text entry features like intelligent fit-to-fill. These technologies ensure the design department’s original intent is achieved, minimize on-air mistakes and improve workflow efficiency.

2 - Unique and Compelling: In order for the look and feel of a brand to make an impact in a competitive marketplace, it must be immediately recognized by channel surfing viewers and compelling enough to make the target audience stop and take notice. Defining a unique brand first requires production equipment that provides a large vocabulary of audiovisual capabilities. From this vocabulary, elements are then selected to create a brand’s unique look and feel. Furthermore, the capability of each piece of relevant equipment in the facility to produce the desired brand elements in real-time is essential in maintaining workflow efficiency.

For example, part of a brand’s look and feel might be graphic elements animating in sync with a unique musical theme or sound effects. Multiple Pinnacle products, including Deko, DekoCast, Pinnacle Liquid non-linear editing system, and Pinnacle Thunder video production server all permit animations to be easily synchronized to sound. This allows production staff to easily create this branding element without involving additional equipment or personnel. Real-time digital video effects, video clip playback with keys, graphics animation and other real-time capabilities are likewise built into multiple Pinnacle products to facilitate branded production.

3 - Brand Proliferation: When deploying a brand, the production team ideally needs to be able to fully express the brand in all content as envisioned by the marketing department. However, the time and expense of doing so can limit the amount of branding that can realistically be accomplished. Production systems that can assist in the automatic or semi-automatic creation of branded content can limit the costs involved, allowing the brand to be fully expressed.

For example, DekoCast allows automated edge events, such as promos, to be designed once and then customized and utilized repetitively in a very efficient manner. Prior to DekoCast, most promos were created manually. Each time a promo was needed for a specific time, day or show, a graphics operator was needed to create the text, and an editor was required to composite the text and graphics with other elements and render a final promo. This promo was moved as a unique file to the play-to-air server and then scheduled. The expense involved in this process limited the number of promos that could be created within a specific budget. However, with DekoCast, the entire process is automated. DekoCast “scenes” describe an entire promo, including video effects, graphics, animation, sound effects and music, and need only be designed once. Each time a promo needs to be customized, the traffic or marketing staff can easily accomplish this without involving other equipment or staff, and DekoCast dynamically creates the resulting promo at air-time. This allows the complete expression of brand, in this case through promos, by dramatically reducing the cost of creation.

4 - Maximizing Branding in HD: The transition to HD presents a significant challenge to the process of branding. Beyond simply delivering a high definition version of content, it is important to maintain the look and feel of the brand in both resolutions. To achieve this, production tools need to offer the same real-time capabilities in HD as in SD, eliminating the need to compromise the HD content.

Multiple Pinnacle products including Deko, Liquid and Pinnacle MediaStream play-to-air servers all offer a broad set of real-time capabilities in both HD and SD, as well as process video in both native HD and native SD formats to maintain the highest possible level of quality.

Case Studies of System-Level Branding

WJLA / ABC-TV, Washington, D.C.

Jim Church is Director of Technology for Allbritton Communications Company, in Washington, D.C. with responsibility for WJLA/ABC-TV and cable NewsChannel 8 as well as the corporation. He recently purchased ten Pinnacle Deko systems for both channel’s air and one to use in production for creation. Church’s challenges derive from high news production demands and the need to ensure brand consistency on both channels. Church’s strategy was to enable producers and reporters to easily create graphics without relying on the design team for every story.

Allbritton’s graphic designers now create branded graphic templates and associated files that are then stored on a shared server. For daily production, producers and reporters access these pre-designed templates using the DekoMOS plug-in into their ENPS news computer system. Producers and reporters fill out pre-defined text fields and drag and drop stills and other graphics from their Proximity Xenostore asset management system directly into the DekoMOS template. DekoMOS uses advanced content independence technology to preserve the template’s graphical design and animation timing regardless of the amount of text entered. DekoMOS then displays a full preview of the customized

graphic, which is then easily inserted into the rundown. Further changes can be easily made at anytime, even after the live broadcast has begun.

In addition, once a template is filled out with each story's particular data, the two channels can share the final graphic without any additional work - Deko automatically adopts the correct brand for each channel at playout.

"With Pinnacle Deko we are now able to maximize our graphic design talent, improve the production quality of both channels, and automatically ensure each channel's unique brand," said Church.

HBO Latin America

Brand proliferation used to be an expensive directive for Emilio Otermin, VP Technology and Operations at HBO Latin America Production Services. Otermin is charged with delivering channel identities; show promos and additional branded information across 29 channel brands, five time zones, three languages, and about 13 countries. The time and cost involved in manually producing these branded elements led Otermin to purchase the DekoCast automated edge graphics system. Otermin currently has 24 DekoCast units deployed on 12 channels, with plans for further expansion underway.

"With DekoCast, our production staff creates a promo once as a DekoCast 'scene', which is essentially a super-template encompassing DVE moves, animation, dialogue tracks, text and video clips," said Otermin. "The actual text is not specified, but instead tagged for automatic insertion later. Our Harris automation system then supplies the data for each specific use of a promotion from the traffic log to the DekoCast PowerPromo module, which builds the data file for each promotion. This file is then sent to the DekoCast system, where the customized promotion is generated in real-time and aired automatically. Even our audio tracks in which an announcer recites specific show start times can be associated to the promo and synched for air."

"In the past, we'd have to manually reproduce each promo several times for each specific feed, movie title, time zone and other variables," said Otermin. "With DekoCast, we've greatly reduced the effort required, allowing us to fully express our channel brands more efficiently than previously possible."

The 77th Annual Academy Awards

The 2005 Academy Awards broadcast presented several challenges to Allan Wells of Fontastics / Mighty Dots, including a more sophisticated graphic "look" that had to be delivered live in high-definition. Wells used two Deko 3000HD systems on-air to accomplish the high-stakes task.

The Deko 3000HD systems generated native high definition graphics in real-time, as well as controlling several Thomson Grass Valley Profile servers for simplified synchronization during the live broadcast. Deko's native HD processing and full set of real-time capabilities meant producers did not have to compromise with a simplified result because of the switch from SD to HD.

“Deko once again delivered a stellar performance, giving us greater creative flexibility before the show and simplifying production when we were on the air,” said Wells.

The Future of Broadcast Branding

Technology continues to dramatically reshape the television landscape. Additional consumer choices, more digital channels, HD, video-on-demand, and personal video recorders such as TiVO are all changing the business of television and ultimately impacting its production.

Already, production teams are being asked to create both high definition and standard definition versions of content. The scope of content is expanding to include content optimized for use on mobile phones, pod-cast devices, personal computers and home theater appliances. The simplest production solution is simply cropping and stretching existing video streams to fit the new screen sizes. This approach, which in today’s HD/SD world already delivers sub-standard results on HD displays, completely falls apart when trying to view shrunken text, graphics and imagery on small mobile phone displays. Production tools must not only allow the efficient creation of content at multiple resolutions, but also enable the effective expression of brand regardless of what type of viewing device is employed.

For instance, a future Deko software update will include advanced “Multi-Compose” technology for efficiently producing HD and SD format graphics. Using Multi-Compose, designers can easily create different versions of a graphic template for each output format, making the best use of each format’s viewing screen size, and aspect ratio. In Multi-Compose, all multiple output formats are viewed and edited simultaneously on-screen, and the results saved to a single multi-format file. This dramatically reduces the overhead otherwise involved in creating, editing and managing multiple versions of each graphic. At air-time, Deko will even automatically select the version that corresponds with each video output format, reducing on-air mistakes and improving production speed.

As television consumption habits continue to change, broadcasters with strong brands and brand-savvy production systems possess a competitive advantage. The strong audience relationships enjoyed by these broadcasters will help them weather all manner of change, because viewers will tend to seek out and consume their content regardless of the distribution model or consumption method. Deploying and maintaining a comprehensive brand production system will continue to be a fundamental criterion for success in the television business.

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