

Building A Brand New Shed

Shed Media On The Move

STEPHEN BENNETT finds how Shed Media has re-vamped itself and moved into new premises in a most streamlined, straight-forward way.

SHEAD MEDIA GROUP is responsible for such popular programmes as *New Tricks* and *Waterloo Road*, and is owned by Warner Bros. International Television Production – with a good stake in the company retained by the management. Since its inception, the Group has grown significantly, with *Ricochet*, *Twenty Twenty*, *Wall to Wall*, and in more recent years *Shed Scotland*, *Watershed* and *KOCO Drama*, joining *Shed Productions* to form the *Shed Media Group*. In late 2010, *Shed Media Group* decided to expand and consolidate its operation at its premises at *Gray's Inn Road* in London, England, and chose UK-based Broadcast Systems Integrator *VSC Design* to oversee the refurbishment of its new flagship facility.

"I have now used *VSC Design* for three different build projects," says *Adam Downey*, Head of Post Production at *Shed Media*. "I rate them very highly for their sound advice and more importantly for the quality of their work. On this, like any project, we had obstacles and problems to overcome and they provided well thought out solutions to every one of them. This is the first time I have worked with *John Hartz* from *VSC* as the project manager, and I must say it was a very pleasant and easy experience."

"The company has been going for over 20

years," says *Martyn Hales*, Managing Director of *VSC*. "We do all sorts of broadcast systems integration, from total studios to automated file based transmission systems in TV and radio studios." Based in *Teddington, England*, *VSC* has handled projects both in the UK and overseas. "We've a very good portfolio of clients including blue-chip companies such as the *Financial Times (FT)* and *British Telecom (BT)*. *Shed Media* was a repeat customer."

Against The Clock

The timescale for the work at *Grey's Inn Road* was tight. "We only agreed the move literally the last day before Christmas and we were in for March – it was a real challenge to fit it in with current work commitments," says *Downey*. The new complex includes 24 *Avid*-based offline suites, three online/grading suites, and two dubbing suites, one of which is fully *Dolby 5.1* enabled. *Grey's Inn Road* will now handle 95% of the various post-production requirements for *Shed Media*. The two audio suites are arranged around a voice over/recording booth and are *Avid Pro Tools*-based, both with *Avid C24* control surfaces. One of the studios is equipped for surround sound using *Genelec* speakers. "The audio suites are just for remixing and sweetening of material ▶



▶ that's already been created in surround – we don't have the facility to create Dolby E mixes here," says Downey. In terms of programmes commissioned, Shed Media deals with approximately 70- to 80% in High Definition, while around 40% are now running tapeless.



Downey explains the reasoning behind the decision to consolidate Shed Media's facilities in London. "We had so many separate media companies it was difficult to find the right staff and the multiple installations always needed constant upgrades and so on – it caused many problems," he says. "In terms of post-production it was a cost saving measure to unify all the facilities and to keep the skill sets we have currently without unnecessary duplication. It gave us the ability to stabilise and allow us to move towards full HD across all shows." The steady move to tapeless production shifts the back-up of material to the production team itself, and that has brought about a need for improved technical skills to a currently non-technical part of the business. Downey believes the new structure will help smooth this transition.

Shed Media is a busy, successful company, and it therefore wasn't possible for work to stop while VSC was going about their business. "Because of the time frame we decided that we'd get the equipment we already had working and then deal with re-training later," says Downey. "We were incredibly busy and had work across all suites right away."

Previously, editing would take place in 'bolted on' edit suites situated within a production office so the new, dedicated, edit suits are a definite improvement, says Downey. "The level of sound-proofing is excellent, we've wired it correctly and made it future proof – we have full 3D capabilities should we need them, and we're wired for 10Gig Ethernet. For the first time in Shed's history we've had post-production people building a post-production environment. The equipment was always good; we've always kept up with upgrades, but we've now got things like the new

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desks and natural lighting – without this kind of investment it wouldn't have happened. We still have a few issues, but we are still able to cope with this busy period with no training, technical, or building issues – you have to give Shed a lot of respect for that," he adds.

That natural lighting even extends to most of the suites located in the basement and, along with a plethora of Herman Miller Aeron Chairs, means that Shed Media's crew should be able to work in comfort – an essential requirement as post production workers typically sit for hours staring at computer screens.

The numbered suites (there's no suite 13!) are laid out in a star formation around a central ingest/machine room designed to keep cable runs to a minimum. It handles playout, mastering, transfers, and encoding, as well as routing and format conversion. A smaller, chilled, server room is hidden away where it deals with media storage, archiving, and the distribution flow via EditShare. "The design of the building, in which Shed and Downey had a major say, revolves around a MCR/CAR (Machine Control Room/Central Apparatus Room)," says Alex Shrank, the Solutions/Systems Architect at VSC. "All the suites are significantly less than 100 metres from the MCR, which negated the need to involve fibre and more importantly fibre converters – which would have increased the cost. All of the suites were connected up the same even though there's a notional difference between an on-line and off line suite – nowadays, the difference is only really to do with the workflow. Shed has three 'high-end' suites, as they've been called, which still use Avid's Media Composer but also have local VTR – which means it's easier to do multiple local ingest. They also have high-quality grade one style video



▶ monitoring and separate audio monitoring – the other suites just use the Avid system.”

“The core that hangs all the AV together is a 144x288 Black Magic Router that offers SD, HD, and 3GB/s SDI routing all in a compact form factor,” continues Shrank, “It also has machine control capabilities with six hardware panels plus a touch screen-based software interface that allows you to associate icons with sources, which makes routing more intuitive and isn’t limited by the number of physical controls available. The ingest is all Avid-based to a central EditShare storage that allows the user to define areas in the storage for different projects and different users along with quotas – one project can’t fill up the entire storage. EditShare has some advantages over more pro-

prietary storage systems, such as Avid ISIS for example – not least of all one of cost.”

Shed Media receives rushes on Sony HDCAM SR, Panasonic HD machines, ‘traditional’ DigiBeta, DV cam, and IMX, and the MCR room has machines to cope with any type of tape the industry can throw at it. “The audio is all embedded – this has the advantage that the installation costs are significantly lower because you don’t have to cater for the loss of discreet audio, and you’re less likely to encounter lip sync problems as the audio is tied to the video,” says Shrank. Along with the production suite, Shed Media have a fully equipped DVD production facility, so the clients can take away preview versions of edits on DVD – though the final edit would, of course, be on HD Cam

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Adam Downey of Shed Media.

SR tape or a Panasonic HD tape.

“Some of the equipment was already in use by Shed Media from inside the company – they got together with Wall to Wall and 20-20 in London – and we integrated all the current equipment and added some improvements, especially in the monitoring,” says Hales. “All the desks are custom designed – the building company were pushing hard to install built-in desks, but we were able to supply that stand-alone furniture for less. The advantage of using these is flexibility – you can take the furniture and equipment out and move it somewhere else.”

VSC provided Shed Media with 3D diagrams of the proposed installations with all of the equipment and furniture in place. “People like Shed Media don’t build systems, they use them, so it’s essential that they can imagine sitting in front of the desk before the installation is complete,” adds Hales.

All Night Long

Because of the tight deadline, VSC had to cope with a lot of late nights – but they reduced the amount of time needed on site by working on mock-up suites at their own facility. “We’ve pre-built complete TV stations at our premises in Teddington,” says Hales. “We connect it all up and get our customers to check out everything, so when we get to site, the installation process is quicker. We run all the inter-edit suite cables during what the builders call the ‘second fix’ – which is when they run in network and electrical wiring. It makes it easier and quicker and it cuts down the time period between getting access to site and completion.”

“At the start of a job I have discussions with the client to fully decide the end outcome,” says Shrank, “We choose which equipment will best suit their requirements and I work with them all the way to firming up their exact requirements right down to the wire level schematics and taking it up to an acceptance procedure to ensure it matches the initial brief.”

“The off-site work was not so critical because it’s the building work that takes the time,” adds Hales, “But on-site we actually only had about 10 days – we had some constraints because the equipment was still being used in existing suites – so we actually only had three or four days to get it up and running. As Shed Media were continuing to use the equipment, the shorter the install period, the less it cost them!”

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Shed Media
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