

DVD technology improves cable for U.S. military bases in Japan

BY TOM A. WALSH

Living on a military base half a world away from home is hard enough, but getting good quality U.S. cable programming on a base is nearly impossible.

Luckily for U.S. military personnel on bases in Okinawa, Japan, cable television just got better. Mediatti won a government bid early last year to upgrade an existing CATV system for military bases in Okinawa.

As part of the upgrade, Mediatti sought to improve the picture quality of the existing VCR-based playback system and to increase the number of U.S. cable channels broadcast to 32. To redistribute this programming via satellite to Japan would have been cost prohibitive and nearly impossible from a technical standpoint.

Mediatti sought help from LEIGHTRONIX, which turned to Media Control Systems, one of its larger product distributors and system integrators that supplies television automation systems to cable TV companies, cities, and schools in the United States. The requirements were to develop a cost effective and reliable television recording and playback system using DVD technology. Mediatti chose a DVD-based system because of its advances in MPEG-2 compression and decompression, which greatly improves the quality of the programs and allows for more content on fewer disks.

The solution consisted of two identical 32-channel, 64 DVD recorder systems, with two Panasonic LQ-DMR200 DVD recorder/players dedicated to each channel. One system is used in California for recording the DVDs, while the other is for playback in Japan. By using the same brand DVD recorder for recording and playback, DVD disk finalization was not required, saving considerable time and labor.

Because the automation task is a repetitive daily operation, automation control is handled by the LEIGHTRONIX TCD/IP. Its user programmable SCRIPT language allows one program to be written that will run continuously day after day, week after week, without any operator scheduling intervention. The only requirement for the operator is to replace DVDs every 12-hours, with each DVD recorder recording or playing six hours at a time.

Another valuable feature of the TCD/IP is status monitoring. If the TCD/IP detects a



A new DVD-based playback system, co-located in California and Okinawa, provides more channels and reduced playback time for military personnel stationed in Japan.

DVD recorder failure, it notifies the operator through a telephone alarm dialer provided by Media Control Systems. The system also uses a customized LEIGHTRONIX Plus-Bus control interface.

The systems were assembled, programmed, and tested at the Media Control Systems facility near San Diego. Once ready, the system was installed in Oceanside, CA, and the playback system was shipped and installed by MCS personnel in Okinawa. After on-site testing and training, the system began broadcasting on July 29.

Through agreements with cable operators, Mediatti was also able to provide better pricing and more channels than the original operator — and reduced playback time from two weeks to 10 days.

Blake Williams of Mediatti said that DVD pricing is an issue, because the system uses 3,840 DVDs per month. "We started out using a lower grade DVD disk," he said, "but

the failure rate was too high, around three percent. This might be fine in some applications, but not for this critical environment."

When recording in long play, six-hour modes, the DVDs are very susceptible to dust and smudging, so technicians are careful when handling them, Williams explained. The DVD players also are cleaned routinely.

"We ended up with a very good, cost effective system, and a higher quality of content than the military had before," Williams said. "The DVD technology gives us much better impressions, and paired with the TCD/IP, we have a highly reliable automation solution." ■

Thomas A. Walsh is chairman and CEO of Media Control Systems.

MORE INFO

LEIGHTRONIX www.leightronix.com
MCS www.mediacontrolsystems.com
Panasonic www.panasonic.com/broadcast