



World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)
WWE tag teams with AMX switches to produce
action-filled programs

Solution

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allows broadcasters to consolidate control
of their machine room computers and devices
into a single-user interface.

A need for quick response

Exciting shows with evolving storylines are what fans expect when they tune in to television shows like Monday Night RAW and WWE Smackdown! In the wrestling ring, superstar performers like John Cena, Kane and Undertaker move their muscle through emotional and physical dramas that culminate or change direction during monthly pay-per-view specials.

Behind the scenes, editing of the non-stop video action happens at the WWE's technologically advanced production facility in Stamford, Connecticut. There, the WWE produces seven television shows, consisting of nine hours of original programming, 52 weeks per year, delivering more than 14 million viewers each week. WWE programming is syndicated in 45 of the top 50 U.S. markets and multiple versions of its U.S. programming are available in more than 100 countries in 17 languages around the world.

Just like wrestlers in the ring, the production team needs to respond rapidly to change and their small multi-port KVM switching system was pinning them down. The system had distance limitations and did not enable sharing so there were multiple computers and servers that handled the same functions. This redundancy factor and the sheer amount of equipment pointed to the need for a more state of the art approach.

“From a broadcast point of view, it truly expands the capability and resource sharing beyond what a typical television production facility is doing currently... We would not be able to function with the efficiency that we have today were it not for the Avocent solution.”

– David “Shack” Haralambou President, By Request Communications

In 2001, working with By Request Communications (BRC), a broadcast systems integrator, and reseller Revco, Inc., the WWE commenced a digital upgrade project and started the search for a more progressive KVM solution. Avocent quickly emerged as the leading contender. Implementing an enterprise-wide AMX® KVM switching solution from Avocent, the WWE gained the ability to share resources, eliminate duplicate hardware expenses and improve overall IT support response time.

“The WWE is a fast-paced organization and like other broadcasters, the ability to change as needed in response to production is imperative,” said BRC President David “Shack” Haralambou. “When we purchased a new broadcast server, we quickly realized that putting in a standard analog KVM solution would not adequately address our needs.”



Solution proves to be winner

The Avocent AMX KVM switching solution allows broadcasters to consolidate control of their machine room computers and devices into a single-user interface. This centralized interface lets operators and engineers in multiple locations access the same devices from the live studio.

“We went with the Avocent solution based on previous product history and because of the ability to run it over standard CAT 5 cable,” said Haralambou. “We have a tremendous CAT 5 and CAT 6 infrastructure already built in the facility and the ability to use that infrastructure for workstations and machines produced a tremendous cost savings.

” WWE purchased four 32-port AMX5000 switches and one 64-port AMX5010 switch to connect standard PCs, graphics machines, broadcast servers, music machines for MIDI, editing systems and several corporate servers. Twenty AMX5120 user stations are distributed throughout the broadcast department. Engineers effortlessly switch between Microsoft, Mac and UNIX platforms.

Haralambou also appreciates that “the user stations’ video capability really helps” by supporting resolutions up to 1600 x 1200 at 75Hz with a very high quality rate of transmission– comparable to a direct computer connection experience. Another benefit is the ability to plug into a local PC at each user station, eliminating the need for a separate KVM at each desktop.

“The end result is less money on equipment and less clutter in the data center without compromising performance,” said Haralambou. “Space is always an issue and having only a single monitor, keyboard and mouse is a plus.”

Secure network/remote diagnostics

Another plus is the ability to be multi-user connected. Sharing of resources is the number one feature making a tremendous difference for the WWE. Haralambou appreciates the ease of ability to assign different user groups, different permissions to each user and different machines within those groups. He notes that the flexibility in setting up those types of parameters allows them to maintain a secure network.

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Remote diagnostics is also enabled through the solution. With access to machines from the desktop, engineers no longer need to travel all over the building to troubleshoot, resulting in a manpower savings as well.

“The ability for engineers to access any machine on the network from their desktop shortens the time it takes to resolve user workstation issues,” said Haralambou. “Now, they can just dial up from their desktop and call up the machine that’s causing a problem.”

The only “problem” Haralambou encountered during the implementation process was that once they began using the AMX switching solution, they found other uses for it and quickly outgrew their original purchase. When they began daisy-chaining – connecting the output of one box to the input of the next – they realized the solution was more than meeting their expectations.

Ready for growth

“The good news is the system already has a growth plan built in and you can daisy-chain, expand or swap it out very easily,” he said. “It is plug and play which makes it very user friendly for instances such as an upgrade situation.”

Haralambou notes that the WWE network is constantly growing and appreciates that the AMX switching system has grown with them.

“From a broadcast point of view, it truly expands the capability and resource sharing beyond what a typical television production facility is doing currently,” he said. “This is a solution that crosses multiple users, multiple locations from newsrooms to production control rooms all in one nice, little package. We would not be able to function with the efficiency that we have today were it not for the Avocent solution.”

Revco, Inc. is a data center solutions reseller located in Trumbull, Conn. For more information, visit www.revco-inc.com.