The ME Generation

By Douglas I. Sheer

With the recent growth seen in switchers and routers, the emphasis has increasingly shifted to the mix effects ~ ME ~ capabilities of them, and a similar emphasis on the ins and outs ~ I/Os ~ of routing systems. In Master Control switchers MEs, coupled with expanding channel capacity, are fueling new interest. This change, particularly in production switchers/vision mixers, has led to a new opportunity for end-users who prefer and are purchasing more portable and affordable smaller systems which utilize less ME's and also have a significantly smaller footprint. This trend was identified in the just published the latest global tracking report from D. I. S. Consulting Corporation called *Video Switchers World tm 2011*.

Manufacturers must like the idea of tiers of product based on their MEs because a veritable 'gold rush' is underway to provide scalable ME and smaller (less) ME models to an increasingly freelance and small operation-oriented marketplace. And, that 'rush' has attracted a considerable number of new brands, particularly from Asian countries. The new entries seem mainly focused on providing more single or double ME boards, many of which are highly portable and may be operated on DC/battery power. Needless to say, they also tend to carry rather lower price points, which users are finding quite appealing. Among the things driving this change are the desire of freelancers and small crews to do some or all of the normally post-production steps in the field, such as editing and to centralize such workflows through a laptop.

This latest D. I. S. switcher/router study was conducted during November and published in early December and gathered over 1,200 global responses from broadcasters and other professional end-users. That data is organized in five regions and by seven segments that include: Broadcast/Cable, Production/Post, Mobile/OB, Event Video, Independent Video & Film, Institutional Video and Rental Houses. In addition to the core brand shares in Owned/Bought & Planned product data and a five-year forecast, there are breakouts by price, application and type – Production Switchers, Master Control and Routing Systems. And, additionally, in the report, there is also Brand Image ranking, Budgets and

Revenues, Technology Trends ~ including a conjoint analysis of the most sought features in a new system ~ and an extensive Classification area, for quantifying such things as size of operations. Responses were gathered both on-line and via computer-aided telephone interviews.

Other important industry currents in the worldwide switcher market include: a continued transition to HD, a growth in the number of 3G (1080p)-capable models and substantial growth in 3D-capability, albeit often optional in nature, as most switcher makers offer re-purposing HD for 3D use as a solution. In routing specifically, the same features are drivers, but also a trend towards fiber and larger quantities of I/Os are appearing more frequently. Big desks were also seeing a good deal of growth in those circles where the recession had repressed growth in 2009 and 2011, mobile/OB and big studios. In those segments as well as in the Americas and Asia, larger models also are seeing respectable demand. This demand has favored a small number of manufacturers who occupy that space. And, there, a trend towards providing scalable and modular expansion has become popular among users.

Understandably, the general trend towards smaller footprints and fewer MEs and increased competition, has led to lower switching prices and created a buyer's market for an increasingly freelance, highly mobile, marketplace of media professionals.

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