American Public Television easily manages COVID-19 transition to remote work with axle ai software

Video team works from home on syndicated content using a browser interface

BOSTON, April 7th - When the staff of American Public Television, like many media companies, faced the prospect of abruptly working from home due to coronavirus measures, they were ready. APT is a syndicator; a leading non-profit organization whose mission is to find, curate, license, and distribute content to public television stations. Operating with a modest staff, they've amassed a current and legacy catalog of hundreds of series and single-event programs encompassing documentaries, education, travel, performance, news and current affairs programs ranging from Lidia's Kitchen to Rick Steves' Europe to Doc Martin and Midsomer Murders.

Just a few years ago, APT's workflows were tied to physical media like tapes and hard drives. Upon implementing axle ai, they were able to economically transition to a browser-based, shared media workflow. So, when recently faced with COVID-19 work restrictions, they were able to swiftly navigate to a distributed approach almost overnight. "axle ai, as well as some of the other key network technologies we've implemented, like VPN and cloud storage, were the difference between being disconnected totally from our business due to COVID-19, and being able to operate nearly at regular capacity." says APT Vice President of Technology Gerry Field.

A better way to screen

APT began to transition to digital distribution and file-based workflows, with the goal "to turn our screening rooms into ingest rooms, and move our screening functions right onto everybody's desktop". Put off by the cost and complexity of MAM systems they investigated, Field and his team opted for axle ai's budget-friendly software, which takes advantage of industry standards and cost-effective storage to simplify networked video workflows.

If content comes in as files, great; if it comes in as tape, we ingest, and in either case create proxies for screening through axle," Gerry continued. Now, he added, "Anything being submitted to us is coming in as a file in a broadcast format. We've broken away from limited on-prem 'silos' we had before, and extend access to more content at the desktop regardless of the location. Of course, this same capability has made it possible for us to handle the switch to a fully-remote workforce, which would have been unthinkable previously."

Designed for easy adoption

"Most of all, axle made it possible to get a system appropriately scaled for what we need, and for the resources that we have. The two equal parts are cost and complexity. There are a lot of asset management products in the market that, particularly for my needs, are tremendously overbuilt. We needed something that could be installed easily and give us access, quickly, to the content that we need to see." I was able to get it spun up and operational inside of three days and get axle ai into the adoption cycle. From there the biggest challenge was getting some of the people used to going to a screening room to screening in their browser, and building their confidence."

The fact that axle is not technically demanding was very important: "APT has good talented and technically aware staff but we're not the kind of company that has a deep engineering department, or a stable of editors" Gerry added. "I could possibly do deeper, more interesting things with a more expensive system, but my experience with things like that is they sound good, but wind up being a boat anchor."

Expansion and growth

As APT moves to a new public television member station interconnection system, axle has been integrated with APT back-end business systems, so licensing and media access rights information are linked to axle. "That's important as APT owns very little programming; it's almost all licensed for distribution under contracts. Under the new system, "material comes into our cloud, is synced from our cloud to local storage and axle makes proxy copies for screening and tracking."

Gerry has seen APT's use of axle ai grow, especially for review of underwriting spots and to help suppliers in negotiating with underwriters. "In addition to full length programs, we're now including promos, sizzle reels, clips, and other promotional material related to the program." Gerry said the staff is now using axle to make programming notes, "extending desktop screening access to collaboration and sharing comments about the content as well."

Radically Simple Resonates

Gerry cites axle's 'radically simple' principle as a key reason for adopting it. "It's one of the things that got me interested. That, and the experience and credibility of the founders in both developing media asset management systems and knowing how they were actually used." Both of those factors paid off for American Public Television, letting them affordably do more, expand their capabilities, and gain new efficiencies to find, curate, license, and distribute content to public television audiences. The recent switch from a single work location to a work-from-home team approach required under COVID-19 public health mandates worldwide, turned out to be achievable almost overnight due to axle ai's affordable, accessible browser-based HD/4K workflows.

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About APT:

American Public Television (APT) is the leading syndicator of high-quality, top-rated programming to the nation's public television stations. Founded in 1961, APT distributes 250 new program titles per year and more than one-third of the top 100 highest-rated public television titles in the U.S. Its programs include Doc Martin, Midsomer Murders, America's Test Kitchen From Cook's Illustrated, AfroPoP, Rick Steves' Europe, Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Television, Front and Center, Lidia's Kitchen, Kevin Belton's New Orleans Kitchen, Simply Ming, The Best of the Joy of Painting with Bob Ross, James Patterson's Kid Stew and NHK News. APT also licenses programs internationally through its APT Worldwide service and distributes Create®TV — featuring the best of public television's lifestyle programming — and WORLD™, public television's premier news, science and documentary channel. For more on APT's programs and services, visit APTonline.org

About axle.ai:

axle ai (http://www.axle.ai) is the recognized leader in developing radically simple search and remote access software. It's solutions have helped over 600 media organizations improve the way they remotely search and manage their video content. axle's radically simple media management uniquely addresses a burgeoning need and has caught on rapidly among video professionals in post-production, education, broadcast, corporate, sports, house of worship, non-profit, advertising-marketing, and government organizations worldwide. Axle ai, Inc. is a privately held company; its founders have extensive industry experience in media asset management for creative applications. Learn more at www.axle.ai; equity crowdfunding at www.republic.co/axle-ai.