



AMWA/EBU FIMS

Joint Task Force to Seek a Framework for Interoperable Media Services

The FIMS (Framework for Interoperable Media Service) Task Force has been set up jointly by the Advanced Media Workflow Association (AMWA) and the European Broadcast Union (EBU). The aim is to develop a common approach to integrate hardware and software components in modern TV production facilities is believed to be a fundamental need of the whole media industry.

The media and entertainment sector is in a state of great change. Program production and distribution are moving away from physical media, videotape and film, to use computer files running on commodity IT platforms.

The first milestone in this shift was the "EBU/SMPTE Task Force for Harmonized Standards for the Exchange of Program Material as Bitstreams" published August 1998.

This groundbreaking report introduced the words 'metadata' and 'wrapper' into common use by the broadcast community. From this came standards like MXF, the foundation for much of today's file-based media workflows.

However, in many cases, the exchange of files between applications simply replaced the movement of videotapes. The workflows changed little.

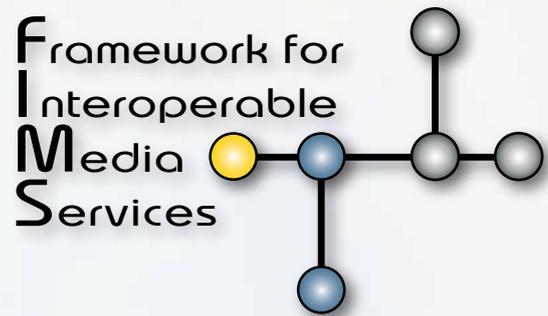
The industry has long exchanged live video over the SDI interface, but as users migrate to the file domain they have encountered a plethora of wrapper and encoder standards that impede interoperability.

The AMWA is addressing these issues by developing Application Specifications that constrain the MXF formats like OP1A with aim that file interchange can be as simple as using the SDI interface.

Although reaching the goal of simple file exchange is necessary, it not sufficient for the next step. And that is the development of workflows that really take advantage of the possibilities offered by file-based operations.

This new Task Force promises to initiate a similar change in the industry as the EBU/SMPTE Task Force triggered over a decade ago. The Task Force is made up of both manufacturers and users with Manufacturer members interested in reducing their costs and risks associated with integration. User members are interested in faster time of integration, with lower cost and risk.

The EBU has been evaluating the use of Service Oriented Architecture (SOA), a system design pattern that is believed to offer the potential for greatly



improved interoperability. AMWA has set up a Media Services Architecture Group (MSAG) with a similar mandate. The adoption of standard interfaces at the business level, as SOA promotes, would allow for the goals of reduced costs and simpler system integration to be achieved.

What are the expected benefits?

The introduction of IT based production models is considered a strategic move to fulfil the market demand for new integrated content distribution services. Interoperability of systems and components is deeply needed to guarantee the required flexibility in the design, configuration and upgrade of the production infrastructure and to keep its associated total cost of ownership as low as possible.

What are the risks if the activity is not done?

The risks are that market solutions are not converging spontaneously towards interoperable models. This could lead to higher costs and low efficiency in the deployment of the new IT technologies in the broadcast environment. It could also lead to a loss of competitive advantage, as users are unable to implement more flexible workflow designs, which are required to meet the requirements of an ever-changing business environment.

To find out more about FIMS and the work of the AMWA, visit www.amwa.tv.