

Pittsfield Community Television is the largest PEG (Public, Educational, and Governmental) Access facility in rural Berkshire County, Massachusetts. We reach 25,000 households on three separate channels via TimeWarner Cable in Pittsfield, Dalton and Richmond.

We serve over 200 individual members of the public, non-profit organizations, school systems and colleges, and government offices. Our organization provides access to television air time, production equipment, and training to members of the public, teachers and students, and political office holders and appointees.

The majority of the productions produced and aired at our facility are accomplished by amateur operators, some of whom are introduced to television production for the first time by our staff.

In addition, our organization produces several professional productions each year, including a 6-camera live coverage of the local Fourth of July Parade, which has been available nationally on satellite.

I wear two hats on a small staff of six. I am the Chief Engineer of the facility, which includes one linear a/b roll and one nonlinear edit suite, a multicamera studio, remote acquisition equipment, and headends for all three channels.

I am also the Education Coordinator, responsible for programming “Educational Television of Pittsfield,” one of our three channels, and interfacing with local schools and the community college to promote local programming.

Earlier this year, we found ourselves at a crossroads. Much of our 12-year old production and headend equipment was reaching the end of its useful life. We knew we wanted to jump into digital, but realized that we would still need to utilize S-VHS and VHS for some time. We felt that a hybrid system, which incorporates existing analog technology but takes advantage of digital advances, would be necessary. And any new system must be compatible with our existing equipment.

Our existing installation included the Adtec Lite-ning event controllers, and Panasonic S-VHS player/recorders. We simply outgrew these configurations, and weren’t crazy about the Lite-ning’s DOS-based control software.

For the heart of each of the three new systems, we would need an automated controller that would run the SVHS decks, play some digital tapes, switch on live transmissions from the studio, satellite, and from the institutional network, and perhaps control a hard disk-based digital video player.

What opened up this door was seeing the MVP-2000 at NAB in April. We saw the unit at the Leightronix booth, controlling a Panasonic AJ-CM32 Micro Cart automation

system, based on Panasonic's DVC Pro format. Suddenly, here was a way to control 32 two- or three-hour digital tapes while only purchasing one playback/record deck!

The MVP-2000 afforded us some real advantages. The control software is straightforward and intuitive. Our three coordinators can control any of the three units from their desktop computers via our local area network, and also via the internet. The MVP controls all of our existing analog decks, along with an external router (we chose a Sigma SS-2100-16 Plus for each setup).

The real kicker is the level of control we have with the Micro Cart. Each command line can control a different function (play, rewind, etc.), including a cue command, which can ready a tape for playback down to an individual frame on the tape's timecode. This is particularly useful for us, because we play some tapes several times in a week. Now we no longer need an operator to manually load and cue tapes in preparation for each evening's programming.

An added bonus is the internal MPEG digital video player, which we use to play short spots between longform programs. We use our nonlinear edit suite to create the MPEG-2 clips, then transfer them over our LAN to the MVP-2000, and control the playback of the clips via our desktops. Very cool.

Installation was straightforward. When it was all connected and powered up, the only snag was getting the MVP to communicate with the Sigma routing switcher. As it turned

out, a baud rate setting on the router needed to be changed. Then, we connected each unit up to our LAN, and we were ready to rock!

Leightronix has been very supportive during our purchase and installation. We had one major issue with the Windows 95/98 control software that tech support was able to solve in a timely manner. They ended up revising the commercial release of the software, and delivering it to us by ftp, to fix a problem with the Micro Cart cue times.

Our staff has adapted well to the new control software and operation procedures.

Because our headend equipment is not used by community people, we did not have to train non-staff on its operation, as is the case with other production equipment in our facility.

This product has been incorporated into our facility almost seamlessly. By automating tedious playback functions, it has saved us valuable staff time, which allows us to concentrate on training and productions.

I see this system as our organization's first step towards television's digital future, and a way for us to distinguish ourselves technically from the stereotype of lesser-quality access television.