

## DIGITAL STUDIO Al Aqarija

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Al Aqarija

Al Aqarija TV made a splash when it entered the UAE broadcast market a couple of years ago with the Middle East's first Arabic real estate channel. Since then, the channel has grown so rapidly that the company felt the need to invest a further US\$2 million to expand its TV offerings. Digital Studio reports.

Al Aqarija, the only channel that currently provides in-depth information about the real estate industry in the Middle East, has decided to expand from one channel to three within the next month. The expansion to an English channel and a classifieds channel has entailed the addition of a dedicated Transmission Control Room (TCR), Central Apparatus Room (CAR) and a studio with a virtual system at the station's headquarters in Dubai Media City. The infrastructure has also been put in place for production and digital editing facilities at the premise. The TV station currently has more than 100 people to man its three channels. The initial contract for the TV station, as well as the US \$2 million expansion project, have been undertaken by systems integrator Salam Media Cast. "Previously, it was a small installation," says Ihab El Baba, technical director Salam Media Cast.

Al Aqarija was using an On-Air video server which was limited to one channel and a switcher. The On-Air system was used for automation, storage, playout as well as graphics but it was very limited in its capabilities. Al Aqarija couldn't do anything additional. So when they decided to expand, we changed the entire equipment and replaced them so that it would allow for future expansion and scalability." As a result, the On-Air system was replaced with a Seachange server that allows for easy and flexible expansion. "We provided more facilities on this server so that they could use the same server for both production as well as playout," says El Baba. "The current server is a BML from Seachange with the Media Client, Etere Automation and Vizrt graphics. They are still expanding further so we are looking to put in place a newsroom system as well for them," he adds.

The expansion project encompasses three main technical areas. These include a TCR, CAR and a two-camera studio. Two of the main systems that are in place in the TCR are the Etere automation playout system and the Seachange transmission video server. The Seachange server comprises three BML nodes with 146 GbX 72 Raid 5 and raid square along with 3 MCL. Other equipment includes a T-520 master switcher from Probel with the 32X32 embedded router, Sony MPEG IMX (MSW-M2IOOP) playout/ingest and emergency playout, Miranda channel ident system and an on-air graphics system from Vizrt. All three channels use the Etere automation system and Seachange video/audio servers. With regards to the CAR, all central processing equipment is located within a suite of eight racks. Processing equipment within this area includes SDI embedded infrastructure, the Probel digital video router, the Drake intercom system, Leitch timecode and Trilogy video reference system. The studio is equipped with two of Thomson's LDK 300 cameras, its Kayak DD2 vision mixer, a BDL prompter, 0 Yamaha audio mixer and microphones from Shure.

As with most projects in the Middle East, one of the biggest challenges has been time, and installing equipment on an unfinished site. Against very challenging time constraints, the Professional Services division of Salam completed the design, installation, testing and commissioning for this project," says El Baba. "Timing was of essence because Al Aqarija had already publicly announced a launch date. Consequently, Salam needed to closely manage, plan and monitor the project alongside several other construction related work such as building.