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BREAKING NEW GROUND

Dubai Media Inc's OTT service has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 2011 with a premium sports channel added to its portfolio recently and a smart app scheduled for Q1 2015. **Vijaya Cherian** takes a closer look at the technology that is driving DMI's OTT service

Dubai Media Inc (DMI) has been successfully delivering an ongoing OTT experience to its online and mobile device audience for four years under the leadership of Digital Media Director Heba AlSamt, with continuous additions to the existing service.

Since AlSamt established the Digital Media Department back in 2011, DMI's digital services team has focused on providing services from OTT to premium content and social media. DMI is the first local broadcaster to provide a catch-up TV service and live streaming of all its channels for free.

AlSamt, who plays an active role on social media platforms, says, "DMI has embraced OTT wholeheartedly" and "merged it with our strategy to provide our audience with the best viewing experience so they can access our content anytime, anywhere."

DMI's most recent notable addition has been a premium sports channel, which was launched online in November 2014. The subscription-based service gives users access to live HD sports programming, including the 2014-15 Arab Gulf League season, on supported devices including PCs, Android phones and tablets, iPhones, iPads and Blackberries. It has also developed an HD OTT video channel on LG Smart TV that is launching this month, and is working towards developing a wider smart TV app that is expected to be available this quarter.

The state broadcaster's entire OTT workflow is driven by the Endavo OTT Video Services Platform, which is used to distribute seven live TV channels, four catch-up TV channels and a deep video on-demand (VOD) library of approximately 30,000 titles. The platform supports user-generated video services, which DMI uses for video competitions, primarily held during Ramadan. Endavo has also developed DMI's

VOD website and DMI OnDemand and Dubai One apps, which are available on Android and iOS tablets as well as phones. The OTT solutions provider is currently developing the smart app for DMI, which is due for release in Q1 2015.

Endavo's end-to-end OTT video services solution includes the multiscreen, global delivery of linear TV channels, catch-up TV, VOD, radio and user-generated video (UGV). Starting with DMI's VOD website, the state broadcaster has pulled all these video formats into a single user experience.

"For the DMI ecosystem, Endavo serves as the central component, providing the OTT middleware and the content/services management platform," clarifies Paul D Hamm, CEO of Endavo Media and Communications Inc.

"Endavo's platform supports the entire workflow necessary for DMI to actively manage this website and service daily, including the management and organisation of all VOD titles, associated metadata and marketing assets, such as title images, thumbs, banners and channel/category images," he explains, adding that the company has worked with other partners including Wowza, Internap, Microsoft (Playready), Apple (iOS), Amazon Web Services, Google (Android), T-Pay Mobile and LG Electronics to deliver various phases of this project.

A significant part of the OTT workflow is the cloud-based Endavo Media Management System, on which DMI organises titles into channels, categories, shows and seasons, and which manages all publishing rules, such as release windows, DRM and geographical restrictions. The OTT solution is also able to tie into existing workflows, such as MAM and OSS/BSS.

DMI ingests its linear TV channels and EPG over IP into the Endavo cloud, at which point Endavo repackages the live streams for adaptive bitrate and multiscreen playback.



“We are heavily focused on content creation, and our aim is to push the envelope to create highly shareable digital content in a revolutionary new way and position DMI as a broadcaster that is also leading on the OTT front”

Heba AlSamt, Digital Media Director, Dubai Media Inc



The service provider also archives the linear streams and EPG data in order to create a 24/7 start-over service on the live channels, as well as a standalone catch-up TV service for select TV channels. Catch-up TV allows users to view a rolling previous two days EPG look-back, then click and play any previously aired programme on their favourite TV channel.

DMI claims that its monthly online viewership runs into millions. This depth of viewership is represented by more than 15,000 video titles viewed each month on average along with viewership on its nine live TV channels.

The broadcaster's VOD website also includes seamlessly integrated social and interactive services. For example, a user-generated video competitions section is used during the month of Ramadan. DMI initiates and manages video competitions on EMMS.

DMI recently launched an interactive feature that allows registered users to choose their favourite TV shows and receive an email notification each time a new episode is published on the service. The technology enables DMI to launch a new subscription service, as well as transactional VOD or PPV live service at any time. Endavo has already integrated a mobile payment gateway

to support premium services, owing to the fact that most regional viewers tend to use their mobile phones rather than credit cards for digital purchases.

"In this particular region, audiences seem to prefer to make payments through their mobile phones rather than through credit cards. This initially posed a challenge, but we were able to successfully address it. One of the benefits of the Endavo system is that we can easily integrate with credit card gateways, PayPal, other payment systems and even OSS/BSS systems for telco and cable service providers. This allows complete flexibility for OTT video service providers, like DMI, to authenticate existing pay-TV subscribers or accommodate preferred payment options for new subscribers. The result is that DMI can easily launch new premium services without having to worry about outside technologies or systems," Hamm explains.

The OTT solution provides several layers of support. For instance, it supports video and display advertising for DMI, as well as full-blown sponsorship around a specific show or event, with completely branded destinations seamlessly integrated within DMI's overall user experience. It provides DMI with user interface (UI) and user experience (UX)

design, development and maintenance services. Besides maintaining DMI's VOD website, it has also developed multiple Android and iOS applications for DMI's overall OTT-TV service, as well as for individual channels, such as Dubai One.

By partnering with an end-to-end solutions provider, DMI has been able to focus its attention on getting its content right and leaving its technology to an enabler like Endavo. Hamm adds, "Endavo also has the ability to take DMI's OTT experience to smart TVs and iSTBs such as Roku and Amazon Fire TV."

DMI's digital arm is now focusing its energies on providing more unique content through its OTT services – and there's no better place to start than its huge library of content.

"DMI has a vast library that we are now working on digitising, with the aim of making it available on VOD," ALSamt elaborates. "We also intend to invest more in premium and encrypted content, which will be available only on our OTT services. We are heavily focused on content creation, and our aim is to push the envelope to create highly shareable digital content in a revolutionary new way and position DMI as a broadcaster that is also leading on the OTT front." **PRO**

▲ Paul D Hamm, CEO of Endavo says that as audiences seem to prefer making payments through their mobile phones rather than through credit cards in the MEA, this needed to be addressed.