

RICH MEDIA STREAMING 2.0

Increasing demand for the latest streaming media solutions can be a major opportunity for AV integrators who know AV, IT, and broadcast.



Sonic Foundry's MediaSite Live combines streaming video and audio with content from PowerPoint slides on a custom-branded background, and allows audience interaction during live webcasts.

by Don Kreski

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IF STREAMING had a version 1.0, it was used to produce Internet video for entertainment, news, and marketing. These kinds of setups were, and are, complex and expensive.

"Our bigger broadcast customers," says Jane Phillips, sales manager at MCSi's New Berlin, Wisconsin office, "tend to have production capability and use stand-alone streaming devices. They do their postproduction then send an analog signal to a Pinnacle or Optibase server."

But "version 2" is aimed at the streaming of meetings, whether over the Internet or on corporate or educational networks. The production values and requirements are lower, but in a way the technology is more complex. "Since today's meetings use media as well as speech, we need to show

not only the speaker but his presentation," says Daniel Padnos of rep firm Robert Christopher Sales.

The best-known of these "rich media" products is Sonic Foundry's MediaSite Live. MediaSite allows the streaming of two synchronized windows: one devoted to video (usually an image of the presenter), and the other to computer graphics (typically PowerPoint). MediaSite Live is unique in that it's a complete, prepackaged system—a computer workstation with video, audio, and VGA inputs plus preloaded software that can synchronize the two windows, stream the resulting program live and archive it for future use.

Phillips says that the right customers—those who need to record events and immediately distribute them—love this product, despite its \$22,000 - \$25,000 price tag. She says her MediaSite customers include the University of Wisconsin's Department of Surgery, several law firms and an insurance company. Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle used the product to stream this year's state-of-the-state address.

However Padnos says the system's downside is that it doesn't include editing capabilities. "When you do your web presentation, you'd better get it right the first time," he says.

Padnos suggests Accordent Technologies' PresenterPRO as an alternative for those willing to trade a little of MediaSite's simplicity for more flexibility. PresenterPRO is, by a large margin, the best-selling of these second-generation streaming systems, although they have only recently begun working in the pro AV channel. "Because PresenterPRO is software based, it can use different encoders, run on different media players, tie in documents from other programs, such as Adobe Acrobat and, most importantly, it allows you edit the video and graphics," Padnos says.

Jerry Meier, a project development manager at AVI of Kansas City, KS, says he recently included streaming video in a multi-room AV system at Heartland Regional Medical Center in St. Joseph, MO. Meier says the hospital was required to do a great deal of training, although employees didn't always have time to attend the sessions. So AVI created a system that combined a MediaSite Live workstation, a 17" LCD monitor, a DVD recorder and switching gear, and built the products into a Sound-Craft Systems cabinet with storage for a Sony pan-tilt camera and tripod. "When they're ready to do stand-up training, they roll in the kiosk," he says. Meier says the system cost about \$45,000.

Despite this kind of interest, rich-media streaming hasn't found a large market so far. In a November article posted on Sonic Foundry's website, CEO Rimas Buinevicius noted that their end-user base is only 70 customers, though it's growing rapidly.

"The network has absolutely been the main limitation," Phillips says. However she says those issues are slowly being resolved. "We're seeing 100baseT, gigabit backbones and fiber backbones," she says. "All of a sudden video, which is such a bandwidth hog, now has room to move around the network. And now many companies are giving video priority, so it can take a wider chunk of the bandwidth."

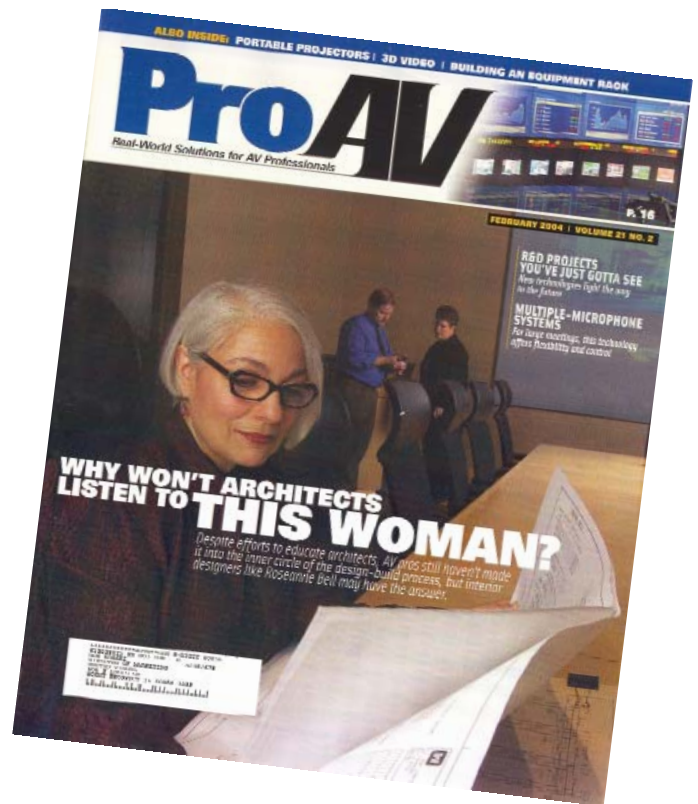
On the other side, the consumer streaming market is booming. According to Accustream Research, almost 7 million people used streaming media in 2002, viewing or listening to 2.5 billion total video and audio streams. It predicted that number will grow by almost 49 percent for 2003, and another 44% in 2004.

James Diaz, vice president of enterprise sales for Sonic Foundry, says that the most promising research his company has seen in the corporate and education markets came about 16 months ago from the Streaming Media Research Group, which reported the total enterprise market at about \$180 - \$200 million. "I would say that the enterprise spend for rich media technologies and infrastructure right now is somewhere between \$200 and about \$400 million," he says.

For now, MCSi hasn't seen much competition when it has sold a streaming solution, which Phillips says may be because of its complexity. "Even though MediaSite comes close to an out-of-the box solution, it's not the right product for every situation," she says. "And while you might find a network company that has a streaming solution, if you ask them how to integrate it into your conference room and control it with Crestron, they can't do it. Broadcast dealers will certainly know more about that, but they don't really understand how meetings function. You'd think we'd bump into other AV dealers, but there's not a lot who have their feet in both the AV and digital worlds."

Padnos agrees. "What we're looking at is not just a convergence of AV and IT, it's the convergence of AV, IT and broadcast," he says. For that reason, he says successful resellers have included AV dealers with a strong background in broadcast, as well as companies that provide the media servers and encoders. Because of this lack of competition, Padnos says most of the 1500 or so Accordent systems installed so far have sold at list price.

So how can pro AV dealers succeed in this market? Sean Brown, a regional manager for Sonic Foundry, says his company is "looking for elite presentation dealers" who



have a consultative or design-build relationship with their customers as well as a basic understanding of IP technologies.

"We need dealers who have people available to their pre-sales staff with Microsoft Enterprise experience and Microsoft web server experience," he says. "Those who have a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer available not just for post-sale technical support but available to the sales force. Because, to be successful, at some point you have to interact with IT." Beyond that, Brown says the new Sonic Foundry dealer must buy a demonstration system and go through extensive training.

MCSi's Phillips thinks the fast growth predicted for the market is realistic. She notes that in the last 45 days her company received six purchase orders for MediaSite products, while it took six months for the previous six sales. "I really think in the next six months to a year we're going to see this explode," she says. "We've been evangelizing and running seminars for a year, but I think now people are getting ready to pull the trigger. All of a sudden now, it's clicking."

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