

Canadian Television Network

Satellite Newsgathering Solutions

Background



CTV is Canada's largest private broadcaster, providing an excellent range of news, sports, and entertainment programming. Owned by Bell Media, CTV has been the most-watched television network in Canada for nine consecutive years. CTV broadcasts news from around the world and has a critical need to supply up to date, broadcast quality news to the more than 25 million viewers who watch the network each week.

Problem

Prior to Norsat's involvement, CTV used low bandwidth satellite data terminals to uplink stories produced by their correspondents who were covering Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Submitting a single two to three minute story often took eight or nine hours, and incurred significant satellite airtime charges. The legacy system also did not have the bandwidth required to perform live interviews with acceptable video quality.

Due to the ongoing expense and lack of flexibility of this system, CTV searched for a solution that would provide the ability to send live broadcast-quality video, reduce their operating expenses, and remain easy to use, so the network could avoid sending broadcast engineer into crisis situations. The solution had to be transportable, rugged, and reliable enough to operate for several years in the challenging environment of Kandahar. The critical time scales for breaking news coverage also necessitated that the solution be supported by a technical support team who would provide 24x7x365 troubleshooting and assistance to ensure that the broadcast team never missed a story. Additionally, CTV was looking for a rental option to provide supplemental coverage when other systems were unavailable.

Solution

After a consultation with CTV on their needs and applications, Norsat proposed a 1m lightweight carbon fibre 25 Watt NewsLink™ Satellite News Gathering Flyaway System, which was purchased in 2006. Norsat provided operational training for the broadcast team and following training, the system was hand carried to Kandahar, where it was used to cover the Canadian troop deployment to Afghanistan. Over the next five years, the NewsLink™ fly-away was used heavily by the Canadian press pool for satellite news gathering and broadcast. In the spring of 2011, Norsat remotely upgraded the terminal at CTV's request with an SDI (BNC) digital video input with embedded audio to the MPEG-2 encoder, to enable a full digital path for both audio and video.

In 2010, one of CTV's Satellite News Trucks was critically damaged after covering a major news event in British Columbia. As this was their only satellite truck in western Canada, CTV urgently needed a solution that would fill in for the satellite truck while it was being repaired and upgraded. Following this urgent request, Norsat was able to provide another NewsLink™ portable terminal on short notice to meet their specifications and needs. The system was provided on a flexible rental contract to facilitate rapid deployment and enabled CTV to continue their coverage of breaking news events without significant interruption. The unit remained in use for a further four months while the satellite truck was repaired and during that time it provided news contribution capabilities to all of Western Canada. Norsat continues to provide temporary SNG flyaway rental terminals for CTV and other broadcasters as needed to support short term requirements.

SUMMARY

Norsat has provided high quality Satellite News Gathering Equipment and services to CTV, Canada's largest private broadcaster, since 2006. Prior to working with Norsat, CTV used a combination of Satellite News Trucks and low bandwidth satellite terminals to cover Canada's international and domestic news events, however they lacked a solution that could be easily transported overseas, provide live broadcast capabilities anywhere in the world, and reduce operating expenses. Using Norsat's NewsLink™ satellite fly-away terminals, CTV has been able to broadcast important breaking news events from Afghanistan and across Canada to millions of viewers around the world.

"We have already put this [NewsLink™] unit through the harshest test of service in Kandahar and if its performance there was any indication we will be on the air from, well anywhere, for years to come."

- Dave Alexander
ENG Operations Manager, CTV



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CTV CASE STUDY

In 2011, following the completion of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, the original NewsLink flyaway system was shipped back to Norsat’s Vancouver facilities where it was refurbished and upgraded to support full HD. The original 25W NewsLink was rebuilt with an 80W SSPA and an MPEG4/DVB-S2 encoder/modulator to enable full High Definition capabilities. The upgraded NewsLink™ fly-away system was subsequently used to cover a variety of Canadian political news events in HD quality broadcast, including elections in BC and Alberta.

Results

Norsat’s NewsLink™ SNG fly-away terminal provided the rugged, portable, cost effective solution CTV needed. The terminal was easily airline portable, enabling CTV to send it on location to Kandahar, where it was used as a primary news gathering and broadcast link for the Canadian press corps for five full years. The portability of the unit reduced CTV’s reliance on Satellite News trucks, reducing the cost associated with broadcasting from remote locations, and providing a return on investment very quickly. The NewsLink™ flyaway enabled CTV to provide live broadcast quality coverage, and reduced the operating expenses via lowered access fees. The durability and reliability of the terminal was clearly evident as it remained in excellent operational form during deployment in Kandahar, requiring very little maintenance and ensuring high quality news feed for Canadian broadcasters.

The NewsLink™ flyaway terminal was scalable and easily upgraded as CTV’s needs changed. The terminal was adjusted remotely to enable digital audio while on location in Kandahar, and eventually upgraded to enable HD broadcast. Norsat can continue to modify or upgrade the terminal as needed.

Norsat’s quick response to CTV’s emergency satellite terminal needs enabled the network to continue covering important breaking news across Western Canada. When the network’s satellite news truck was damaged in 2010, this was their only available method of broadcast and Norsat’s quick provision, setup and service of a rental NewsLink™ flyaway was essential for Western Canadian news coverage during the truck’s repair. The rapid deployment, ease of use and cost effectiveness of this rental led CTV to continue to their use of Norsat’s rental service in the following months, and Norsat continues to provide satellite terminal rentals to cover a variety of Canadian events such as festivals and concerts.

The Norsat support team has been available to CTV on a 24x7x365 basis to provide trouble-shooting and operational support, ensuring every broadcast is timely and successful. Additionally, Norsat’s thorough training of CTV’s broadcast team enables team members to successfully operate and maintain the unit in the field, and removes the need to send broadcast engineers into dangerous situations.

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- Dave Alexander, ENG Operations Manager, CTV

For more information about Norsat’s Satellite News Gathering terminals, including lease and rental options, please visit <http://www.norsat.com/solutions/satellite-solutions/>.

About CTV

CTV is Canada’s largest private broadcaster, offering a wide range of leading news, sports, and entertainment programming. It has the #1 national newscast, CTV National News with Lisa LaFlamme, and broadcasts the top-ranked local newscasts in 11 of the 12 major Canadian markets, reaching more than 25 million viewers each week. CTV is also the #1 choice for prime-time viewing, and has been the most-watched television network in Canada for the past nine consecutive years.



CTV is a division of Bell Media, Canada’s premier multimedia company with leading assets in television, radio and digital. With passion and an unrelenting commitment to excellence, Bell Media entertains, informs and inspires Canadians. Bell Media owns 28 conventional stations, including CTV, Canada’s #1 television network and lead broadcaster of the London 2012 Olympic Games, and owns and operates 29 specialty channels, including TSN, Canada’s #1 specialty channel and RDS, Canada’s #1 French-language specialty channel. Bell Media also owns 33 radio stations, dozens of websites including the Sympatico.ca portal, and Dome Productions Inc. Bell Media is owned by BCE Inc. (TSX, NYSE: BCE), Canada’s largest communications company. For more on Bell Media, please visit www.bellmedia.ca.



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