

# AV MAGAZINE

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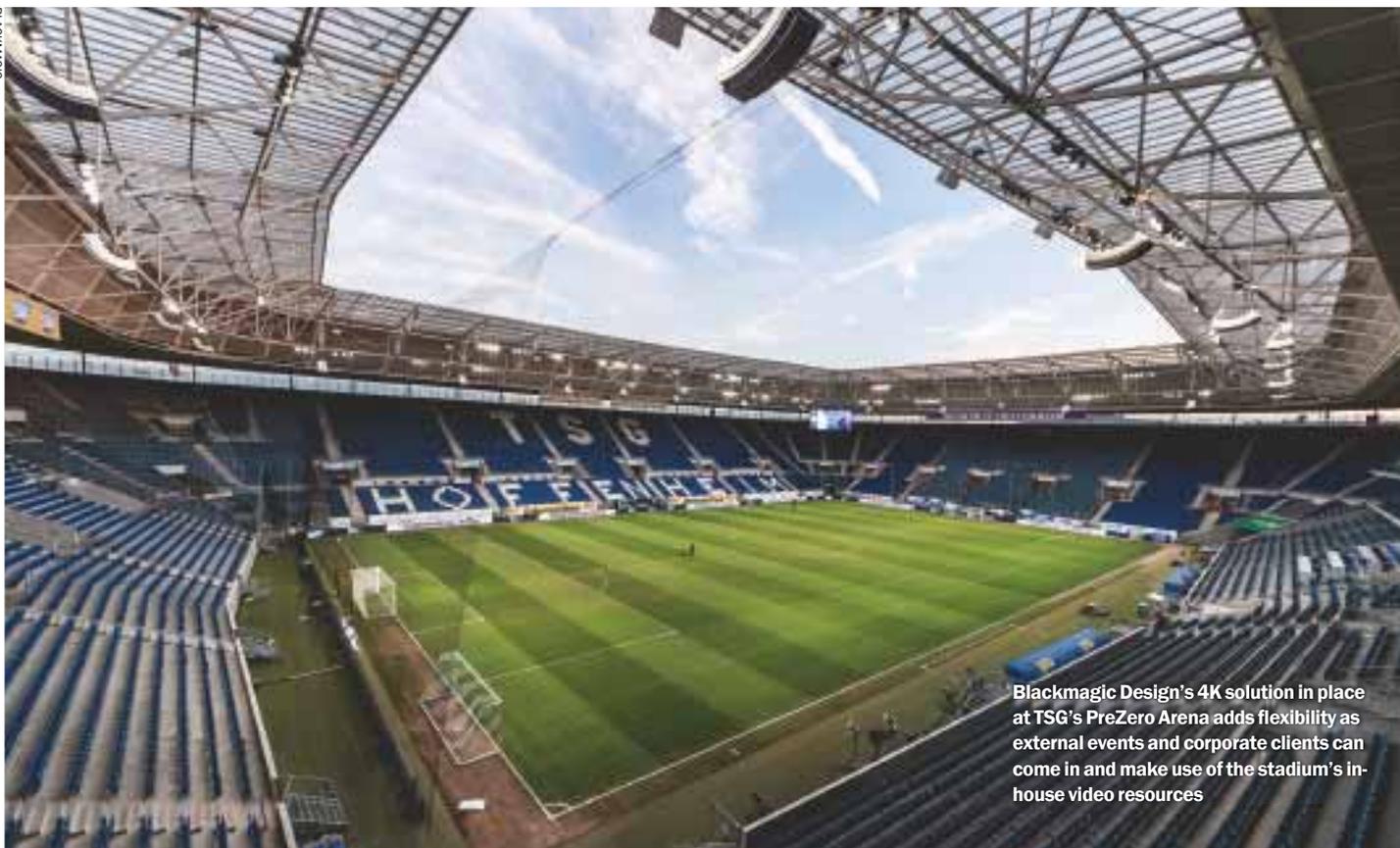
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BLACKMAGIC



Blackmagic Design's 4K solution in place at TSG's PreZero Arena adds flexibility as external events and corporate clients can come in and make use of the stadium's in-house video resources

# Get them off the sofas and into the stands

Stadia and performance venues want fans to be able to seamlessly interact with mobile devices to see game stats, replays, choose camera points-of-view, and get alerts to special events, says *Paul Bray*.

It's one of life's little ironies that the Holy Grail of many sports stadia and performance venues is to match the experience we can all enjoy on our sofas at home. If they succeed, the thrill of 'being there' will persuade fans to part with a fistful of £10 notes to attend the live experience. If they fail – well, that sofa can seem awfully comfortable.

"As a sports fan I have three distinct experiences – what I watch on TV, a smartphone application that provides multimedia, stats and more, and the in-venue experience," says Rob Muddiman, EMEA sales director at ZeeVee. "In the US, opening month audience draws for Major League Baseball are

on a decline. I see venues trying, though early stages, to replicate the first two experiences in the stadium to help draw people to the third.

Muddiman believes that eventually fans will want to be able to be in the venue and seamlessly interact with mobile devices to see game stats, replays, choose camera points-of-view, and get alerts to special events at the venue. "The perfect experience for me is watching someone play live and getting an alert to grab my phone to look at a slow-motion replay only available in the venue," he says.

The latest trend though is to bring the game-day or performance experience into the mobile device. "While audi-

ences are being entertained by what's happening on the court or stage, their mobile device is being used to capture the moment and look up stats or other information," agrees Joe Walsh, vice-president of sales for sports and entertainment at Vitec.

According to Todd Erdley, CEO of

**"It's not uncommon to have 1,000 or 2,000 displays, so fans can leave their seats and never miss a moment."**

**Joe Walsh**

Vice-president of sales, sports and entertainment, Vitec

Videon, the concept of being able to live-stream low-latency video to thousands of fans is shifting from being a goal to a reality. Consider the breakthroughs made in the past 18 months with the adoption of the CMAF (Common Media Application Format) standard. Hardware encoder, cloud and device player companies have adopted CMAF workflows, resulting in three-second glass-to-glass latency. Because this is based on an HTTP workflow the opportunity to deliver at scale is very real.

"Add the new element of device synchronisation to low-latency delivery with cloud statistic features, and an entirely new opportunity for in-stadium



Really Creative Media relied on a variety of Panasonic projectors for Bastille's recent touring production



Exterity's IP video solution is used for content streaming at Elbphilharmonie



SSE Arena Belfast upgraded with Tripleplay digital signage and IPTV



Newtek's TriCaster is being used at Olympique Lyonnais club

experiences becomes possible. Between the action, fans could watch replays, selecting the type of content and statistics presented," he says.

### Increasing interactivity

The prospect of having 100,000 people simultaneously accessing video data between each play is daunting. But with the advent of 5G, a stadium becomes an outstanding application of 5G and the enablement of massive bandwidth.

"Interactivity lets the stadium audience interact with the screens, sending messages about the game, as well as betting, ordering tickets for upcoming events, and ordering food, drinks and club merchandise linked to venue offers," says Ross Burling, business development manager at Absen.

This brings us to another compelling reason for stadiums and venues to provide blanket AV coverage.

"They recognise that financial success hinges on more than what happens on the pitch," says Colin Farquhar, CEO of Exterity. "Fan engagement throughout the facility is an increasingly critical part of the overall experience and return on investment, and a Premier League soccer club can earn as much as a third of its revenues from experiential match day events such as hospitality, merchandising and refreshments.

"It's all about enticing fans in earlier, providing pre- and post-match entertainment, special offers on merchandise, and an extensive range of food and beverage, and AV can span every facet of this."

IPTV-driven screens at the entrance can reinforce branding, engage with arriving supporters and create a buzz. In central atriums, displays provide guests with information about seating and facilities; increasingly these signs are dynamically managed to cater for unique events, special offers or seating section changes. And in bars and beverage areas, screens help to entice spending and show the live action so fans don't miss anything when at the bar.

"It's not uncommon to have 1,000 or 2,000 displays, so fans can leave their seats and never miss a moment of the action because they can see a live, high-quality, low-latency feed wherever they go," adds Walsh.

### Memorable live staging

The music industry also relies heavily on AV in live venues. "This is due to the changing landscape of the industry, where 75 per cent of an artist's revenue

now comes from live performances," says Lucy Meredith, field marketing manager at Panasonic Visual Systems.

"Artists use memorable live performances to promote their music and grow their brand. This has made projectors a popular component of live performances, mapping large screens behind the artist. In future we can expect to see more holographic and live projection tracking, with artists using holograms to project images of supporting actors on to the stage.

"Both concert audiences and sports fans expect to feel involved in the action, whether they're standing at the front or sitting in the gods, so large panel displays have also become an expectation in large venues, providing a clear view of the performers or players as well as close-up replays."

Performance venues, such as Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, are broadening their use of AV from large screen, on-stage projection to installing screens in the foyer and bars. "Digital signage can promote upcoming events, while live streams can ensure late-comers don't miss out until they can be shown to their seats. Backstage, live streaming of the stage performance can help with cast cues and assist stagehands to have the audience's view of the stage and prepare for scene changes," adds Farquhar.

The glamour and excitement of sports stadia and performance venues can make them highly attractive to installers and vendors, especially if they are sport or music fans themselves. But breaking into the sector is not easy, »

### PICTURE THIS



When Picture This played Dublin's 3Arena in March, the stage setup included two large format curved screens supplied by Faber plus LED screens contained in the floor of the stage, providing the canvas for multimedia content created by Dublin-based creative production studio, Algorithm. The video was powered by two Avolites R4 media servers driving a total of around 14 million pixels.



cautions James Keen, group head of marketing at Tripleplay.

“The hardest part is getting a foot in the door, and once you’re in the pressure is on to deliver,” he says.

“We’ve seen some of the world’s biggest vendors and integrators struggling to establish in the space and resorting to giving away service and product for virtually nothing, or in exchange for a commercial package, just to get a reference site. Venues and stadia are very open and share knowledge quite freely, so suppliers doing a good job are accelerated while those who don’t are quickly kicked into touch.”

If you want to build a good reputation in this market you have to get to know your clients and their challenges, work with them to find mutual solutions, and ensure they’re getting full value from their investment. If you see arenas and stadia as transactional accounts you won’t succeed.

The puppy-like eagerness of some suppliers can also cause issues for buyers. “When businesses are itching to get into a sector they can sometimes over-promise on their solutions or ser-

WELLS FARGO CENTER



At Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, large format L-Acoustics line arrays have been installed around the central scoreboard gondola. The system is used in this configuration during basketball and ice hockey games for entertainment and advertising before, during and after the game, and can then be easily reconfigured to provide sound reinforcement for live concerts.

vices,” says Keen. “Sometimes a product or company just doesn’t fit into a sector, however much they want it to, so buyers need to be aware of the limitations of a solution and the reasons it hasn’t been deployed in their market.”

Spending power

Another common misconception is the spending power of venues. “They’re not as cash rich as people think,” says Keen. “So suppliers who think it’s OK to pitch at full list price or with a bit added on top often come away with their tails between their legs. Venues talk, they have a good handle on the

value of products and services, and they won’t be taken for a ride.”

Once a contract is awarded, the window for installation may be a narrow one. “Most venues are used for nine or 10 months of the year, limiting the time any install can take place,” says Burling.

And while a stadium or arena might look very big, finding a place to hang a giant screen or install a studio can be surprisingly challenging. “Space is perhaps the most significant consideration,” says Craig Heffernan, EMEA director of technical sales at Blackmagic. “Constructing a purpose-

built studio within a venue that wasn’t designed with that in mind is fraught with challenges, whether that’s trying to lay new cabling infrastructure, or the need to repurpose a space that might already be generating revenue, such as a private box.”

“Theatres and concert venues are often buildings of historical importance, so any installation should enhance not detract from the venue’s heritage, and wall mounted or ceiling hanging may not be viable,” adds Jasmin Stemmler, product marketing manager at NEC Display Solutions Europe. ■

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