

C-SPAN Maximizes Efficiency, Expands Coverage with Sony's "Robo VJ" Kits.

Customer:

- C-SPAN

Industry:

- Broadcasting

Challenges:

- Enable greater government access to the American public
- Provide window on governmental proceedings
- Improve efficiencies to maximize coverage of events
- Develop new technologies/methodologies to maximize resources

Solution:

- Sony's BRC-series HD PTZ cameras, RM-BR300 remote control units, and MCS-8M compact audio/video mixing switcher

Benefits:

- Delivered superb full HD broadcast-quality imaging with a small footprint via the BRC PTZ cameras, easing transport and unobtrusive camera placement
- Significantly reduced shooting crew size because of remote control operation
- Added full field production capabilities simply and easily with the MCS-8M switcher



Over the past 35 years, C-SPAN's mission of opening a window on government by telecasting political and policy proceedings to millions of Americans on cable and satellite TV has become a mainstay for many engaged in public life. Given the abundant number of such events and limited resources for the privately-funded non-profit company, carrying out the mission requires creativity and nimbleness.

Now C-SPAN has created a new field production paradigm using "Robo VJs," leveraging Sony's BRC-H900, H700, and Z700 robotic HD cameras, along with its MCS-8M compact audio/video mixing switchers and RM-BR300 remote control units. In many situations these Robo VJs make it possible to provide more expanded coverage than is possible with traditional techniques.

"Using Sony's Robo VJs helps us optimize our operations, creating efficiencies that

generate savings in people and equipment," said Roxane Kerr, C-SPAN's VP of Technology.

For Kevin Washburn, Director of Field Operations, Robo VJs make it possible to cover more ground with smaller crews. "On any given day, we have our eye on twice as many events as we can cover, so we're always pushing hard," he said. "With Sony's BRC cameras, we're able to get to many more. A two- or three-camera set-up often takes four people. With the Sony Robo VJ, it can take as few as two people."

Washburn added that the full Robo VJ concept combines the cameras with the MCS-8M compact audio/video mixing switcher and RM-BR300 remote control units to make for a complete production kit. "The whole package doesn't just increase the number of events that can be covered, it also improves the quality of the coverage. In some venues we have been able to add a second robotic camera where we previously might have only been allowed to use a single manned camera.

"Watching only the speaker for an hour is limiting, but now being able to deliver a switched feed lets you see the audience

Beyond Definition





BRC-H900

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Roxane Kerr,
VP of Technology, C-SPAN

response. That tells so much more of the story,” Washburn said.

Developing the Robo VJ

Both Kerr and Washburn have more than 30 years with C-SPAN and have seen the evolution of broadcast technology since the Betacam® era. Robotic cameras have long been a staple at C-SPAN, but the small size of Sony’s BRC series opened new opportunities. In early 2010, they began to explore the possibilities.

“We started testing with a pair of -Z700s, putting them to work providing an unswitched feed for events featuring one or two speakers, like presentations at think tanks and interviews with book authors. We’ve found that the 20x optical zoom allows us to use the cameras in large auditoriums where you need that long throw,” said Washburn.

These proved so useful that they were deployed for events with more speakers, including hearings on Capitol Hill. In the time since, C-SPAN’s fleet of BRC-series cameras has expanded beyond the BRC-Z700 and now includes the BRC-H700 and BRC-H900; they are used for a wide range of events, including festivals for Book TV. The different feature sets make each the best choice for particular applications and settings.

According to Washburn, the BRC-H700’s ND filter makes it better suited for outdoor work in bright sunlight. The BRC-H900’s 1/2” sensors deliver the finest image quality. What they all share in common is small size,

light weight, and Sony’s renowned image quality and reliability.

“Camera placement is crucial, and because the BRCs are so small, venues are willing to let us place cameras in the audience. With a full-sized camera and camera operator, that would be unacceptable because the people seated behind it would be blocked. And the light weight makes it easy to our crews to transport the gear and set it up,” Washburn said.

Also, adding the MCS-8M compact audio/video mixing switcher has added a crucial dimension, making it possible to produce finished packages with little additional effort.

“The MCS-8M is menu-driven, which works well for us because much of the work we do day-in, day-out follows the same formula,” said Washburn. “This has all the capabilities we need and they’re also road-worthy. They get bounced around plenty, and have held up well.”

Getting Ready for the Coming Elections

Making it easier for the crews is crucial with the coming presidential election cycle. Normally, most events happen around C-SPAN’s headquarters in Washington, DC, but the elections call for extensive travel across the country.

“Our crews volunteer to take on the travel assignments, and the ability to send them out with a Robo VJ instead of traditional equipment helps cut down on the wear-and-tear on them, and that is essential as



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we get stretched thin covering candidates,” according to Washburn.

For Kerr, there are also new possibilities for Sony’s BRC technology that may create an even more efficient operation. For the past several months, her staff has been developing a new way to do field acquisition—from inside C-SPAN headquarters.

“We’ve installed an MCS-8M in a small room here in our facility and will be

connecting it to BRC cameras over fiber. We can direct from here and that means we can operate with sending fewer people out on location,” said Kerr.

“We have many demands on our budget from maintaining existing equipment to trying to develop new capacities. We always set aside resources to test new equipment and to innovate new techniques. Here, our investment in Sony’s technology has given us a terrific return,” said Kerr.



MCS-8M

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