

Greg Cupitt, ABA Manager Planning represented the ABA at the 9th Broadcast Asia 2004 Annual Conference and Exhibition held in Singapore 12–18 June 2004. He also presented a paper, *Implementation of Digital Television in Australia*. This is his report on the conference.

# BroadcastAsia 2004

The theme for the BroadcastAsia 2004 International Conference was 'Redefining Broadcasting' and it was held in conjunction with CommunicAsia 2004.

This combination of events provided a unique opportunity to assess technology developments and trends across a range of broadcasting, radiocommunications and multimedia fields.

The conference focused on interactive television/digital lifestyles, mobile broadcasting, digital audio broadcasting, digital terrestrial broadcasting and broadcasting management.

## Interactive television/digital lifestyles

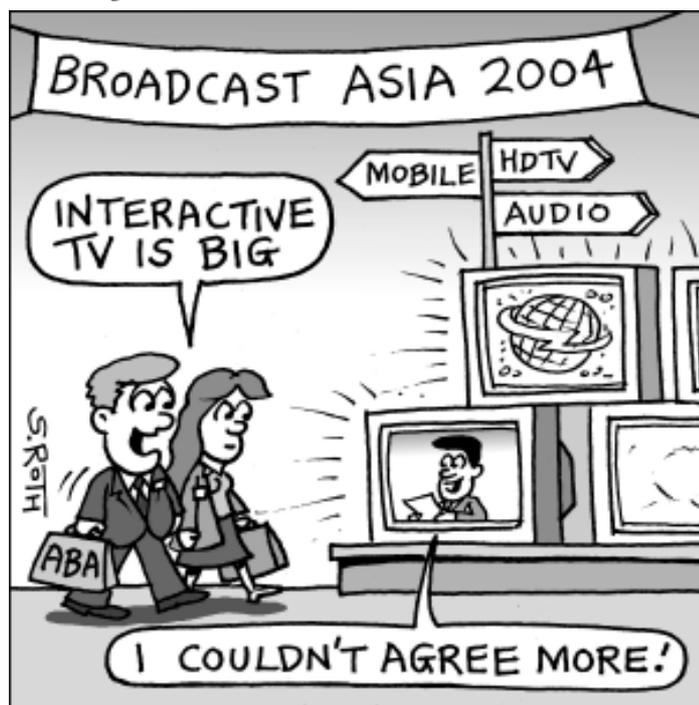
Presentations on this topic emphasised the importance of content in the take up of digital services. The presentations not only addressed storage and access solutions for content, but also the impact of personal video recorders (PVRs) on the viewing population and how their introduction has the potential to change the way content and advertisements are presented. Discussion on PVRs extended to the manner in which they are used by the viewer and how a viewer's habits, in terms of watching television programs, has changed in those areas where PVRs are widely available. 'Live events', such as sport, still dominate viewing patterns but serials and news or current affairs type programs will, more often than not, find their way to the PVR. Quite a large amount of material recorded is not routinely accessed and watched.

## Digital lifestyles and the consumer experience of the digital age

Presentations in this session looked at the type of content that will capture the attention of the viewer in the digital television age, the impact digital television (and in particular high definition television) is having on the Japanese market and television landscape, interactive television, MHP and its impact.

Japan's digital satellite broadcasting HDTV system has, since its launch in 2000, has achieved penetration into five million households, whilst digital terrestrial broadcasting commenced in the three metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in December 2003. In the first month some 200,000 households subscribed to the new digital services.

Also discussed in this session was SMS and how it is working hand in glove with television to form an integral part of the interactive environment, and finally the influence of the recently announced DVB-H standard and its delivery of digital television to hand-held devices or terminals. Other topics referenced trials that are occurring in a number of overseas markets and the potential impacts on viewers, advertisers, broadcasters and regulators of developments in interactivity, SMS and television and the previously mentioned DVB-H standard. These sessions highlighted the next phase in the digital progression – mobile reception. A feature of this session was the convergence of mobile media with what might be termed 'conventional media' and its



potential to go further than all other previous media paradigm shifts. Speakers also reinforced the fact that as mobile services will be delivered by multiple technologies, the historical division between telecommunications and broadcasting is eroding. This theme set the scene for many future presentations during the conference.

### Mobile broadcasting – bane or boon?

A showcase session was the ‘Mobile Broadcasting – Bane or Boon?’ forum which focused on the rapidly emerging mobile wireless technologies. The ABA was represented on the forum by Andree Wright, ABA Director, Industry Performance and Review, (see her report, *ABA Update*, August 2004, page 20). The forum was conducted in two parts: an industry showcase on mobile broadcasting with speakers from Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland and a panel discussion ‘Regulating Mobile Content Services – Reshaping the Role of the Regulator’.

### From analog to digital

The change over from analog to digital and the issues faced by countries in managing the switch-off of the analog television signals was addressed in some detail in a further session. It became obvious in hearing from the various presenters that the ‘switch-off’ will be dealt with in a number of different ways by different constituencies. Social and cultural factors will play a significant part in the decisions to be taken, coupled with addressing the simple, yet complex, matter of complementary analog and digital signal coverage. This is an area where lessons rather than practices are the important learnings to be taken forward.

The influence of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) on the traditional perception of radio broadcasting was assessed and reviewed in a number of presentations which considered the impacts of DAB services in a number of countries which included Australia, the United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, Korea and Singapore. The audience also heard from various presenters who intro-

duced concepts such as video radio and synchronous FM systems – different complementary systems that bring local and global broadcasting and the delivery of multimedia content to radio and into the digital age.

An observation from the conference was that while the United Kingdom continues to be at the forefront of DAB development, the emphasis in the past 12 to 18 months has moved to other European and Asian countries where the DAB market is now starting to take off. An example is Singapore.

### DAB

A feature of the DAB session was a presentation by MediaCorp Radio, Singapore, who discussed and promoted DAB products and innovations that have been launched in the region using Eureka-147. Prices of DAB receivers are rapidly falling and as a result the 13 digital audio stations SmartRadio has in operation are proving to be popular. Six of the 13 stations can be heard exclusively on DAB radio, and seven are the more popular FM stations on simulcast. Access to more than 20 types of timely data information services, including song titles, traffic reports and weather updates is also available on all DAB receivers. Another project or feature is the Mr. Taxi-Smart – an LCD screen cum DAB receiver device mounted in the cabins of some 50 Singapore taxis. The screen provides the

commuter with music entertainment from SmartRadio and up-to-date on demand infotainment such as news clips and traffic reports.

### Asean Digital Broadcasting Meeting

On the day before the start of the BroadcastAsia Conference, Asean country broadcasting representatives met to discuss the ‘Path to a Common Set Top Box (STB)’ for the region.

This was the second meeting of the group to define a common STB specification. One of the driving considerations is that, with a population totalling more than 500 million, pooling demand is considered a major factor in keeping the costs of STBs to a minimum. It was recognised at the meeting that defining a common standard is not easy, and while the more advanced countries in the group are looking for some of the more sophisticated features such as interactivity, conditional access and PVR capabilities, some of the countries are yet to adopt a digital television standard.

All countries agreed that in order to have widespread adoption of digital television, costs need to be lowered. A task force of the member countries is to continue to explore the possibilities having had the opportunity to listen to and question speakers from set top box manufacturers, broadcasters and suppliers. ☒

### Conference preview: IBC 2004

The IBC 2004 Conference and Exhibition will be on in Amsterdam from 9 to 13 September and promises to be a great and informative event. The conference theme days include delivery and networks, content protection, content production and how to make best use of digital technology in terms of home area network and interactive television.

Digital cinema will attract its share of interest from the commercial, creative and technical aspects points of view.

Each theme day will include a keynote address from an industry leader, parallel strands looking at technical, practical and

commercial issues through papers, workshops and panel discussions.

The exhibition is expected to be a great complement to the conference, with 1000 exhibitors placing their products on show and 40 000 people anticipated to go through the turnstiles. The exhibition provides a great opportunity for checking out the latest developments in digital television and radio technologies, receiver developments and digital compression standards.

Giles Tanner, ABA Acting Member and General Manager, and Fred Gengaroli, ABA Acting Director Planning will attend the conference this year. ☒