

TVBEurope

EUROPE'S TELEVISION TECHNOLOGY NEWSMAGAZINE

CMP
United Business Media



NAB set for AAF-compliant products, of which Quantel iQ is first

■ AAF editing integration expected for NAB Post steps forward

by Nick Radlo

BARCELONA — While the Advanced Authoring Format has yet to make its presence felt across the broadcast industry, there's substantial work going on behind the scenes to encourage its adoption as a key file format for the complex work that takes place in post production.

A recent developers' conference in Barcelona saw several major equipment suppliers and broadcasters send their top software engineers to help refine the first data sets that will be implemented in products this year.

NAB 2002 will be an important launch pad for AAF in action, with more manufacturers integrating the format in products aimed at post production.

Users are certainly looking forward to the benefits AAF will offer them, witnessed by the number of post production houses as well as broadcasters that have joined the AAF Association. As one participant in Barcelona pointed out: "If you're building low-cost nonlinear editor software and you include this now, you won't half be popular!"

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NEWS

Post steps forward

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The initial target for the AAF Association was to get a straightforward method of using AAF in the market: finding an edit interchange extension for AAF software developers kit was seen as an important step forward, as it offers real and tangible benefits to users.

The conference set about refining the AAF SDK, and worked on the guidelines for implementation of an editing interchange that will allow users to move on from their current use of EDLs in post production towards a kind of 'super EDL' that should make life easier.

"It's extremely frustrating working in post production right now, when technology gets in the way of what you want to do. But as we've seen in the AAF Association, manufacturers are co-operating to get the interoperability we need," said AAF Association Executive Director Brad Gilmer. "It has a lot of value to users who want to come out of one system and into another, seamlessly."

Quantel's iQ finishing system is the first product to implement AAF in this way — it is in use at Modern Video in Los Angeles, where conforms are done using AAF, not standard EDLs. The implementation of the edit interchange guidelines is likely to mark a milestone in AAF development, since it is readily identifiable evidence of AAF working in practice.

Gilmer states that AAF is a completely open standard and is free to use — and isn't in competition with other formats. "AAF isn't closed: for

instance, there's no reason there can't be a tie-in between AAF and QuickTime. We want that, and think it would add value to QuickTime by adding media asset management and routing," he said.

WORKING WITH MXF

The AAF Association has appointed as engineering director Phil Tudor, a senior engineer at BBC Research and Development, who was pleased with the progress made at Barcelona. "The range of companies involved is a sign of real technical engagement," he said.

Avid Technology, Microsoft, Sony Broadcast, Discreet, the BBC and Quantel have all contributed substantially to the development of AAF, and most were represented. Tudor's first priority is to ensure AAF Association members get the support and documentation they need to implement AAF — especially the edit interchange implementation guidelines, to ensure interoperability between applications using AAF.

"What we're doing in terms of implementation is exactly what teams of software developers working on new products are looking for: a step-by-step guide on how to implement AAF in their products," Tudor said.

The AAF Association has also been working on the tie-in with the file exchange format MXF. AAF is making use of the extensive work done on descriptive metadata for MXF, and the work is underway to map MXF into AAF, so the AAF toolkit can read and write MXF files directly. "Having both formats in the AAF toolkit minimises the learning effort application writers have to put in — and that's an important consideration for the small software teams in most companies," said Tudor.