

Aastra serves up a world of communication



Facts & Figures

The Customer

- BBC World Service, London

The Solution

- Ascotel ISDN Telephone System
- Switchable ISDN feeds

The Benefits

- Easy 'patching' of programmes and live broadcasts
- Broadcast digital quality programmes
- Significant cost savings

The BBC World Service broadcasts international news, analysis and information in English and 42 other languages. For more than 6 decades it has maintained a reputation for the highest standards of journalistic integrity and impartiality, gaining an audience of 151 million. Programmes are broadcast from London on short-wave and the Internet, with additional correspondents providing news and reports on location around the world.

To enhance the efficiency of information flow throughout its head-quarters, the BBC World Service needed a communications system to manage and broadcast high quality news reports and live commentary from around the world using ISDN. To achieve this the BBC turned to Aastra, specialists in ISDN, for a complete project managed solution.

With an increasingly large amount of programmes and broadcast information being fed into BBC World Service headquarters via ISDN, the organisation was faced with two choices. It could either install a large number of individual ISDN connections, or find a cost-effective communications switching system that could channel its external ISDN feeds from multiple locations out to its studios for broadcast.

Aastra provided a direct and extensive consultancy service to the BBC's on-site broadcast and IT specialists to assist in developing an appropriate solution. Its Ascotel system offered the capability to switch all the BBC's internal and external ISDN requirements and ensure the high quality broadcasts expected from the BBC. This system is widely used by businesses throughout the UK for similar applications.

ISDN Delivers High Quality Broadcast Material

The BBC decided to implement an Ascotel system with one primary rate ISDN connection to receive all external feeds and a number of internal ISDN extensions to enable easy patching of any programmes or live broadcasts through to the appropriate BBC studios. This allows programme producers to receive, edit and ultimately broadcast digital quality programming without any degradation of quality.

The system has now been implemented throughout the BBC World Service to handle live news and sports programming received from anywhere in the world. "Using the Ascotel systems to perform the switching function for our ISDN requirements represents large cost savings for us due to the high cost of purchasing basic rate

ISDN at source," said John Westbury, systems specialist, BBC Resources Ltd. "Aastra worked extremely quickly to provide support for our test runs. After analysing the results, we chose Aastra as the best solution for our requirements."

The Ascotel can also help with ongoing cost management: by channelling the information it receives through a powerful V.24 data port, it provides information on usage of the ISDN channels, plus essential information on call costs. This is important for such data calls, which are normally of long duration making cost management extremely important.

Administration and Control Through System Management

With the Ascotel installed, the BBC is able to pre-programme and control its incoming ISDN load at any time to serve only the number of studios required. This eliminates the need to set up hundreds of basic rate ISDN channels keeping them 'open' at all times. As the primary rate ISDN feeds into the Ascotel, the service can be patched through to any studio or device throughout the BBC's extensive structured cabling system.

The system is regularly used at 'full power', especially for live sports and news events. The Sydney Olympics provided a stringent series of tests for the Ascotel, as sports commentaries and reports were fed live from Australia to London via an ISDN line in Sydney. Reporters were channelled into the BBC via the Ascotel system, which then switched the connection to a basic rate signal for broadcast to World Service listeners either as a live feed or as part of a recorded and edited programme.

"Aastra has been supplying data only switches for sometime, and as a result our ISDN expertise and experience enabled us to meet the BBC's exacting requirements," said Mike Ballantine, business development manager, Aastra Telecom. "We're the leading provider of telephony systems to radio stations in the UK. Most of our customers use their Ascotel systems for their voice requirements as well as for their ISDN broadcast requirements."

Flexibility for the Future

Ascotel systems are now installed at BBC World Service Bush House, BBC Broadcasting House, BBC Television Centre and BBC Westminster.

The systems are built with a high degree of flexibility and programmability, features resulting from Aastra's pedigree of Swiss-made manufacturing excellence. For example, Aastra engineers can remotely programme the switches used for the BBC's complex and widely changing communications needs, many of which can occur outside office hours.

A summary of the benefits

- High quality digital broadcasting
- Significant cost savings on ISDN connection investment
- Ability to switch received live broadcast feeds easily between studios
- Easy remote system support, reducing engineering time and support costs
- Optimised line usage for cost saving
- Swiss engineered manufacturing excellence
- Flexibility & programmability
- Specialist consultancy project management and system implementation

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