

MOS Grows for New News Needs

Latest version of protocol extends benefits to Web

by Craig Johnston

SEATTLE

"How do I get my brand-X computer system to communicate with my brand-Y media server?" is the question posed on the Media Object Server (MOS) protocol's Web site. The answer for most newsroom computer and peripheral device makers is the MOS protocol.

MOS was born at AP's ENPS developer's conference nearly eight years ago, and today is the communication protocol used by all but one of the newsroom computer vendors. MOS protocol has grown and evolved through the years, steered by The MOS Group, made up of broadcast equipment vendors and customers.

WEB PROTOCOL

"This year at NAB we're presenting MOS 3.8.2 that will complement MOS version 2.8.2," said Mike Palmer, director of broadcast digital distribution systems and strategy for ENPS and acting moderator of The MOS Group.

Version 2.8.2 will continue to be used by newsroom computer systems communicating with peripheral devices such as video and audio servers, still stores and character generators. "[Version] 3.8.2 is based on Web services transport," said Palmer. "I know that there are a lot of people who are very excited about that."

"The main benefit [of MOS] to anybody is it's a standard, published protocol that different companies can use to communicate with each other," said Neil Hutchins, chief technology officer at Autocue Systems.

Autocue is a recent convert to MOS. Because the company made a newsroom computer system, an automation system and a teleprompting system that shared the same database, Autocue could use its own protocol to communicate among those machines.

"The use of MOS by everybody else convinced us that we needed to properly support it in order to properly communicate with devices from other companies," said Hutchins.

That leaves one MOS holdout on the newsroom computer side, Comprompter News and Automation.

"I'm not particularly anti-MOS as I'm not a MOS supporter," said Comprompter president Ralph King. "I don't see the need for it."

Comprompter writes its own interface software to the protocols built into devices from individual manufacturers. "I could be wrong," said King, "but I don't see anything [MOS] does that we

don't already do better."

Asked what he would do if he needed to control a device that could only be communicated with using MOS, King said then he would write an interface to it utilizing MOS. "But there is no such manufacturer who builds any piece of machinery that is only MOS compliant," he said.

Still, MOS has plenty of fans in the broadcast equipment field.

"Absolutely I think it's valuable, said Scott Blair, product manager for news automation at Sundance Digital. "It allows us to interface with leading newsroom computer sys-

tem manufacturers—talk in the digital language."

MUSICAL SYMPHONY

Comprompter's King issued a challenge to MOS supporters: "In terms of

channel without doing anything more to those clips if we have the extended metadata we need to repurpose them."

machine control," he said. "It's a question of what's the simplest way to accomplish it, and who's good at doing what."

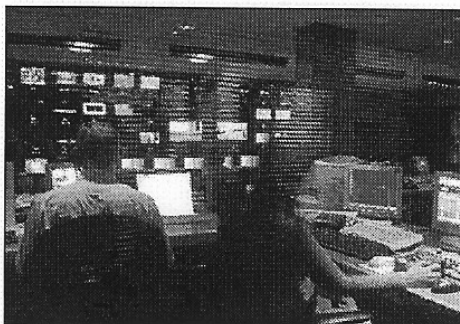
He used a musical symphony as a metaphor. "[The newsroom computer] writes the score for the newscast. But then it's up to the conductor, the automation system, or the director, to actually execute that. And sometimes it doesn't make sense to do that through the newsroom computer system."

Sundance's Blair said, "MOS is really an intermediary language developed so newsroom computer systems and devices could talk to each other. We use [MOS] to get information from the computer system, and then we use specific machine control, RS422 VDCP [Video Disk Control Protocol] to control devices outside of MOS. For all intents and purposes, they're two different languages."

MOS continues to be an evolving protocol to meet new needs. "There are a couple of implementations where you run into issues where you've got to go back to the MOS committee and try to get a change added in, to take care of some particular issue a vendor or customer may have," said Avid's Schleifer. "But we're seeing less and less of that."

ENPS's Palmer pointed to some upcoming additions. "Some things that we're working to handle are thumbnails and low resolution video, to be able to explicitly handle those and display those in the newsroom computer system, without the use of separate plug-ins."

Another set of features just around the corner is auto-discovery and auto-configuration, which promises to make MOS devices more plug-and-play. "[Then] whenever you put a MOS device on a network, it is able to discover other MOS devices on the network and ask them for their configuration information," said Palmer. ■



Autocue's installation at GMTV in London. Autocue is a recent convert to MOS.

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—Scott Blair, Sundance Digital

functionalities I've never heard of anyone using MOS for on-air playback, for on-air automation."

True enough, none of the automation vendors interviewed for this article use MOS to, in effect, hit the GO button to begin playback.

ENPS's Palmer said that the MOS Group has been discussing this function for years. "There is a set of messages within MOS that exist today for

David Schleifer, vice president of Avid Broadcast and Workgroups said that MOS allows his iNEWS system architects to sit down with third-party device vendors and quickly map out a system that satisfies a customer's requirements.

He said the current iteration of MOS handles almost everything customers want from news automation systems. "With the great majority of customers that's as much as they want to do, so with very little effort on our part and the third party's part, we can be up and running."

Looking into the future, Crispin Director of Business Development Michael Kroll said MOS will be even more valuable. "There's a lot of information that can be included in the MOS protocol which allows us to actually repurpose news items," he said.

Kroll used the example of daily newscasts where proper extended metadata has been associated with the individual stories. "We can take those same MOS objects and repurpose those clips to create a 24-hour news

Omneon

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ment to production and playout, including those from Transmedia Dynamics (ingest), Tektronix (QC), in addition to the Rhozet and Ardendo applications.

There is also a pool of 20 Apple Final Cut Pro editors working simultaneously to illustrate the bandwidth capability of MediaGrid. Pro-Bel's Morpheus automation product is also apart of the MediaGrid demonstration, as is closed-caption embedding and conformance logging from

Starfish Technologies.

Stedman says that Omneon is looking forward to working with numerous automation, media asset management and media archive management vendors in terms of making this product really work for broadcasters.

"It's one thing to have an interesting piece of hardware with some different capabilities," said Stedman. "It's another thing entirely when you've got applications that know how to take advantage of that hardware."

Omneon is now taking orders for MediaGrid and will be shipping units within a few weeks. ■