Partnering With Pacifico to Provide Solutions

Over the past few months, PSSI and Pacifico Management have been combining our resources and expertise to help the live television industry conquer the challenges of COVID-19. Together, our two companies have the ability to ingest dozens of remote signals via just about any platform and aggregate them into a polished final production, while allowing for social distancing and other pandemic-related safety measures.

Leveraging Pacifico’s master control room and studios, conveniently located in Burbank, California, we are able to offer a clean, socially distanced environment for live production, including space for on-site talent. Pacifico has been deemed an essential business by Los Angeles County, ensuring its resources will be available to clients throughout the pandemic. And its facilities are adhering to strict COVID-19 safety measures, including enhanced cleaning and sanitizing protocols, social distancing measures, mandatory face masks, and more.

With Pacifico’s facilities as a home base for production, our vast resources allow us to offer cutting-edge multi-platform transmission and data capabilities — including satellite, IP via Nextologies and fiber via AT&T Global Video Services — across the globe.

During each live event, we deploy transmission vehicles to as many separate venues as needed, allowing clients to produce events without the need for a large gathering in a single location. From these various venues, we send feeds to Pacifico for production, and receive feeds back from the facility for transmission and distribution around the world. So far, we have collaborated with Pacifico to develop and implement solutions for the “American Idol” finale, the SpaceX launch show, “Impractical Jokers,” “Celebrity Show-Off” and more.

Through our partnership with Pacifico, and with extensive support from Nextologies, our clients now have access to additional facilities that are operating with COVID-19 safety in mind, along with our expansive remote production capabilities. Despite the pandemic, the show must go on.
NASCAR on NBC: At-Home Edition

To allow for social distancing, minimize on-site crew size and avoid travel restrictions due to COVID-19, NBC partnered with PSSI and NASCAR to facilitate at-home productions for this season’s NASCAR races. Over the course of 15 weeks, we provided both fiber and satellite services for races originating from a variety of remote tracks.

This project set the record for the largest number of both fiber and satellite signals transmitted in an at-home production for NASCAR. Our transmission scheme for the races allowed for 16 primary cameras, 12 in-car cameras, three super slo-mo cameras and seven cameras in MPEG format coming from the remote track.

In total, the fiber signal flow for each race included up to approximately 80 feeds, with some feeds inbound from the track to NBC’s production base in Charlotte, North Carolina, and others outbound back to the track and other NBC venues. We also provided a three-service mux via satellite to back up the fiber paths and managed four data circuits between the remote track, Charlotte and NBC in Stamford, Connecticut, for internet and comms.

As an example, for the race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the transmission included 50 paths to NBC’s remote location of Charlotte Motor Speedway and 31 paths to NASCAR headquarters in downtown Charlotte. There were also 12 paths of satellite transmission on three separate transponders of Eutelsat 113 West A — all from one C-band PSSI satellite transmission vehicle.

To prepare for this unique NASCAR season, we spent a month equipping our NT38 transmission vehicle for the job, including installing an AT&T Media Links MD8000EX fiber shelf to support transmission via AT&T Global Video Services fiber. We also set the vehicle up with 30 distribution amplifiers and a 40 x 40 router to support extensive signal flow distribution and real-time visual monitoring of up to 40 sources.

With the challenges of COVID-19 and social distancing, live television production workflows now have to allow for minimal staffing at the venue. Projects like this are the future in remote sports broadcasting, and our extensive past experience with at-home solutions has given us a solid foundation to meet increasingly complex at-home production needs.
Engineer of the Quarter: Norm Bearce

When we need something fixed, upgraded or built, Norm Bearce always steps up to the plate. Not only is he skilled and knowledgeable, but he also has a great attitude and is always ready to lend a helping hand. No matter what challenge we bring to him, he meets it head on with an innovative solution.

“Norm is our go-to guy for installation, repair and fabrication on our fleet. His craftsmanship is top notch, and he has the ability to provide viable solutions to complex problems on a regular basis. His willingness to travel and support the guys at the teleport is invaluable. His calm, low-key demeanor is his trademark.”

– Rick Varney, Senior Broadcast Engineer
The Democratic National Convention Goes Remote

With COVID-19 in the mix, this year’s Democratic National Convention brought a variety of new transmission and production challenges. To help deliver this historic event to viewers across the country, we leveraged multiple modes of transmission to deliver hours of live remote content in and out of the production hub in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Throughout the convention, we provided live satellite uplinks for several of the most important remote speakers, including Jill and Joe Biden, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and Bernie Sanders. The uplinks utilized multiple transponders of Eutelsat 113 West A, accessed through PSSI International Teleport (PIT). We also provided coordination and management of several other remote locations via satellite uplink and LiveU. Our friends at Nextologies teamed up with us to provide backup IP pathways for the most critical remote feeds.

In addition to uplink services, we provided tech management and multi-camera production services in collaboration with Patin Media Ventures and Gravity Media at the remote sites where Barack Obama and Jill Biden were located.

Back in Milwaukee, we had an engineer in charge and a Strategic Television project manager on-site to handle encoding and decoding services and manage the satellite, LiveU, Nextologies, The Switch and AT&T GVS pathways in and out, with PIT as the hub gateway.

This Democratic National Convention was like none we have ever been part of before, and once again, our team rose to every challenge. Our entire industry has had to shift and adapt to COVID-19, and we are fortunate to have the resources, expertise and network of skilled partners to help our clients continue to bring live events to viewers around the world.
Spotlight on
Chris Hovden

Q Please tell us about your journey to your current role at PSSI.

A I started my television experience in college, taking an elective course in news production. This gave me material to put together a reel to get my first real job in TV as a news photographer in my hometown of Bismarck, North Dakota. At that TV station, I was tasked to learn the old and rusty microwave truck for the rare live shots we had in that small market. I used that experience to land a job in Albany, New York, as a news satellite truck operator. I lived there for a couple years operating a microwave/satellite combo truck.

My first contact with PSSI was out there in Albany. A coworker of mine had a friend from college who was a PSSI engineer. That engineer needed driving relief for the Columbia truck — he needed to get the truck from Boston to Buffalo overnight, but was out of driving hours. My coworker gave him my name, since I had a DOT medical certificate. I agreed to help him out — he drove the truck to Albany, and I took over the driving from Albany to Buffalo overnight, with the engineer sleeping in the passenger seat. PSSI flew me back to Albany, and I made it to my next shift at work just in time. I've never driven a truck that large before, and I think I made the engineer nervous because of that. But the trip went perfectly, though!

I was looking to get out of Albany, so I contacted PSSI to seek a job. I lucked out and landed a position here, and I jumped at the chance to start out fresh in Los Angeles.

Q What are your favorite things about working in this industry?

A The variety of going out to different locations is my favorite thing. I don't think I would like going to work in the same cubicle every day. This job allows me to go see different places and do the occasional traveling. Being somewhat in the middle of large events, like Hollywood award shows, the Super Bowl, etc., is pretty neat to me. In the end, it's the variety that keeps things interesting.

Q If not this career, what?

A I think I might still be a news photographer if it weren't for PSSI.

Q Please tell us a bit about your family.

A My wife Julie and I have been married for three years — I met her here in Los Angeles, and she grew up in this area. We welcomed our son Anders in July — he's the perfect little addition to our family! My parents and most of my relatives live in North Dakota. I like to go back and visit once a year.

Q What's something people might be surprised to learn about you?

A I have a pilot’s license.