Telos Xport Is Fast on Its Feet

by Michael Black

GENEVA, N.Y. The sport of lacrosse has been described as the fastest game on two feet (not to be confused with the fastest game on skates). At the NCAA college level, the sport is found mostly in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, but it is rapidly expanding.

In Texas, this is especially true at the high school level. It is with this background in mind that the first Division I men's college lacrosse game in 32 years and the first broadcast in that state was scheduled between the Hobart College Statesmen and the Georgetown Hoyas.

The venue was the Texas Military Institute, a private institution with a great athletic program that counts General Douglas MacArthur among its notable alums. As with any remote broadcast — especially at a distant location and, in this case, with no knowledge of the facilities available at that location — making sure the right connections were available was key.

Too cool for its flight

We wanted the quality and also the simplicity of using our normal "home broadcast" equipment for the show, which includes a mixer, wireless parabolic microphones and return audio from the studio. While our first choice was ISDN, this would not be available in the press box; fortunately a POTS line was available.

We routinely use standard POTS codecs in certain circumstances. However, this seemed the ideal situation to call upon the capabilities of the new Telos Zephyr Xport.

The Xport has a stunning appearance. Its frame is constructed of extruded metal; rubber bumpers front and back protect the controls and connectors and also act as the "feet" of the unit.

Xport's appearance actually raised some concerns with airport screeners when carrying it to our flight; one exclaimed that it was too "cool looking" to be allowed on the plane, and he would have to take it home. Thankfully, we were allowed to keep the box.

But the real beauty of the Xport is in its simplicity and straightforward operation. An LCD display provides information, including a graphical display that shows send and receive audio quality in addition to audio levels. The display mirrors that of the Zephyr Xstream, which makes operation for our student and community volunteers that much easier.

Auto dial setups based on location are included for both POTS and ISDN remotes. Did I forget to mention that this codec will do both? The unit connects to your Xstream in the studio using either ISDN or POTS — whatever's available. This streamlines equipment requirements and operations at the "receive" end of the call, because a single Zephyr Xstream does double duty.

Controls on the Xport are intuitive. Stowable "push to extend" knobs control the two inputs (one mic, one line), the headphone volume, and the headphone mix of send and receive audio. The back-panel inputs and outputs are balanced; connections are laid out logically, including an output for a PA feed. Everything is easy to get to and labeled to minimize mistakes, including the POTS and ISDN jacks.

One final connector is an Ethernet port that allows for Internet software updates and remote control from a standard Web browser. You won't find little mini plugs on this unit.

Sound of the sticks

Game time arrived. We set up the phone call by having the studio call us via the POTS phone line. The connection was made on the first attempt, and stayed solid for the entire duration of the game;

no renegotiations or audio dropouts. (If line quality degrades, Telos provides an extra "security blanket": Xport contains a full telephone hybrid, and will convert to a POTS call, if things get that bad.)

Audio quality was outstanding. The aacPlus algorithm used provides great fidelity to the studio. For contrast, we also conducted a "listen test" of a similar game transmitted using ISDN, and were amazed to hear how good the

Xport sounded using POTS. Every hit, the metal sticks hitting each other, conversations from the field, all were reproduced with great clarity and fidelity over the POTS line.

Xport has proven to be a valuable tool for remote production, and we have used ours all around the country as well as locally. One common use is to broadcast city council meetings. Xport has simplified this process greatly; we now use the Xport as our entire remote kit, rather than lugging along the extra mixer and interface equipment needed before. The two balanced inputs cover this application perfectly.

I would prefer that both inputs be XLR (the line level input is 1/4-inch TRS); it would also be nice if the second input were mic/line switchable. However, the Xport does not disappoint in its operation, design nor its ruggedness for remotes. It has become a favorite of our staff for remote broadcasts.

Our historic broadcast came off successfully, with only one minor problem: the Statesmen lost to the Hoyas, and would have to wait another day until their first victory in the Lone Star State. However, our broadcast was a winner, thanks to the Xport.

Michael Black is general manager of WEOS(FM) in Geneva, N.Y., the public radio station of Hobart & William Smith Colleges.

For information, contact Telos Systems in Ohio at (216) 241-7225 or visit www.telos-systems.com.