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USER REPORT

Leightronix Is Hot Item at Fire Department

by Dean Pearcy
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SPOKANE, WASH.

The Spokane Fire Department is one of the few such units in the country with its own professional video production unit. As the audio/video technician for the department, it's my job to write, produce, shoot, direct and edit training and public safety videos, public service announcements and emergency scene documentation videos. In-house video production makes sense, as it reduces costs. With more than 300 firefighters spread out over four different shifts at 14 different fire stations, it can take six weeks to get the entire department through a training class.

SPECIAL CABLE CHANNEL

The Spokane Fire Audio/Video Department got its start in the early 1990s. Video productions then were shot and edited on S-VHS and distributed on VHS tapes. In 1997 the department asked for, and received, a government-access channel on the Comcast cable system here. Unlike other government-access channels, our channel is only available through authorized Comcast receivers. This is due to the nature of EMS and fire department programming.

The addition of a cable channel was a big step forward for the department as it enabled us to start cablecasting 24 hours per day. Content includes locally produced training programs and satellite training programming from the Fire Emergency Training Network. Crews can now stay in their remote stations to complete their training requirements. That has saved wear and tear on the apparatus and allows them to be ready to respond to emergencies within their various districts.

Another big step for the department occurred in 2003 when we moved into our new training center. The new building included a television studio, control room and five multimedia classrooms. Each of the classrooms is equipped with remotely controlled cameras and wireless microphones so that any training classes can be broadcast live or recorded for future playback over the cable channel.

From the beginning, the Spokane Fire Department has used Leightronix products for automating playback on our cable channel. We started out with a Pro-8 switcher for controlling a few VHS decks. Later, we began using a TCD R/P digital video recorder/player for playback of MPEG programs. And in May 2007, I replaced both boxes with the latest generation from Leightronix, the Nexus Video Server/System Controller.

MAKES WORKFLOW EASIER

The Nexus has really simplified the workflow here. That is important, as the Spokane Fire AV unit is a one-person operation. With the network capabilities of the Nexus, ingest is a breeze.

After editing training programs on our nonlinear editor, I simply export the program as a MPEG file and transfer it to the Nexus. With 1 TB of external USB storage, we have plenty of storage space. The Leightronix Total Backup application allows me to easily backup the contents of the Nexus online storage to a USB drive on my desktop. All of this happens automatically on our existing network.

Dean Pearcy

Scheduling is a breeze with the WinLGX software. I can just drag and drop programs into the schedule. The software also flags any conflicts.

We've had the Nexus system running now for about six months. So far it has been rock solid. It's made my job easier and provides a great set of features at a reasonable price.

Dean Pearcy is the audio/video technician for the Spokane (Wash.) Fire Department. He has also worked as a television news photographer/satellite truck operator. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone. He may be contacted at dpearcy@spokanefire.org.

For additional information contact Leightronix Inc. at 800-243-5589 or visit www.leightronix.com.

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