



CUSTOMER

- Alabama Power Company

INDUSTRY

- Public Utility

CHALLENGES

- Upgrade their audio video equipment from standard-to-high-definition technology.
- Improve communications with a vast network of employees and customers that span over four states.

SOLUTION

- Replaced the current SD infrastructure and analog gear with Sony's XDCAM® HD system as the core technology for their five year transition plan.
- Chose Sony's XDCAM HD PDW-F800 optical camcorders and PDW-F1600 decks for all their video production needs, which range from employee training videos to website content.

RESULTS

- The XDCAM file-based system allows crews to capture high-quality footage that can be easily edited, and the system's optical workflow using Professional Disc™ media delivers superb image quality and longer archival capabilities. The file-based recording format allows use of the same format for acquisition and archiving and simplifies workflow.
- Having the latest HD production equipment has allowed Alabama Power to produce higher picture quality, enabled new types of content creation, and improved the ability to handle more diverse types of video production.

Utility Powers Up for HD with Sony Technology.

Alabama Power Company's primary goal is producing power for its customers, but the utility's communications teams are also focusing on its own "production" power, specifically in terms of audio and video technology.

Alabama Power is an operating company of Atlanta-based Southern Company, one of the largest producers of electricity in the United States. With 4.4 million customers and more than 42,000 megawatts of generating capacity, the company also owns and operates three other electric utilities and serves a total of 120,000 square miles in four states.

That's a lot of territory to cover, requiring a vast network of professionals who need up-to-the minute information on the latest industry news and developments. To keep them informed, Alabama Power is making a significant investment in its training capabilities for its employees, as well as its customers.

To accomplish this, the utility is taking advantage of the state-of-the-art in video and audio equipment, upgrading from standard-definition to high-definition production using Sony Electronics technology.



Alabama Power is using Sony's XDCAM® HD PDW-F800 optical camcorders and PDW-F1600 decks for all its video production needs, which range from employee training videos to website content. The Sony optical camcorders are used in the field to capture a variety of video elements, and the XDCAM HD decks also serve as the utility's "house" recording format.

According to Alabama Power's Chief Engineer for Communication Services, David Hunter, the decision to upgrade to HD using the optical technology was based on recording format efficiency, workflow quality and the level of support Sony is able to provide.

Another justification for upgrading to HD was the fact that footage is often displayed on large screens in auditorium or lecture hall-type settings for company meetings. "Our video has to hold up when blown up on a large screen," he said.

Hunter added the XDCAM system allows crews to capture high-quality footage that can be easily edited. He added that the system's optical workflow, superb image quality and especially the longer archival capabilities of the Professional Disc™ media were the main reasons for choosing the system. The company often shoots video for legal documentation, and needed an archive format with a long shelf life, such as the optical XDCAM system.

"We produce a lot of training material," he said. "The advances in technology have enabled us to communicate more effectively, and to more easily make our programs available on a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week schedule. The XDCAM system fits our needs perfectly and makes our video production much more efficient."



The XDCAM technology replaces Alabama Power's previous infrastructure of SD and analog gear. Hunter noted that the utility identified a clear need to enhance its production capabilities and improve image quality, and recently put in place an ambitious five-year plan to transition to HD.

"We felt it would be a poor investment to lock ourselves into the past by replacing equipment with new equipment that was not HD," he said.

Once the decision was made to upgrade, the first step was to identify the specific equipment that would be the core of its five-year plan, with the only limits on the timeline defined by the Communication Services Department's annual capital budgets.

Selection of the equipment was accomplished by Hunter and the company's full-time team of production personnel.

The Sony XDCAM camcorders that Alabama Power selected were defined by the recording format that was the best fit. "We needed a file-based recording format that would allow long-form recording as well as short segment film-style shooting, and we wanted to use the same format for acquisition and archive to simplify our

workflow," Hunter said, adding that the system infrastructure (router, DAs, switcher, monitors) was put into place before the camcorders were purchased.

As with any project of this scale, challenges along the way are expected. For example, Hunter noted, the engineering teams had to deal with the inability of certain third-party systems to handle HD bandwidth.

Overall, having the latest HD production equipment is allowing Alabama Power to produce video content of a significantly higher quality, and making them much better equipped to present a better product to its internal and external audiences.

"We consider reliability and performance as the most important reasons to purchase 'production' equipment," Hunter said.

The utility's use of the new technology has enabled new types of content creation and given them the ability to handle more diverse types of video production; however, perhaps the biggest noticeable difference?

He said: "Our clients are impressed by the picture quality."