Sony has long been a leader in providing high-end camcorders to broadcasting stations. But now some of those stations are in the market for a different type of Sony product: the new Video Journalist Backpack, which contains everything needed for field production except the pathway home for the video.

One of those stations is WCTV Tallahassee, FL (DMA 106), which just completed a month-long trial with the VJ Backpack. When News Director Stan Sanders was a photographer back in the 1980s, he weighed 110 pounds and carried 130 pounds of gear. He would have loved to have had the VJ Backpack then, because it's a complete ENG acquisition package weighing less than 50 pounds.

"For today's multimedia journalist, carrying all of that equipment is challenging," Sanders said. "Most people are familiar with backpacks, so this makes maneuvering in the field much easier."

The gear takes no longer to set up than conventional equipment, which can weigh more than twice as much.

Equipment for the One-Man Photojournalist

The VJ Backpack contains Sony's HXR-NX30U HD camera, Xperia™ tablet, and VAIO® laptop (loaded with Vegas Pro® software); tripod; wireless UWP-V1 lavalier mic and handheld mic; headphones; LED video light; and cables, batteries, and chargers. All the gear fits nicely into a custom-made backpack and is also available without the laptop.

Introduced just before the 2012 NAB show, the palm-sized NXCAM® camcorder at the core of the VJ Backpack features a 1/3" Exmor® CMOS sensor and Balanced Optical SteadyShot® image stabilization. Using AVCHD recording, the camera has 96 gigabytes of internal memory.
(approximately 40 hours of HD content), with a slot that accepts either SD or Memory Stick® media cards for additional recording capacity, plus an audio pod with two balanced audio inputs.

Equipped with the Tiffen prompter app, the Xperia tablet allows reporters to review their video on a screen larger than the camera’s viewfinder and to work with a teleprompter. In the accompanying instructional video, it’s recommended that the reporter stand about seven feet away from the camera when using the tablet as a teleprompter to make the broadcast look natural.

A Month-long Trial

Stan Sanders stated that the Backpack more than lived up to Sony’s promises during the trial. “The homerun for us was when people were watching our on-air content internally, and nobody could tell the difference between which camera was being used. The quality is definitely there.”

Outside of its portability, Sanders said the biggest appeal might be the familiarity of its camera and functions for new reporters. “This camera mirrors what many young journalists used in college. Being that we’re the 106th market, we’re going to have some people that start their careers with us. That’s exciting because the transition will be much easier.”

Gray Television worked closely with Sony in optimizing the Backpack for broadcasting and believes it is a significant development, citing its capabilities and low price. Many Gray stations have adopted the Backpack along with the Sony Media Backbone™ Production System for ingesting and moving video onto various distribution platforms.

There are further plans for the Backpack to evolve according to broadcasters’ needs. Mike Berry, who works in strategic business development at Sony, said a telephoto converter will likely be part of the unit in the future. “The whole concept of the backpack journalist is getting out in the field and being the one man to get the shot and the story,” he said.

In addition, customers can choose between new models that now include the PMW-100, PMW-200 or PMW200K1 XDCAM® camcorders in addition to the original HXR-NX30U NXCAM® camcorder version.

Dilorio reported that Sony is working with Gray to add RIFD tags to the kit components in order to make it easier to ensure that all the bits and pieces are there, or inform the user when they’re not.

Gray has “always been about the news,” and the payoff is higher story counts, and the ability to track their content and archive it properly.

It’s a turning point for great television in the sense that all reporters can be equipped with cameras and editing equipment and allow Gray to be much smarter about how to get the content in and send it back out.

“Most people are familiar with backpacks, so this makes maneuvering in the field much easier.”

Stan Sanders, News Director, WCTV

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