



SMPTE About to Make 3.0 the Standard

New BXF evolution is set to significantly streamline the process of handling traffic instructions for ads

By George Winslow -- Broadcasting & Cable, October 21, 2013

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In recent years, the broadcast exchange format (BXF) has become a major tool for integrating traffic and billing systems with myriad parts of broadcast infrastructure in ways that have cut costs and automated operations.

Even more dramatic improvements are on the way, with an upcoming version of BXF 3.0 expected to be published by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) before the end of this year.

BXF 3.0 includes a number of new features, but the most important is the ability to automate many instructions on how ads are placed into the broadcast stream.

"Traffic instructions are a critical component of ensuring that ads are correctly placed on-air," says Angela Tietze, president of Entertainment Communications Network, which works with major advertising agencies to distribute around 90,000 instructions on ad placement each week to broadcasters, networks and other outlets. "Currently, this is a very manual process done with faxes and emails that requires instructions to be manually entered into the traffic system."

Why This Matters The 3.0 standard, which is expected to reduce errors and manual data entry, will produce significant savings for broadcasters.

The industry has been working on solutions to fix this problem since the early 2000s, says Eric Mathewson, founder and CEO of WideOrbit. "Everyone is very interested in finding a way to avoid having to manually enter traffic instructions," he says.

Solving that problem has been a major challenge, says Christopher Lennon, president and CEO of MediAnswers and standards director of SMPTE, who has chaired the group working on BXF 3.0 for the past 18 months. "If it were easy, it would have been fixed earlier," he says.

The proposed new BXF 3.0 standard will not automate the process of carrying out every traffic instruction, but it will significantly streamline the process. "It will get the traffic department out of the data entry business and allow them to focus on managing schedules," says Tietze, who played a major role in getting SMPTE involved in working on the issue.

Faster Track for 3.0

It took a number of years for vendors and broadcasters to begin BXF implementations after the standard was published in 2008, but the first 3.0 applications could happen within a year.

"Pretty much every major vendor was involved in the working group, and we expect there to be movement on this fairly quickly," says Karyn Reid Bliss, U.S. director of product management for SintecMedia.

Reid Bliss and others add that implementations should also be easier because the industry is now very familiar with BXF.

"This standard is slowly becoming the primary foundation in which best-of-breed software and hardware providers integrate with each other," says Crist Myers, president and CEO of Myers Information. Myers is a longtime supporter of the BXF standard.

Lennon also stresses that the standard includes a number of other features that will encourage faster adoption. These include tools to make it easier to insert overlays and secondary events on top of programming, better integration with cable advertising standards, handling of loudness-related metadata, billboards and tools for streamlining the way traffic systems work.

"3.0 is a dramatic improvement in BXF that addresses some major issues," Lennon adds.