USER REPORT

Burk Enables 'Unified' System for Va. Cluster

Sinclair Telecable Modernizes Norfolk Stations' Remote Control With Burk ARC Plus/ARC-16

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NORFOLK, Va. At the Sinclair Telecable station group in Norfolk, Va. — WNIS(AM), WTAR(AM), WPYA(FM), WROX(FM) and WNRJ(FM) — a modern, unified remote control system has been on our wish list for a number of years, and we have finally begun the process of retiring or upgrading our aging stand-alone systems.

We have four transmitter sites for five stations; all are at least a half-hour drive from our downtown studio site, making reliable and easy-to-use remote control, monitoring and diagnostic capability even more important. After evaluating a number of systems, we decided to employ the **Burk Technology** ARC Plus/ARC-16 platforms.

Familiar territory

We were familiar with the ARC-16, having owned and operated two ARC-16SA units with Enhanced Speech Interface (ESI) dialup access. The ability of the ARC Plus to connect with our existing ARC-16 units will allow us to create a unified system while keeping replacement costs down. We could even upgrade the existing ARC-16s to current standards for a reasonable price.

What we liked about the ARC Plus system is that it can be used with both IP and dial-up telephone access. The ESI option provides a phone jack for telephone control, and can be programmed for selective alarm dial-out, allowing varying tiers of alarm notification.

Because of the ESI capabilities, we were able to buy our first ARC Plus ahead of IP service availability at the WNIS/WNRJ transmitter site. This allowed a timely replacement of our 24-year-old Delta Electronics RCS-1V system.

ARC-16 ESI users will find comfortable familiarity with the ARC Plus ESI, as well as a number of improvements, including a greatly expanded voice vocabulary and the ability to use macros without an outboard computer.

In fact, none of the basic operation of the ARC Plus system requires a dedicated computer, unlike systems that use a computer and software to connect to the I/O panels. Computers have a way of crashing, but Burk units have been rock-solid for us over the years.

Dave Morgan operates the Burk ARC Plus remote control.

At the studio, we will use AutoPilot Plus software for controlling, monitoring and logging our sites, while Burk's AutoLoad Plus software eases configuration and calibration. Both applications are user-friendly, which is an absolute necessity for modern-day station control operators who are not technically-inclined (but only key engineering personnel will use AutoLoad Plus).

Burk does not charge annual mainte-

nance fees, and routine firmware and software updates are free.

The front-panel display on the Plus is a huge improvement over that of the ARC-16, and I really like the larger Raise/Lower buttons, which also are programmable for each function with integral LCD lettering and backlighting.

To the extent that our extremely busy and stretched schedule allows, we are gradually adding control, status and metering capabilities beyond the bare necessities. Connecting and configuring the ARC Plus is the easy part; the hard part is finding the time to get to the site and run cables for new capabilities.

One helpful feature of the ARC Plus system's Integrated Command Relay Unit (ICRU) is the ability to program the duration of relay operations, even to fully latching. The ICRU, IIU and ARC Plus main unit include useful front-panel status indicators.

We also have found Burk's optional AFD-1 Arc and Flame Detector to be so sensitive that it can see a lighter's flame or even the arcing inside an electric drill from several feet away. This adds important fire detection capability, which should make our insurance company a bit happier.

Plans

We have only scratched the surface of the ARC Plus's capabilities, but we are paving the way for the day when we finally get IP service at the WNIS/WNRJ site. The Plus will connect with a computer at the studio control point that will run AutoPilot Plus full-time, and also will link serially (via IP) with the two ARC-16 sites.

A second ARC Plus eventually will be added at the remaining site to complete the system. I have already designed a control screen using the Custom Views feature of AutoPilot Plus; the dangers with this software are that it is fun and can be addictive if you're at all creative.

At the recent NAB Radio Show in Charlotte, N.C., Burk's Anita Russell and Steve Dinkel showed us important new innovations, which we plan to adopt. One is the PlusConnect interface unit, which connects directly to the Harris Z series of FM transmitters, yielding much more monitoring capability for the transmitter we use for WNRJ.

We also liked the new connectivity with Web-enabled PDA phones, such as BlackBerry or Treo. While Burk's ESI works well using "good old" DTMF tones via telephone, once we get an IP connection at the ARC Plus site, control and monitoring through a PDA device promises to be significantly faster and more user-friendly.

The folks in Burk's tech support department have been patient and helpful when we have leaned on them for help. Turnaround of our ARC-16 units sent back to the factory for "Good as New" upgrades has been fast. Sales support from our dealer, Mike Phelps at SCMS, has been outstanding.

We're satisfied with the early performance of the ARC Plus, and we look forward to using its full range of capabilities for our sites when our implementation process is complete.

The ARC Plus lists for $2,995.

For more information, including pricing, contact Burk Technology at (800) 736-9165 or visit www.burk.com.