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Tanner Is Confident in PPM Assurance

With Burk, D.C. Cluster Makes Sure Arbitron Ratings Are Never Lost

USERREPORT

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WASHINGTON — Radio One owns five stations in the Washington market. When the Radio One stations here switched to the new Arbitron PPM measuring system, it became apparent to engineering that we needed a solution for monitoring the stations for PPM encoding and, equally as important, the ability to switch from a primary encoder to a secondary encoder in the event of a failure.

After all, in the PPM environment, if you are not encoding, you may as well have the transmitter turned off.

SOLUTIONS

The immediate solution was to purchase a remote control and connect the PPM monitor's alarm output to the new Burk Plus remote for encoder failure reporting. Engineering would receive the call and then remotely control an IP-controlled power strip to turn off the primary encoder and power up the secondary encoder.

The problem with this solution is that you are not encoding while going through the switching process, which takes time with this method. That means no ratings for a period of time.

I thought there had to be a better way.

I remembered seeing an advertisement in Radio World for the new Burk Technology PPM Assurance System. I called my vendor, Broadcasters General Store, to ask some questions about this system. BGS' Chris Shute recommended that I speak with Steve Dinkel at Burk.

When Steve and I spoke he recommended a demo. I asked the Radio One VP of



Scott K. Tanner stands in front of a rack of equipment including the Burk Technology PPM monitor.

Engineering John Mathews to attend the demo as I thought this might be a sound solution companywide.

As a result of actually seeing the system in operation and what it could do, and given its cost-effectiveness, Radio One then purchased the system for every market that is currently in PPM.

HOW IT WORKS

The system is well thought out. Users can configure the system for any of the three PPM configurations recommended by Arbitron. This makes system setup a breeze.

The configuration for Washington contains two encoders per station for the main STL, a primary and secondary (of course we have additional encoders on the backup STL and auxiliary transmitter sites). If the primary encoder fails we just power up the secondary unit.

So you think to yourself, "Why not leave both encoders powered up?"

If you have two encoders operating simultaneously, both feeding the transmitter, the decoding system at Arbitron becomes confused and you'll get no ratings. In the case of running both encoders hot and switching the program feed downstream, the Burk PPM Controllers have relays to control an audio switch.



The Back View

Another big plus is that the Assurance Monitor has built-in silence sensors for each of the four stations it monitors and controls. In the event of loss of program audio, it will send a message that notes the problem is a loss of audio and not an encoder failure. This helps isolate the source of the problem and greatly helps in troubleshooting.

The way it works is that the program

material is connected to the primary encoder and is also looped to the secondary encoder, where the main program output to the STL is provided.

The PPM monitors are connected to the Assurance Monitor system by a serial cable.

The PPM encoders are connected to the Assurance Controller system also by a serial cable.

Both systems communicate through the LAN, which provides a lot of flexibility for installation of the Arbitron gear and the Burk system.

FAILURE DETECTION

When the Burk Assurance Monitor detects a failure, it sends a command to the Burk Assurance Controller, which then automatically switches from the primary encoder to the secondary encoder by throwing a relay to disconnect the power to the primary and energizing the secondary. All is done seamlessly without human intervention.

The system then sends an e-mail to

inform the engineers, programmers and manager (or whomever you designate).

Installation was a breeze. If you purchase the optional cables with the system, it is plug-and-play. Unit configuration is done via the LAN with the onboard Web server. Once the units are configured and connected to the LAN, the system automatically comes up. All wiring is done via standard RS-232 interface.

There are other useful features. Automatic testing allows automated testing of the primary and secondary encoders. This verifies the proper operation of all encoders and takes another “to-do” off your list.

With the “Exception Log” you can not only verify proper operation of your encoders, it also logs all actions taken by the PPM Assurance system. If during the scheduled test mode the system fails, it will log the failure and notify the preprogrammed e-mail list of the failure.

If the programming or management staff has doubts about the encoding, they simply

go through the log and print verification.

The bottom line is the system works and alerts preprogrammed individuals or groups to detected failures. I believe this to be a sound engineering solution packaged in an attractive system.

You may now be thinking, “What about all that money spent on the remote control and IP power strips?” Not to worry. The remote is installed as a backup to the Burk PPM Assurance system. Since there is no ESI (Enhanced Speech Interface) in the Assurance system, I have the Burk Plus connected to the monitors as well so the engineering staff is notified via the phone of the failure/switching. The remote control is also used to monitor the studio generator, UPS and TOC temperature.

As for my expensive IP power strips, they have been redeployed to a transmitter site.

A win for everyone!

For information, contact Burk Technology at (800) 255-8090 or visit www.burk.com.