



Softel



Article Reprint

The Mill Reshapes Commercial Subtitling Operation With Softel's Swift vTX

By Miles Stormer

BEAM. TV's Adtext subtitling arm, part of The Mill Group Ltd, is a dedicated and digitally streamlined subtitling operation that offers broadcast-quality subtitling and distribution to advertising clients as a single, combined service. Adtext is the premium brand in the commercials subtitling market, with around 90 percent of the output from the major advertising agencies passing through our doors. Advertisers want to be sure the message gets through to the largest audience, and that includes everyone from the hard-of-hearing to people in the gym watching MTV while listening to their iPods.

We take great pains with our work, and the decision to move from our previous tape-based operation to a file-based workflow was taken with the twin aims of streamlining the subtitling procedure to make it easier for our team, and lowering operating costs, with a reduced hardware overhead.

We routinely deliver commercials digitally to television stations, so the logical extension of that was to dispense with the tape-based subtitling workflow, take the existing file structure and simply move the subtitling assets around our system electronically. We developed our own ftp system and started looking for a subtitle encoding solution. Some products we looked at appeared to do what we wanted, but we found in practice that they were not flexible enough in operation.

When we started talking to Softel about a system based on Swift vTX I was a bit sceptical because they proposed a solution involving a number of different software modules bolted together, but it quickly became apparent that they completely understood our requirements. They immediately came up with a user interface that was exactly what we had in mind, and we were impressed with that because we thought their main experience was in broadcast settings rather than post-production.



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Miles Stormer - The Mill

Softel also gave us unfettered access to their development team, so it felt like we were working hand-in-glove with them throughout the project. Our in-house development team really appreciated that because we were under pressure to meet a tight deadline, and they agreed to our milestones, which they met and in fact exceeded by one day. That's not my normal experience in software development projects!

During the development stage, Softel would produce a version of the code for us to try, we would submit some files and watch to see if they were processed successfully, or read the logs and work out where changes were required. The entire time the Softel team worked in the background with Omneon to make sure that they were meeting the specs and understanding the Omneon file structure.

Our acceptance testing was helped by Softel coming in with the hardware to create a full replica transmission path, so that we could be sure that what was going on air would be completely correct. This was an example of the thorough approach Softel took during the development phase that inspired such a lot of confidence.

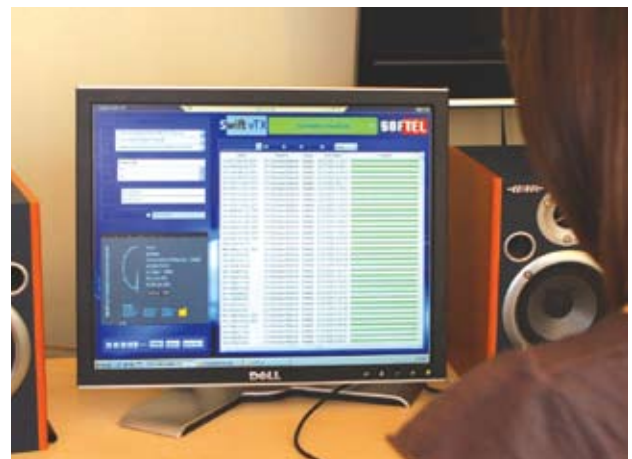
The workflow now is pretty efficient and quite simple: the agency sends the script and the commercial on tape or in digital form as an MPEG-2 file. We put that through FlipFactory to create a WM9 file, which is delivered automatically to the subtitler's desktop (for off-site freelancers, delivery is by email). The saved file is then encoded by Softel's Swift vTX as subtitles in DVI. After quality control, the files are moved from the subtitling room to transmission and from there to the broadcaster, all in an automated process via a web interface.

Overall this is a much more efficient workflow in terms of reduced machine control input, which leaves the subtitling operators to do their work uninterrupted by concerns about requesting and cuing machines. Before, they had a very cumbersome process that involved a fair bit of contact with broadcast technology — not something that specialist subtitlers are necessarily comfortable with. The process required them to write up the script, then telephone the

video facility, make a switch for a video link, agree that the tape should be played, and so on. Not coming from a broadcast video background, they generally found this a longwinded and fairly stressful process. Now, once the file is ingested, it appears in a queue on the web interface for them to accept onto their system, and they can get started without further ado: no waiting, no telephone conversations, no need to operate machines. And the effect on our productivity and responsiveness to clients is significant — we have increased our turnaround speed by about 50 percent, and it is very easy for us to call up off-site freelancers at short notice when they are needed, and for them to get to work straight away.

Most of all, we now offer our clients a modern, fully digital automated file-based process, with receipt or delivery at any time.

Miles Stormer is Head of MCR and External Facilities at The Mill.



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Swift vTX is Softel's solution for offline subtitle encoding, transcoding & extraction, operating faster than real-time, it integrates with leading video servers.

Swift vTX benefits: • Scalable • Automated, unattended operation • Improves operational efficiency, saving time & money • Wide multi-format support • Easy installation & use

To get more information about the full range of Softel subtitling solutions, visit our website www.softelgroup.com or email info@softelgroup.com

