Video on demand offshore

Caprock Communications has put together a service to provide video on demand offshore via satellite – including handling all the licensing. By Eduardo Correa, Caprock

Offshore quality of life has changed dramatically over the past two years.

What was once a brief, periodic phone call to family members has evolved into crew morale services that provide a constant link between remote personnel and those back home.

Whether it's keeping in touch with friends and family through email or online social networks like Facebook, now more than ever remote crew members are capable of staying updated on the latest happenings in their personal lives. As on-site technology progresses, it's only fitting that communication providers are finding new ways to keep the crew up-to-date on the latest in entertainment as well.

Live television service to offshore sites such as drilling rigs, maritime vessels and FPSOs has been an added feature that some providers have offered onboard crews for many years.

While it's provided the crew with a great outlet for relaxing and re-connecting with the world back home, it does have its limitations.

The number of TV stations has been limited because of the bulky equipment required to add additional channels. At the same time, with the crew working long hours and night shifts, they often miss their favorite shows and don't have the opportunity to record them for when they are free.

While on-demand entertainment provides an answer to these challenges and no longer restricts viewers to what's currently showing on live TV, it has yet to be fully utilized offshore as it is onshore, even though there is a greater need as crew's yearn to be connected to the world back home.

CapRock Communications has partnered with a variety of equipment and entertainment providers to deliver vast content possibilities through its video-on-demand service.

The crew can select from thousands of movies, TV programs and music options and the trick-play capabilities such as pause, fast forward, rewind and seek help make navigating the content that much easier.

Leveraging CapRock's digital network also brings a host of added benefits. It enables quick channel changing, provides closed caption options and offers interactive program guides for live TV, formerly unavailable with analog systems.

And while it sounds like a system with so many added benefits may require more equipment, digital networks actually require less equipment, freeing up critical rack space and reducing maintenance and operational costs.

Additionally when a rig or vessel arrives in a new region, there's no hassle to switch out the equipment as there are no geographical limitations with CapRock's digital network.

Beyond improving crew morale, the most compelling benefit of the on-demand service is that content is easily licensed and managed by CapRock.

Owners and operators now have a legal means to distribute the content digitally that does not violate any copyright laws—no more shipping DVDs and dealing with the stringent legal issues behind watching and distributing these movies on vessels.

CapRock is the first licensed provider of video-on-demand content for the offshore energy market. The content is contained and managed on servers and comes licensed to play, perfectly legal to use and can be accessed while a vessel is en-route or positioned in any location of the world.

CapRock's new crew infotainment system not only provides a means for video-on-demand services but also integrates live TV, music, DVD players and corporate applications including ROV feeds, CCTV and Rig TV into a consolidated media console.

Using an easy television graphical interface, users select with the remote control which content from the entertainment system to view. The interface is similar to what you would find on the menu screen of a hotel television—users can choose to watch movies, play games, view TV and listen to music.

Further than providing the crew with a much-needed connection to the outside world, the corporate capabilities of the entertainment system are almost endless. Video-on-demand also enables remote personnel to watch training videos and classes.

Since everything is digital, almost any of the company's media files can be played on any television onboard the rig, including required training and safety videos.

Companies can even set requirements on when and how often these corporate videos must be viewed before an employee can access additional content on the television.

The infotainment system allows for extremely advanced reporting and user controls such as controlling viewing times for each television (disabling video functions during shifts), controlling channel access per television and requiring users to watch certain content before accessing other content.

Caprock - making video on demand available on offshore platforms (photo courtesy US CoastGuard)

Management can even see the time and date that the employee watched the content for reporting and documentation. Having these on-site training options available reduces travel costs by decreasing the need to bring remote personnel back onshore for mandatory training.

The infotainment system also allows rig personnel to utilize televisions as monitors for viewing rig activity and projects. When configured with additional remote streaming capabilities available from CapRock, managers and technicians can monitor video sources from other areas of the rig or even outside of the rig quickly and easily.

Designated users can turn on the television and view CCTV camera feeds from around the rig, which not only heightens the security of the vessel, but also helps ensure the safety of its staff.

Other video content feeds, such as those from remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), also can be streamed through the televisions. Specialists can watch the video feed of a subsea riser being repaired in real-time without ever leaving the break room or their living quarters.

The technology available to the offshore market continues to impact the quality of life and the quality of work onboard these vessels.

What's most interesting is how we're finding ways to utilize onshore technologies in the offshore world to not only improve crew morale and standards during break time, but also in how these technologies are being applied to further crews' professional development and capabilities.