

THE DAILY SHOW

relocates to house larger laughs

BY MICHAEL GROTTICELLI

The breakout success of “The Daily Show With Jon Stewart” on cable’s Comedy Central channel has meant a larger viewing audience and bigger laughs. It’s also necessitated larger studio facilities.

The entire cast and crew recently moved from NEP Studio 54 into a new space across town in New York City from its smaller digs (where it had been since 1998), with the help of NEP Studios, in a mere two weeks. Comedy Central did not want to have any significant amount of downtime for the show, so the move to the new facility, which opened in July, had to happen quickly. New construction to get the facility ready and make room for expanded offices and production space began in January 2005 and spanned six months.



The audio control room features a Solid State Logic C100 digital audio console and a Digidesign Pro Tools workstation. Photos courtesy Dave King.



NEP Studios owns the studio space and has agreed to lease it to “The Daily Show” for four years. John Chow, NEP Studios’ vice president of engineering, oversaw the engineering project, which was renovated to Comedy Central specifications. This includes the show’s desire to have all of the production rooms located on the same floor. Also, the graphics workstations are now located close to the editing systems so that the staff can collaborate on projects more effectively.

The show’s producers wanted the tape operators to be able to see the control room, so a hole was cut and a window built between the two. In most cases, the show’s staff would rather communicate across the rooms to one another than send and grab a file off of a network. However, the staff does have access to a Telex/RTS Matrix Intercom system with wireless intercoms units.



Top photo: The spacious SDI production control room employs a Sony DVS-9000 switcher, a Pinnacle DVEXtreme digital video effects system, Ikegami monitoring and a Telex/RTS Matrix Intercom system.

Bottom photo: The large 100ft x 75ft studio audience area accommodates more than 200 people. The set is equipped with Sony BVP-950 cameras and three large rear-projection screens.

Chow also supervised the purchase of several new pieces of digital production equipment, as well as the transfer of existing systems to the new facilities. There's also a new serial digital/fiber-optic network connecting the systems and expanded space for the show's studio audience, writers and administrative staff.

The facility did not go completely digital. (It's 601 digital and AES with analog video and audio layers.) There's a Grass Valley Venus analog router with dozens of Grass Valley Gecko signal conversion cards and numerous Betacam SP decks in use. However, it does take advantage of several digital islands — for editing (Avid Media Composer Adrenalines) and for graphics (Discreet flint, Quantel Paintbox, etc.) — connected via a Gigabit Ethernet connection, that help streamline the sometimes frenetic production process. Four Avid workstations share material via a LANShare server with 2.88TB of storage.

Because it's such a graphics/video-intensive production, the show also uses five Grass Valley M-Series iVDR (two record and two playback channels, with 16 hours of 25Mb/s storage per unit), Profile servers (eight channels), TiVo digital video recorders and four digital betacam VTRs to capture images off-air for use in the show. The editors also use Sony DVW-M2000 and DVW-A500 source decks.

An analog transmission path at the old location has been converted to a DS-3 digital link. As the show is being taped live, video and audio is sent to Comedy Central's office at 1515 Broadway, in New York City. Then it's bounced to the network operations center, in Hauppauge, NY, for playout across the country.

Audio also has been greatly enhanced, with a new Solid State Logic C100 digital audio console serving as the centerpiece of a retrofitted audio production room. Tim Lester, a freelance audio engineer who has been with the show since its inception, said the new console includes all of the features he



The tape/server operations room looks into the production room. It uses Sony Digital Betacam, a Grass Valley M-Series iVDR, and DNF and Lance controllers.

Technology at work

- Adobe After Effects workstation
- Avid Technology
 - Media Composer Adrenaline systems
 - LAN Share server
- Chyron iFiNiTi! CG
- Digidesign Pro Tools|HD3
- Discreet flint workstation
- DNF Controls 2034CL Clip Instant Access System with ST 420 Shotbox
- ETC Expression 3-800 lighting control console
- Grass Valley
 - M-Series iVDR
 - Venus routing switcher
 - Signal converters
- Ikegami
 - 14in and 17in broadcast monitors
 - Rack-mount LCD panel
- Lance HSE-200 four-VTR controller-editor
- Leader SDI waveform/vectorscopes
- Mackie Onyx 1640 analog audio mixer
- Pinnacle Systems
 - DVEXtreme digital video effects system
 - Lightning stillstore
- Quantel Paintbox workstation
- Sennheiser EM 3532 wireless mics
- Solid State Logic C100 broadcast audio console
- Sony
 - BVP-950 digital portable camera system
 - DVS-9000 switcher
 - DVW-M2000 Digital Betacam editor
 - DVW-500 Digital Betacam VTRs
- TASCAM MX-2424 SE hard-disc recorder
- Tektronix SPG 422 SDI sync generator
- Telex/RTS Matrix Intercom systems w/wireless intercoms
- Vinten
 - Vector 70 pan/tilt heads
 - Fulmar pedestals

wished he had in the existing facility.

"The Daily Show" selected the SSL C100 due to a number of live production features. The new version 2 software includes expanded I/O capacity and TouchPan, a feature that allows Lester to have full 5.1 panning access on every channel from the console's central touch screen. The console's ability to handle full 5.1 surround sound mixes was another key factor in selecting the unit, as "The Daily Show" plans to begin producing the show in Dolby Digital sometime this year. Lester also uses a Digidesign Pro Tools system and a TASCAM 24-track, 24-bit hard disk recorder to create sound effects.

An expanded production studio, which is the former home of The Food Network shows such as "Emeril Live," includes four Sony BVP-950 digital cameras (with switchable aspect ratio), an ETC lighting system and a larger studio audience area. The studio audience area accommodates more than 200 people, twice the amount of people the older studio held. The set also has been redesigned, with the addition of three large rear-projection screens.

A renovated control room features

a four M/E Sony DVS-9000 SD production switcher, fully loaded with 80 inputs and 48 outputs. Images are stored for each night's show on a Pinnacle Systems Lightning server, which can be called up through the switcher for insertion into the show as well. Ikegami monitors fill out a comprehensive monitor wall, where the director and TD sit and call the shots.

The new digital facility offers Jon Stewart and his staff a chance to spread their wings and produce more complex segments than they could before. The frenetic pace of producing the show is still the same, but now there is more room to roam. **BE**

Michael Grotticelli regularly reports on the professional video and broadcast technology industries.

Design team

NEP Studios

Charles Pontillo, president

John T Chow, VP of engineering

Kevin Tobin, chief engineer
Studio 52

Lorenzo Handsford, engineer
Studio 52

Adriane Truex, facility manager
Studio 52

Bill Willig, project manager

Georgia Pappas, executive in charge of production

Ray DeMartini, director of support services-engineering & facilities

Kevin Tobin & Ed Modzel, design engineers

Sonny Waysack, installation supervisor

Alan Garry, Kossar & Garry Architects



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