Viz Mosart

Global BC automates election coverage with Viz Mosart

The Viz Mosart control room automation system allowed Global BC to focus on the content of the election coverage instead of the process to create the coverage.

Elections coverage is one of the most demanding production environments in live news broadcasting. It requires the editorial team to be able to react quickly to a variety of unfolding events and to change directions at a moment's notice. Fluctuations in polling data and the unpredictable movement of candidates are just a few factors that differentiate elections coverage from the typical news rundown.

Vancouver-based Global BC, the Global TV channel serving British Columbia (the westernmost province of Canada, with roughly 4.6 million people), has relied on Viz Mosart automation for all its live newscasts since October 2012.

When it came time to plan for coverage of the 40th British Columbia general election, held May 14, 2013, Global BC evaluated its options. Global realized that its operations had become so embedded with Viz Mosart automation that it simply didn't make sense to step back and use a conventional (non-automated) approach to elections coverage. Instead, the broadcaster was convinced that its Viz Mosart system could accommodate any production challenge presented by the provincial elections.

Viz Mosart automation is used by Canada's Global TV across every one of its 11 on-air stations, which are broadcast from nine control rooms, ranging from channels in the network's smallest markets to its national nightly newscast, Global National, and regional 24-hour news channel. The network adopted Viz Mosart automation because the system is hardware-agnostic, and because the single interface provides operators with most of the production tools they require.

"We'd not even had Viz Mosart in our building for two years, so undertaking a project like an election was a significant challenge," says Scott Hinde, operations manager at Global BC. *"Automation in general has had its proponents and detractors."*

"Some think that by turning to newscast automation and the efficiencies it offers, we're sacrificing product for the bottom line. What we proved on election night, however, is that it's really about refining the news production process and making it better so that the end product is better."

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Viz Mosart automation gave Global BC extensive flexibility

Going into the election, there were some at Global BC who had to be convinced that any automated system could react with the speed or agility required on election night. Less-capable automation systems require that everything be planned out and scripted in order to have a successful broadcast. Past experience had shown, however, that the Mosart system is intuitive enough to allow staff to adapt to the unfolding story faster with automation than they could with a traditional crew. Nevertheless, Global BC put a lot of thought and planning into the use of Viz Mosart automation on election night.

While Viz Mosart had been used regularly for morning newscasts, which are fairly routine four-hour shows, election night called for five hours of intense coverage. Because keeping on top of a rundown for that long is impractical, operators needed to abandon set patterns and instead "freewheel" on the keyboard and GUI — something they had done for short time periods on morning shows, but never before for an extended period of time. Thus, technicians and directors spent two weeks prior to the election refining the workflow, using rehearsal scenarios to determine the functionality needed and where to place that functionality on keyboard.

"For a simple show, one operator using Viz Mosart automation can take care of everything," says Gerry Belec, director of technology and design for Global News. *"For more complex broadcasts such as elections, which require ad hoc and even improvisational operations, the system allows us to 'plus up' and add more tools and people as needed."*

Viz Mosart automation gave Global BC extensive flexibility in tailoring the desktop configuration and keyboard layout for the unique requirements of its election coverage. When, for example, the leader of a political party arrived at his or her headquarters and the director decided that that's what she wanted to cover, she could use a single button press to pull up live video, audio, and associated graphics. This "single-button" operation has proved to be much more efficient than asking an audio technician for a feed on a particular receive channel, telling the technical director create a double box with the video source, and requesting the necessary images from graphics as well. During the actual broadcast, the flexibility of the automation system made it easy to adapt the predetermined workflow in response to the changing needs of election-night production.

Making news on election night

During the evening's production, Global BC used two Viz Mosart control rooms. Global's news channel utilizes many virtual set components, such as elements rising up out of the floor, which in itself is a complex proposition, so one Viz Mosart group was tasked specifically with management of live integrated sets. While one Viz Mosart control room functioned as a virtual set, focusing on reporting results with a host and a three-person discussion panel, a second system served as the main integration room. This integration system had an anchor and political expert on-set, but also used the first control room as a source, along with 12 remotes from across the province adding commentary from lead reporters and anchors. In a conventional approach, this would have required more than a dozen technicians, but working instead with Viz Mosart, Global BC needed no more than eight.

In this most time-sensitive of environments, with Global BC competing with other networks to bring news and images to air first, Viz Mosart automation provided a fundamental advantage by supporting a faster, more agile workflow in which a greater part of production resources were dedicated to the editorial content and quality of the broadcast.

"We got a lot of positive feedback that indicated that our coverage surpassed that of our competitors by leaps and bounds," adds Hinde. *"A lot of that had to do with the technical quality we achieved through Viz Mosart, creative elements we added with our virtual technology, and the added production value we realized by redirecting resources into newsgathering. With more people turning their eyes on the election rather than watching the technology, we were able to focus on the results, the calling of the election, and identifying and telling the best stories."*

Following the election, a simple recall of the standard template set on the Viz Mosart system allowed Global BC to revert instantly to the configuration used for its regular live news programs. Lessons learned in the 2013 provincial elections will enhance the broadcaster's ongoing live news coverage, as well as future news and elections coverage at other Global TV stations across Canada.

"We used Viz Mosart for a year and a half before deciding that it was our model for the election, and now it is safe to say that, for everything we do from here on in, we will think in terms of our Viz Mosart workflow," says Belec. *"Viz Mosart automation is not the type of tool that you take out of the toolbox as needed; it is our tool. When we embark on any new production or enterprise, it will be taken in the context of how it works in Viz Mosart. It is our production interface, plain and simple."*

"I was amazed at how seamless the broadcast was and how quiet it was in the control room. The discussion was about the end product, not the process, and from my perspective, it was one of the best shows ever produced in this facility. We provided dynamic, fast-paced wall-to-wall coverage, and we didn't need to compromise on any production elements or editorial content."

Gerry Belec, Technology and Design Director, Global News

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