

Hi-Def Horse Sense

DIGITAL SIGNAGE MAKES THE WINNER'S CIRCLE AT KEENELAND RACEWAY

LEXINGTON, KY—It goes without saying that at a horse racetrack, things have to happen fast. And this doesn't just apply to the horses, the video production crew has to hightail it, too.

One of the most famous facilities on the Thoroughbred racing circuit and a National Historical Landmark, Keeneland in Lexington, KY, honors its 78-year history while embracing high-tech AV. Recently, the racetrack upgraded its digital signage system in an effort to improve the quality and workflow associated with instant replays that are displayed throughout the venue after each race.

David Humphreys, president of New World Resources, a local AV integration firm, has been working with Keeneland for well over 15 years, mainly handling its audio reinforcement systems. But when the video production crew voiced its frustration with its digital signage playback system, he began searching for a better solution.

"They were using a streaming set-top box system, and it was very unstable, had some issues and just didn't really work for what they were trying to do," Humphreys relayed. "At some point, the product got sold off and they were left with a system that they couldn't upgrade, and couldn't do much with."

At the time, Humphreys had been integrating digital signage systems for other clients, which led him to BrightSign's line of media players. "I really liked them, they're in HD and they are very easy to operate," he said. "It dawned on me that this could be a good solution and a better way to do it instead of using set-top boxes, which limits who can watch the race."

Instead, he envisioned a system whereby the race replays would be broadcast on a channel on Keeneland's existing RF system in HD, expanding the potential viewing audience. Humphreys turned to an inexpensive solution from Blackmagic Design to record the races live in HD. He then installed 12 BrightSign players and 12 QMOD-SDI- HD modulators by Contemporary Research. "This way, the system operator just drops the file into the BrightSign player within minutes after the

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race is completed, uploads it, and it immediately starts playing the file—that race—over a specific channel," he explained. Now, anyone can tune into that digital channel and watch the race replays that continually loop, in HD.

All of this must happen quickly: there is less than a 10-minute gap between the end of the race, and the time when the winner, the horse's



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owners, trainers and racetrack officials congregate in a meeting room to watch the replay. "With the old system, it was really tough for them to get the file recorded and playing in time, because these people want to see the race replay," Humphreys explained. "With the new system, it's quick and there's plenty of time, and they get a better-quality image. The channels that the Contemporary Research modulators put out just look incredible." He clarifies that these replays aren't used for judging purposes in close races—officials use tape machines for this purpose. "But they do include all of the different camera shots on the channel so that the people that are watching can see the race up close when they get a tight shot on the horse that's coming over the finish line." In other words, the judges see the same image as visitors do, however they use their own recording devices.

New World Resources is starting to integrate an increasing number of digital signage systems, and Humphreys noted that both ease-of-use and ease-of-installation are high priorities for him. "I tried doing some digital signage in the past and just found that some of the systems were a little overwhelming for the end users to deal with," he said. "But this one is more of a drag-and-drop solution, and that's what made it ideal for Keeneland. The races are recorded onto a PC equipped with an HD card that ingests the files and records four clips of each race, then dropped into the player for distribution to the display.

Humphreys noted that this solution is more cost-effective than one in which it's necessary to assign a digital signage player to each display. He also pointed out that broadcasting in high definition was important to the racetrack's leadership. "Keeneland was the first track to be completely HD, and so image quality is a really big thing for them," he said. "They certainly didn't want to have their race replays in a sub-standard format, so having them in full HD fits in with everything they do and the level of quality they're aiming for. For me, it was a great solution because it delivered a higher level of quality than what they thought they would end up with."

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