

# High-life in Vegas

The American broadcast industry is obsessed with high-definition, but NAB 99 has more than enough for UK visitors. Robert Buckley investigates

If American broadcasters were worried last year, they're going to be downright terrified this year. Despite being as cash-strapped as always, they have until the end of the year to start transmitting some kind of high-def signal or have their licences revoked. No licence - no business.

Vendors of all varieties are aware of this and compared to the trickle of HD products at NAB 98, NAB 99 will be opening the floodgates to every kind of upgrade, add-on and innovation to take advantage of the new standard.

In Europe, we haven't had to think about HDTV too hard, so you might think there'll be nothing of interest at the show. But, with digital television already forcing the industry to upgrade its kit and change its work practices, vendors will be using this smaller revolution to push a subtler message: "Analogue to digital is almost as large a jump as analogue to high-def - so why not go all the way now and save yourself some cash in the long run?"

Among those pushing this line are Quantel and Cintel. Any Quantel products purchased now will be upgradable to high-def for free as soon as the technology is available - there's even a new Editbox designed for film work capable of handling HD data; Cintel's C-Reality telecine, whose user-numbers in the UK aren't yet in double digits, is already capable of HD resolutions.

With increased resolutions and the exacting standards of digital transmission come ever-greater IT demands. Editing and production now require a knowledge of computers usually befitting an IT manager; anyone looking to make the step to a fully digital operation, particularly in broadcast, will find useful the ability to translate buzzwords like MPEG2-encoding, video servers and fibre-channel. A slew of companies will try to help you store your data, move it around networks and transmit it, all without tape or film.



Just when you thought the digital format war was starting to settle down, Panasonic is previewing DVCPRO HD, its high-def-capable format, despite DVCPRO 50 only just starting its onslaught in earnest. It won't be available till the end of the year at the earliest, so it's likely to miss out on early HD adopters this year - at least in America. For more leisurely Europeans, there's no time limit to beat. Panasonic knows this, and its PAL version won't arrive until early next year.

Sony will take the overall lead it has with DigiBeta even further, launching the successors to its popular DVW-700WSP - the 709WSP and 790WSP.

The battle for the low-end editing market continues, as the distinction between low- and high-end continues to blur. Avid will be pushing its NT-based Symphony uncompressed editing system with the help of price reductions. Firewire, the plug-and-play SCSI replacement aka IEEE-1394, is starting to make a strong showing, both on Macs and on NT-compatible editing boards that need to link directly to camcorders. Matrox is launching another real-time board, the DigiSuite DTV, designed to take advantage of the technology, while Apple is likely to unveil its Firewire-compatible Premiere-competitor, FinalCut Pro.

To cap it all, Silicon Graphics, the last bastion of Unix, will be showing off its new low-cost NT Visual Workstation, with Accom even managing to run a 3D virtual set system on one. Effects and graphics gurus will be relieved to know that plug-ins and upgrades are the only things liable to stretch their wallets this year.

With HDTV capabilities being bestowed on high-end kit as quickly as manufacturers can manage, the low-end is acquiring its current capabilities. We Europeans might just end up catching the digital scraps from the American high-def table... and picking up some bargains on the way. ■