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NEWS

WJLA Clicks with Travel Videos

by Robert Brilliant

WASHINGTON

The longest journey may no longer begin with a single step, but with a single click. Recent surveys have shown that nearly 10 percent of all Internet page views are travel-related, which makes travel research one of the Internet's top uses.

With this statistic in mind, WJLA — Allbritton Communications' ABC-affiliate in Washington, D.C. — announced a partnering relationship with Travelago, a Lexington Ky.-based producer and distributor of travel videos for the Web that will deliver more than 1,800 streaming travel videos to WJLA's Web site.

Visitors to the WJLA site (www.WJLA.com) will be able to click on a "travel" button that will take them to a co-branded WJLA-Travelago "bridge page." This page will provide access to Travelago's extensive catalog of high-quality streaming travel video clips and detailed destination information. Users with even a 28K dial-up connection will see good-quality streaming video while broadband users will view some of the best quality streaming travel video clips to be found on the Web.

Streaming video content from its Web site is nothing new for WJLA, which was the first broadcast station in the Washington, D.C., market to provide such content to its Web audience. The station currently streams live all of its daily newscasts through four in-house



Travelago Partnership Brings More Than 1,800 Streaming Travel Clips to Web Site

Sun Microsystems video servers that often serve several hundred simultaneous Web viewers. A team of four Web producers edit and encode sections of each newscast for use as video components to news stories on the site.

According to Robert Forsyth, director of Internet Operations for Allbritton Communications, WJLA has an archive of 13,000 Web news stories from last year alone, and about 20 percent of those stories have a video component.

"We're really trying to push video and streaming content out onto the Web because we've

experienced a tremendous demand for it," Forsyth said. "There [are] a lot of news stories and other content, like vacation information, that people would much rather see than read about. D.C. is also a very broadband-connected market, which makes video something that people expect to see on our Web site and want to use."

This experience with streaming has laid the groundwork for the new partnership with Travelago, an arrangement that Forsyth characterized as turnkey, straightforward and user-friendly.

“What we want to do is find niche things that Travelago is doing and put them on our bridge page where people are used to surfing and looking at our navigation,” Forsyth explained. “Then, if they see a place they want to go, they click on it and they’re taken into Travelago.”

“We buy its content, Travelago keeps its advertising and places our banner advertising on its Web pages,” he added. “It’s a pretty simple relationship. When you start getting into revenue sharing it really becomes a hassle to do the accounting and reconciliation. So, when we go out to make content agreements, we just keep them real simple: You keep your dollars and we’ll keep ours. We have this relationship with other content providers and it’s worked well for everybody.”

TAKE ME AWAY

Since its founding in 1999, Travelago (www.travelago.com) has grown to become one of the premiere aggregators, distributors and producers of



net network latency, leaving the problematic “last mile” to the user’s desktop as the only gating factor.

Encoding is where Travelago achieves the high quality of its streaming videos, utilizing the extensive controls and capabilities of Terran’s Media Cleaner 5, a tool used to digitize and encode clips.

“We have our own ‘secret sauce’ of settings we apply to Media Cleaner 5 that really differentiates our videos from other distributors,” said John Bobel, Travelago’s president, CEO and co-founder. Bobel added that with hundreds of setting combinations to be found within Media Cleaner 5, the company has invested extensive R&D time learning how to extract the very best quality from a clip using Media Cleaner 5.

“That’s what makes us different, the fact that we’re not satisfied with the default settings on any of the technologies we use,” Bobel said. “We’ll spend weeks testing and tweaking and then re-encoding an entire batch of clips if necessary to get the best streaming results.”

This painstaking encoding results in a ratio of 129 minutes of computer processing time for each minute of finished video. An in-house processing farm of six 900 MHz Pentium PCs crunch the numbers on a 24/7 basis. The raw, uncompressed video files are also stored on backup tapes in a library system that now holds some 3 TB of video data.

“We do this because the rate of change in codec technology is so fast that we have to re-encode several items a year to stay on the cutting edge of technology,” said Jay Mitchell, Travelago’s vice president and editor-in-chief.

destination video content for the Internet, a market whose growth has paralleled the rapid rise of broadband.

Many of Travelago’s clips are taken from videos (in everything from VHS to Betacam-SP formats) that come from such organizations as Chambers of Commerce, Ministries of Tourism

and similar travel-related agencies. Two- to three-minute excerpts are edited from the tapes and encoded into Real, Windows Media and QuickTime formats at 28, 56, 100 and 300 kbps bit-rates. After encoding, the clips are uploaded to the Digital Island content distribution network “cloud” where they’re served from the closest caching server to the user’s Internet connection. The system all but eliminates Inter-

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