



VCC White Paper

Station Group Live News Disaster Recovery

CHALLENGE: Unfortunate experience is causing Station Group leadership to consider disaster planning for live telecasts. When one member of station group suffers a catastrophic studio outage due to fire, flood, tornado, or other disaster, Master Control hubs and servers allow relatively easy continuity of recorded and network material, but creation of an efficient and rapid disaster recovery system for live broadcasts is more challenging both operationally and economically. The ability to return live programming to air rapidly is essential to fulfill the station's responsibility to its community, to maintain its image within that community, and to restore revenue producing local content.

Criteria for a live disaster recovery system include

- a) rapid implementation for any station in the group
- b) system and per-station cost efficiency
- c) ease of operation for local production team
- d) similar on-air look and feel to normal news programming
- e) non-disaster use to maintain readiness, skills and to offset costs

PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL APPROACHES: While "shadow" or "crash" studios have existed in large organizations for decades, the economic and operational realities of providing ready-to-go off-site facilities across the many dozens of stations is impractical.

THE VCC SOLUTION: VCC permits efficient creation of a financially-conservative live news recovery system allowing talent, producers, and show control to be located in any place that has a reliable broadband connection, and each of these can even be separated from one another. VCC explodes traditional production processes and allows various functions to occur from any place—or multiple places—covering loss of any individual station within a group. Put another way, not only does VCC provide backup for any disaster within the entire station group, it permits the normal staff of the station to provide the recovery even if they, themselves, are separated from one another.

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RECOVERY PACKAGE: Each protected station has one or more “recovery packages” of light weight, portable computer equipment that drives VCC’s technology to deliver broadcast-quality productions. It doesn’t matter whether one or a hundred stations are protected. When one station needs disaster support, the pre-positioned control unit enables talent appearance, video clips, graphics, opens, bumps, closes, and live remotes via smartphone or other optional means. The recovery package control units can be located at a secondary location (transmitter, suburban bureau, etc.) or even at the home of key talent.

An internet-based broadcast connection exists between the VCC and station group hubs, with full broadcast communications and IFB connectivity between hub, VCC, and the production team for the station experiencing the emergency. The control connection between the station team and VCC takes minutes to select and establish using a normal broadband connection.

ON AIR LOOK: While providing backup to all stations in the group, VCC’s systems respect the look and feel of each individual station. During the pre-need period, important elements are pre-loaded by local producers for each show on every station to be protected. When the need arises, additional per-show elements (packages, clips, graphics) can be loaded on a per-episode basis by producers of the station experiencing the emergency. Set backgrounds are the responsibility of each station. Effective use has been made of de-focused 3x6 ft prints of the normal anchor set simply pinned to a wall at the host origination site.

WHAT THE RECOVERY TEAM SEES AND DOES: The minimum Recovery Team is, generally, an anchor and a producer, though the anchor alone can connect the system (in coordination with VCC) and run the program. Using the Recovery Unit, both talent and producer can see and select remotes, roll clips, packages, opens, closes, and bumps. The Recovery Team sees program video and hears mixed minus audio (program less themselves). Using their own smart devices, they can connect through a communications system to speak with remotes, VCC, and the hub. Prompter can be added at the option of the station.

The program is controlled by the talent or producer through intuitive touch screens and a patented hand control that permits the host to be looking at the camera while driving the show.

As other newsroom personnel become available they will be using VCC’s Show Creator software to upload the latest packages, clips, and stills via a web interface, to be triggered by the talent and producer. Reporters and weather talent can participate in the program via smartphone video remote, and are able to see real time return video to hit cues, and hear their own mixed minus audio. Associate producers can be arranging and pre-checking live remote interviews via smartphone for handoff to VCC for final connection. All of these functions from wherever the crew members happen to be.

WHAT VCC DOES: VCC's central core is the on-demand production facility providing hardware and proprietary software which actually composites the hi-def show for delivery to the station group's hub for distribution back into the affected market. Working with proprietary VCC software and hardware design, the central core acquires and converts IP video signals to broadcast standard, and then composite those signals along with pre-loaded materials to create the broadcast quality programs at the direction of the station's production team. Skilled VCC personnel monitor the technical processes and work to maximize the quality of remotes by smartphone and other devices. Optional bonded cellular approaches can be added for one-way video intake leveraging the Group's existing systems if they are functional.

VCC encodes and delivers the switched program video/embedded audio feed to the Group Hub, and receives real time program video plus audio minus VCC for return to the Recovery Team and remotes.

SYSTEM READINESS The best way to know a disaster recovery system is working and available, is to use it. The VCC Recovery System is made to produce live and live-recorded smartphone-based programs for broadcast, cable, or the web. The same recovery hardware and software designated for use with each station can work with the VCC central core to deliver regularly scheduled daily or weekly programs to any or all of a Group's stations. The Recovery Units can be used to create programs from remote locations, including talents' own homes.

WHAT DOES IT COST? Recognizing that every operation is somewhat different, VCC prices on a "scope of work" approach and provides services through multi-year agreements. The full backup system can be provided through the VCC's central core plant, or one or more central cores can be established at strategic locations for a specific group and operated on a software as a service basis. And since the system can be used for daily programming, overall backup costs may be offset by other uses. In any case, VCC systems represent just a tiny fraction of the cost of building new control rooms and studios, or even retrofitting older facilities.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE? Just contact sales@thevcc.tv and our experts will work with you to understand your specific needs and provide ways to use the system in daily programming.