

Bespoke needs? Tricky problem? “Don’t compromise on reliability,” advises dB Broadcast.

Customer service can mean many things, but for systems integrators like dB Broadcast an important aspect of service is taking on new challenges for which off-the-shelf products don’t yet exist. At their purpose-built offices in Cambridgeshire, they were keen to demonstrate their impressive track record of high performance custom product development.

dB Broadcast offers custom solutions – every system is designed and built to the customers specification. “In many ways our business model is based on custom development as 99% of our product range was initially developed to solve a specific client’s challenge where there wasn’t equipment available on the market to meet their need”, says Tom Swan, dB’s Director of Sales and Marketing.

dB argues that developing bespoke products should have quality and reliability built in. “It’s part of entering into a long term relationship”, says Tom. “When you’ve a technical issue that requires a custom solution it’s tempting, in a challenging broadcast environment, to find yourself compromising on reliability. This is not the route we follow.”

Market changes and cost reduction....

The MERlin DVB-T2 monitoring receiver development for Arqiva is a classic example of this, and a great example of collaboration between dB and the customer. When the UK adopted the DVB-T2 standard and introduced it mid-way through the UK digital switch over programme, dB was working closely with Arqiva who were responsible for the entire switchover programme. A need was identified for enhanced monitoring at 800 transmission relay sites across the British Isles. DVB-T2 was a new standard therefore there was no off-the-shelf products with the right features and price. “...and as one was needed on each of the 800 sites, the unit cost was critical,” says Tom. “Every £100 difference in price was £80k extra on the project bill.”



dB Broadcast's MERlin Unit

In response, dB created MERlin; a self-contained receiver for continuous off-air demodulation and monitoring of DVB-T2 and DVB-T signals. The price of the unit enabled wide scale installation of the unit. Coupled with its reliability the unit continues to lead the UK market today.

“The Falcon has a similar story,” adds Ian Mattison, Operations Director at dB. “The unit was developed as a special product for Crown Castle. dB already had a modular ASI product for monitoring the status of the transport stream and ASI signal but Crown wanted a portable version that carried out very specific maintenance checks - something that people could carry around in their car.



dB Broadcast's Falcon Unit

Cost and Reliability need to go hand-in-hand...

“Dependability is central to dB,” says Tom. “Clients need reliability and consistency, and want any custom developments to be delivered quickly and cost effectively. The design of the Cardinal mains distribution unit demonstrates this – developed within a very tight timescale with extensive functionality appropriate for use at unmanned locations, again it started as a



dB Broadcast's Cardinal Mains Distribution Unit

custom product for a customer. They needed enhanced reliability at remote transmission sites and the existing off-the-shelf models were lacking features and reliability.

“The new Cardinal Mains Distribution Unit (MDU) was developed to include web and SNMP interfaces giving easy access to sophisticated remote control and configuration facilities. Unlike other units on the market, the Cardinal intelligent MDUs provide last minute SNMP messages before closing down if mains supply is lost. They also revert to being standard ‘dumb’ MDUs in the event of an internal PSU or controller failure – vital features for remote transmitter sites. The latest product, the iMDU, builds on the success of this original unit. Today there are many Cardinal units in use - confirming its technical performance and reliability.

“Build quality is important but sometimes units only need to fulfil a short term role”, continues Ian. “At a recent Commonwealth Games we were commissioned by the BBC to provide audio monitoring units at a price that meant they could be made redundant at the end of the Games. Sometimes you need reliability but only for a short time with cost being a central driver.”

David Bird, MD of dB, summed up the company's approach to tackling difficult technical requirements. “My advice to clients who are grappling with complex technical requirements is not to compromise on what you need – come and talk to dB; the challenge will spur more exceptional developments. It's all part of the service and the way we build long-term relationships.”