



Case Study | Midco Sports Network

MIDCO EXPANDS COVERAGE WITH CENTRAL PRODUCTION MODEL





Sporty's Bar and Grill in Madison, S.D., fills up with locals during football season in part because Cam Shafer, the owner, installed numerous wall-mounted TVs that broadcast the game start to finish.

Pair that with hard-to-beat food and drink specials, Shafer said people flock to Sporty's to watch the game and support their team, the Dakota State University Trojans. "We have [the game] on all the TVs here," said Shafer, who's a former DSU student. "We have to air it no matter what."

"Kids were talking to me down at the game, saying they wanted to come down afterwards ...

I was like, 'well we have it on here, HD, looks nice, it's like you're at the game practically.'"

Walking on DSU's campus on Thursday, Aug. 24, you'd see the type of energy from fans that only comes with the first game of the season.

The field house's parking lot was full of students and families tailgating, with food and drinks, yard games and large tractors, and more. The game brought thousands of fans, given the rivalry between Dakota State and Dakota Wesleyan (S.D.).

Amid all the pregame festivities was Midco Sports Network's newest addition to its fleet of broadcast vehicles, Lewis.



Owner Cam Shafer, right, sits with friends at Sporty's Bar and Grill in Madison, S.D., watching the Dakota State University-Dakota Wesleyan game on Thursday, Aug. 24.

Lewis the van wasn't what you might've seen at other sporting events. It wasn't a large 18-wheeler, with tons of camera equipment and a full crew. That's something Midco wanted to move away from with this most recent addition -- what they're calling a centralized production model.

CHALLENGE

Midco had two fully equipped production trailers, and one is still in use. But, the challenge with these production trailers is that it's hard to load everything up, get the trailer to its destination, unload everything, do the broadcast, and move onto the next location. Quite simply, the trailer can't make it to all of the games that Midco wants to broadcast, which

forced the company to rent out vehicles to fill the gaps.

These big production trailers also demand a full crew. And with a full crew comes hotel and meal expenses, time on the road and time away from home.

The benefits of having a full crew on the road were out-weighed when it came to update the trailer.

Midco had a choice.

"It was time to either upgrade that trailer or try something new," said Craig DeWit, production technology manager at Midco Sports Network.

They went with something new.



SOLUTION

Midco's new centralized production truck was parked outside of the ticket windows at Trojan Field in Madison.

Technicians from AVI Systems and Midco brought the truck to life, running cable from an outside power source to the truck to the grand stands.

One camera operator was positioned at the top of the stands, getting an expansive view, while two others were on the field.

Peering into the truck you'd see a broadcast suite and a single chair for the engineer. Chad Thielen, design engineer IV at AVI Systems, spent a fair amount of time in that chair, making sure everything was running as it should for its first broadcast.





“As far as technology in the van, the concept here is to minimize what we put in there,” Thielen said. “We have the core power supplies for the cameras, we have some encoding equipment, we have a digital DSP based audio mixer. For the most part, that’s really all that’s going on inside that van.”

While technology is kept to a minimum in the van, a full production suite sits at headquarters in Sioux Falls, where producers direct those on site to get a different angle, zoom in or out, or to switch camera views.

“Back at headquarters, AVI Systems just revamped that facility, put all new routing systems, [and] the audio control room as well,” Thielen continued. “Everything was redone, brand new replay systems, all with the mindset of doing this centralized production and doing more production.”

There are three main control rooms at headquarters. One controls all the audio; another deals with the shading, editing, and playback; the biggest works with the live shots, varying angles and on-the-field game





play coming in RAW from the company's fiber optic cable.

"On the headquarters side, we built it with the mindset that it was going to grow," Thielen said. "We're ready to add the next vehicles, more control rooms, and do multiple control rooms at the same time."

Four operators share the biggest control room, sitting in front of a dozen monitors all showing different versions of the same game. A producer speaks into his mic, giving directions to those in Madison at the game. The others sit silently, but keep up with the pace of the game and make the technical changes as needed.

Two people managed the audio control room, while another three made sure playback was

running smoothly in the editing control room. That's nine people who would've normally been on site and on the road.

"Those folks that are running the operating positions here in Sioux Falls, they get to go home to their own beds and sleep at home tonight, instead of sleeping in a hotel room on the road," said DeWit, with Midco.

"The benefits of that are we don't have to send such a large crew out on the road all the time," he said. "We can reduce our travel cost, we can reduce our meals, hotels, all of that. We just have to send out a small van, camera crew and engineer out to the field – everybody else can stay here."



**WE'VE BEEN ADDING MORE CONTENT, MORE
CAPABILITIES, AND GROWING OUR VIEWERSHIP AND
ADVERTISING WITH THE PARTNERSHIP OF AVI.**



- Craig DeWit, Midco Sports Network

RESULTS

Erik Speer, systems sales representative at AVI Systems, explained that rolling out this new model has already given Midco the chance to expand and scale its production in their footprint, which is comprised of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

"They've already signed a new contract with another college football conference," Speer said. "They're already reaping the benefits of the van that we've integrated for them."

"This gets them a bigger footprint in their target market and allows them to cover a lot more events."

DeWit said: "There are so many benefits to this model. We're excited to get it rolling, and see where we go from here."

Midco Sports Network started about 10 years ago, but the partnership goes back a decade earlier. Roughly 20 years ago AVI Systems and Midco partnered up to build the broadcast company from the ground up.

Since then, "we've been adding more content, more capabilities, and growing our viewership and advertising with the partnership of AVI," DeWit said. "It's been a great relationship."





WHY CENTRALIZED PRODUCTION?

“People are shifting to centralized production, because they get a lot more use out of the more expensive pieces of equipment,” Thielen said. “They also can do a better production, because the crew stays back home, and they’ve got a little better working environment and a little more time to prepare for stuff.”

The centralized production model is going to allow Midco Sports Network to scale its production significantly, Thielen explained. “By doing these small, nimble vans, and being able to deploy multiple crews, they’re going to be able to scale their production much faster.”

But, with this model, there are some important considerations that needed to be met ahead of time. At the forefront, you have to know how much data you’re sending from point A to point B.

“You really have to understand how much bandwidth you’re going to be utilizing,” Thielen said. “The magic is trying to get the best quality with the lowest bandwidth, so picking the right equipment, the right vendors to work with, and the right integrator to work with.”

When capturing all of this data, one key element to keep in mind is the Internet Protocol (IP) factor. Since this data is moving over an IP network, it’s critical to work with the network to make sure it’s going to be able to pass the amount of data needed. **Advice from Thielen:** Start testing early.



BETTER USE OF EQUIPMENT

BETTER PRODUCTION

BETTER WORK ENVIRONMENT