Volicon in a monitoring mood

Time Warner Cable's Raleigh, N.C. division is keeping close tabs on more than 500 channels on a continual basis using a monitoring system from Volicon.

Volicon's Observer RPM system, which cut its teeth in the broadcast TV world, is designed to automate a monitoring process that has historically been as manual as it can get–paying an individual to flip through channels to make sure that video and audio signals are flowing in smoothly. The 3-RU-high system already deployed by Time Warner Cable can automatically scan up to 10 channels per minute. If something's amiss, the Observer will issue an alert via e-mail or phone. The platform also keeps a faults log, and will slow the scan down to about a minute and a half if a problem occurs. The Observer also houses a hard drive that records the programs, so operators can check the video record to not only see when the fault occurred, but it provides a "video proof" (delivered via the Internet) of what that fault actually looked like on screen.

Interestingly, one of Volicon's primary competitors comes from the consumer electronics space–SlingMedia's Slingbox. In fact, several cable operators are using multiple Slingboxes as a remote monitoring tool.

But that approach "is manually intensive for the remote headends," said Russell Wise, the VP of sales for Volicon.

Slingboxes can also be had on the cheap. Volicon's more capable recording and monitoring system, meanwhile, costs about $25,000 for a four-input system. Time Warner is using two Observer systems for a total of eight parallel scanners–equivalent to eight human operators constantly scanning channels.

Wise said Volicon is also in evaluation or in trials with other operators, including Cox Communications and Comcast Cable, among others.

C-COR's nPVR tech deployed

Ambitious little BendBroadband is the first operator to launch an on-demand service based on network personal video recording (nPVR) technology from C-COR Inc.

BendBroadband, a long-time customer of C-COR, is using its real-time encoding and playback technology to offer broadcast programs on the on-demand platform with full PVR capability from the time the scheduled program begins.

C-COR's new Local On Demand Packager (LODP) manages the ingest and metadata entry of real-time content. The LODP platform is combined with C-COR's video server to enable nPVR capability. The system scales from a single program to as many as the operator decides to offer, C-COR said. Once encoded and recorded, all content can be made available on-demand.

BendBroadband is currently making local news available on the system, with plans for additional content including high school sports, cooking shows, city council meetings, and public broadcasting programs.