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USER REPORT

Audio Complaints End With Dolby

by Deepak Jolly
Headend and VOD Engineer
BendBroadband

BEND, ORE.

At BendBroadband, I am pleased to report that we have not received a single subscriber complaint about audio levels in the past year. Like many MSOs, we used to receive several a week.

The difference is that we installed a Dolby LM100 Broadcast Loudness Meter in our facility. We use it to normalize the subjective dialogue level of all incoming sources before sending the programming on to our subscribers. As our cable subscribers switch from channel to channel, the subjective loudness remains constant. They no longer have to readjust the volume all the time and there are no more sudden blasts from commercials.

As headend and VOD engineer, I had very little control over volume levels. They varied widely from program to program. I had to send out the signal that came into our system. I knew there was a better way. I started searching—literally worldwide—to find equipment that would measure audio, reflecting what people actually heard, and addressing our customer complaints. My efforts seemed fruitless until a colleague at Megahertz in Denver put me in touch with Jeff Riedmiller of Dolby Laboratories in San Francisco. Jeff had a new product—the LM100. He arranged for me to try out one of the first units and the rest is history.

Deepak Jolly, headend and VOD engineer for BendBroadband CATV

SATISFACTION ACHIEVED

I collected all the data needed to normalize my incoming sources to what I call the "sweet point." By displaying the dialogue-based loudness of a source as a simple number, the LM100 made it possible to find the right audio levels for all programming. The result has been a level of subscriber satisfaction that my company could not have otherwise achieved.

We are now getting ready for more and more content for digital simulcasts. I know the LM100 will be invaluable in this effort. It makes it much easier to insert local advertising and to establish a consistent dialnorm level on the outgoing Dolby Digital audio. The dialnorm metadata in the audio is read by the Dolby Digital decoder in the subscriber's set-top box to provide a consistent listening experience.

Overall, I am very enthusiastic about the Dolby LM100 Broadcast Loudness Meter. My company is also enthusiastic about Dolby recommending realistic loudness standards. With the LM100 as the measuring tool, we have industry standards that were not possible before. Because Dolby licenses Dolby Digital technology to all set-top box manufacturers, they can keep broadcasters informed of what to expect in the way of incoming signals, and they can also keep manufacturers informed of what broadcasters are putting out. ■

Deepak Jolly is Headend and VOD Engineer for BendBroadband, a privately owned cable operation serving Central Oregon since 1955. He may be contacted at 514-388-5815. The opinions expressed above are the author's alone.

For more information, contact DolbyLaboratories Inc. at 415-645-5000 or visit www.dolby.com.

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