Shenzhen is China’s most pioneering city, renowned for its openness and innovation. Shenzhen Media Group (SZMG) is a leader in the Chinese media sector when it comes to media production and management. With the integrated development of traditional media and new media, Zhao Weigang, President of SZMG’s Technological Innovation Research Institute, says that the only way for traditional media companies to maintain leadership is to embrace media convergence wholeheartedly.
As our service scope expands, especially with new media services springing up, media production becomes even more complex. To improve system flexibility, we have adopted private cloud architecture. Hybrid clouds are also likely to be adopted in the future.

Integrating new media with traditional

WinWin: The media industry is becoming more digitized, Internetized, and automated. What are SZMG’s development plans against as media converges?

Zhao Weigang: We are implementing media convergence on two levels. First, we are converging media production through our Convergent Media Center, presently under construction. Second, we are integrating overall development for the industry. We are integrating traditional media with new media such as IPTV and OTT services, on numerous fronts. We have also established the TV Station Alliance with various municipal television stations in China so that we can share operating resources, standardize business processes, establish joint technical platforms, and promote joint advertising operations. In this way, municipal TV stations can explore the integrated development of new media together.

WinWin: Tell us more about the Convergent Media Center project. How are you innovating during its implementation?

Zhao: Looking back at SZMG’s nearly ten years of development, we can see that from audio/video (A/V) to IT and from single IT devices to larger IT systems, evolution has been oriented largely around system flexibility. In the past, TV program production was conducted in a simple single-input single-output (SISO) manner. A nonlinear editing workstation was bound to specific personnel and businesses. Even if the workstation was free, resources could not be released for other program production teams to use. Today, program production is conducted in a multiple-input multiple-output (MIMO) manner, which places higher flexibility and agility requirements on IT platforms. Thus, we have established a shared production network so that networks throughout the TV station are connected and shared. This is in alignment with Huawei’s notions of business agility, which stresses agile requirement-oriented systems that better allocate resources and improve their utilization in a secure and efficient manner.

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WinWin: Intelligent and flexible IT infrastructure is the key to improving productivity for program collection, editing, and broadcasting. How did SZMG coordinate ICT and use IT to improve productivity?

Zhao: In the single-device era, one person was responsible for the entire editing, dubbing, and broadcasting process for a single program. Today, teamwork is common. A program is produced rapidly and the production team must also pay attention to social media and the Internet. For example, after releasing a piece of news, you need to respond to immediate readers’ feedback on new
media such as social media. This requires faster and more efficient IT platforms to facilitate the upgrade and transformation of management processes.

With traditional and new media converging, SZMG plans to build a flattened, open, and fully-integrated media production and operation platform to integrate news resources. The platform will change the traditional media operation model of “single-channel collection, closed production, and unidirectional P2MP broadcasting” into a model of “full-media convergence, shared platforms for production, and multi-channel distribution.”

We built four business platforms. The first platform is for full media convergence, where we aggregate information through traditional TV and the Internet. The second platform is for shared production. Besides traditional TV programs, we also produce new media programs such as big-screen display in studios. Interactive programs are also made and stored on the sharing platform. The third platform is for all-channel distribution, including traditional studio broadcasting, where we also adapt our productions to different channels. The fourth platform is a news resource planning system which manages and controls the entire news delivery process. Timely response to news dissemination can also be made. For example, audience response to the news released today can be analyzed to guide subsequent news production. These four business-level platforms are all supported by a large cloud-based media data center.

Considering the characteristics of new media, we treat audiences and readers as independent users rather than a vague user group as we did in the past. We focus on user segmentation and pay attention to personal feedback from each of them. As a result, we are able to deliver different types of media information to users of different categories.

Cloud-based media production and operation

WinWin: What kinds of opportunities does the introduction of technologies such as cloud computing bring to SZMG?

Zhao: I think the traditional media industry must embrace cloud technology. New technologies like cloud computing will transform traditional marketing into Internet-based marketing. Advertisements will give way to e-commerce; we must change. What is affecting the media sector is not cloud computing, but the new marketing model. Traditional media should embrace cloud to converge new media, after which the production and management process will become even more complicated, thus requiring a more robust support platform. Cloud architecture and technology will play a key role in the future.

For SZMG, cloud computing means that we have to better plan resource organization and utilization to transform SZMG into an asset-light operating media corporation. There are two development directions. One is the construction of a private cloud, while the other is utilization of public cloud infrastructure. We plan to build our private cloud in the Convergent Media Center. One thing that warrants consideration is size. Do we build this cloud based on average business scale or peak scale? There will be a great difference in the investment. During peaks, how can we better leverage public cloud resources? These are the topics we are going to consult with Huawei and Sobey (a local Huawei reseller).

WinWin: What Huawei products and solutions have SZMG already applied? How can Huawei better facilitate the execution of SZMG’s cloud strategy?

Zhao: During the construction of our Convergent Media Center, we did not select different partners for different products. We need a more agile, service-oriented, and intelligent private cloud system, so we selected Huawei’s comprehensive solution that encompasses switching, storage, and computing resource pools. We selected appropriate resource pools based on service characteristics. Most media companies have basically the same types of services, with only the percentages varying. Therefore, TV stations can choose corresponding private cloud resources, virtual private cloud (VPC) resources, or public cloud resources based on their respective service structure. This way, service- and requirement-driven infrastructure development can be realized.