



THE RACE TO BE FIRST ON AIR

The focus from mobile technology companies is usually on distributing content to a mobile phone but since 2007 Netherlands based company **ProSkope** has been focusing solely on the other direction: uploading from a mobile phone to the internet or master control room – to be the first on air. Development of the product is entirely demand-driven, says MD **Corné Bouman**, and that demand is growing

Our core business can be summed up in three simple words: mobile news gathering. And that's it. We have a very specific focus. We believe that the mobile device that is right now already in the pocket of every journalist worldwide will play a more and more important role for newsgathering, and all the various factors involved with this mobile device are developing every day – I am talking about video encoding of the device itself, at what bitrate can it encode a video or upload the video to our video platform, and at what speed, and at what speed can we transfer it to the broadcaster, and so on.

Give us a typical example of how broadcasters use ProSkope

RTL Netherlands are using it in the field right now. Their reporters have this Nokia phone in their pocket already just for checking emails. With our software they can

“**People still trust the traditional media because they check sources**”

be the first on air. They can do three things: they can shoot a video, and then send it forward to the FTP server, they can shoot a photo and send it through, and thirdly, the live broadcast functionality, live to television. Which they couldn't do in the past of course because they had to wait for the satellite truck to arrive. It's very simple, it's just a piece of software on your mobile phone which allows you to gather news. You download it to the mobile phone and you can use it right away. It gives you great possibilities.

Is this the end of satellite trucks?

No, not at all. Broadcasting in HD or whatever comes after HD, I think satellite will still be very convenient, very powerful and unbeatable. But the mobile phone can be very handy, everyone has it already so why not give them the capability to broadcast in a convenient quality. That's the point - quality is not superb but can be acceptable within the context of breaking news. When news is breaking we just want to see

it and then YouTube quality is very acceptable for every one of us. Quality is increasing but it will never take over satellite functionality.

How does the Proskope Online Newsroom work?

That is the place where all the content comes together, that is where you can manage your content – upload it, store it, forward it, download it, delete it etc. It is like a traditional FTP server used by newsgathering organizations. And of course you can also transfer the signal to the master control room, you can convert it to different formats, it's very easy to handle and accessible from every internet browser.

And if your journalists are using phones that enable a GPS signal, then you can map the location of your reporters. But the focus is on the core functionality of the application, we try to keep it as simple as possible because at that very moment when news is happening right in front of you, you just grab your mobile phone

and you just hit that one button that brings you up on air or lets you record video straight away and lets you record another one after it while uploading it automatically to the FTP server.

On top of these three core functionalities we can build a lot of functionalities, GPS is just one of them. When you are in a live broadcast, the master control room can type comments to the reporter which pop up on his mobile phone screen – if he is filming himself he might get a comment like "We can only see half of your face" or something like that. He can have feedback.

Where are your main markets?

Our typical clients are organisations with their own newsgathering department. We started off in Europe, and have a foot on the ground in the US right now, and an office in India. The plan is to expand to both Asia - Japan in particular - and Canada and the US.

We are very dependent on the local data infrastructure, if there are no 3G antennas, we are limited. China is also an interesting market – very high speed local data networks are not yet the case in China but the 3G areas are coming in Beijing and the more urban areas.

Are there not companies in Japan that offer what you are doing?

Japan and Korea are very innovative in the mobile space. But in Japan, like elsewhere, the focus from mobile technology companies is usually on distributing content to a mobile phone, and what we do is the other way round of course – we upload from a mobile phone.

That is something that no-one was thinking about. Of course there are companies now who are trying to do this. But to be number one in the industry you need to have a very strong focus, especially when you are operating globally. We made the conscious decision to do just mobile newsgathering – it was scary at first but now we have to expand to meet the needs.

How do you market your product?

Up to now it's been direct marketing, attending shows like NAB, IBC to meet people and to give them a demonstration. People have to see how it works.

And we offer a trial, we install the equipment on their site and they can start using it, we can add features and customize it. Now that we have created a momentum to connect those first customers we can start rolling out our next marketing plan.

Why have you integrated live feeds from Twitter into your product?

The journalist is seldom the first one to be at the scene, it is likely that an ordinary citizen like you and me are the first. In newsgathering Twitter becomes important because it creates headlines, it says what happens and when it happens. So people start reading about what's happening on Twitter, news agencies like AP or Reuters also see the story evolving on the web and they of course check sources and confirm it.

Our thought was that we just aggregate all the buzz going on on the internet, and include this within the ProSkope Online Newsroom so you are very up-to-date about what is happening. I think these services will play an important role in the sense of being supportive to the traditional media coverage. People still trust traditional media and I know why – because they check sources, they are professional.

Sometimes, depending on the situation, you can trust a fellow citizen more than a traditional TV station.

How do you assess what your customers' future needs will be?

We talk a lot with different stakeholders in the newsgathering industry. We translate their needs to very specific functionalities in the application itself, so when talking about GPS or Twitter integration, it's all possible, but we will only do this when there is a realistic demand in the market.

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What is in the pipeline?

We are very dependent on the capability of the mobile phone itself, on the phone manufacturers and the carriers. We can't wait to connect the new phones with an H.264 advanced video codec capability MPEG4! We are also doing research in areas such as how to communicate more effectively with the FTP server, and how to integrate Twitter and other services that media are already using for their newsgathering.

What's your vision of future communication – where is it going?

I think that semi-professional citizen journalism – like France 24's Observers – will play a more and more important role in newsgathering. We have to create this dedication within citizens to enable them to deliver rich stories, complemented by what the journalists produce. The mobile phone is just the supportive device in this. The device that people are using will be at least a mobile phone so that everybody involved in newsgathering will have a kind of newsgathering piece of software that is compatible with their own infrastructure back at the news station. You cannot deny the role of the mobile anymore.

Corné Bouman, thank you. ■



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