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Video Creators and Distributors Use Tracking Technology to Increase Asset Value

By Dorian Benkoil

A revolution in video tracking technologies is allowing broadcasters to not only tell how their material is being used but also to help them revamp operations to add efficiencies and serve clients in new ways.

"Digital technology has changed the workflow and the workflow processes beyond recognition," says **Sue Brooks**, head of content development for international broadcast at **The Associated Press**.

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The AP and **Reuters** are using two technologies, fingerprinting and watermarking, to find out where their video is going and how it's being used. *Jack Myers Media Business Report* introduced the **Attributor** technology in our *May 22* column on "fingerprinting".

Fingerprinting, used primarily for Web-based content, enables a purveyor of content search throughout the Internet to see if its content is being used and whether that use is legitimate.

With "watermarking," the primary emerging video tracking technology, a video creator inserts an "invisible stamp" to be hidden somewhere in an image or video signal. Nielsen has a proprietary technology it calls "SIGMA" that hides a watermark

in the invisible part of a vertical broadcast signal. **Microsoft** and **Hitachi** have solutions for video that their equipment and software can handle. Other vendors promise to hide watermarks in the luminescence of a video.

The most popular means of tracking broadcast videos comes from a watermarking technology invented by Netherlands-based **Philips** and provided by U.K.-based **Teletrax**, a joint venture between Philips and Medialink. Teletrax hides a watermark in every second of video, then uses a network of detectors and other monitoring equipment to track signals throughout some 60 countries, including all 210 U.S. designated marketing areas (DMAs). Teletrax has recently enhanced its U.S. operation, hiring Peter Winkler as chief marketing officer from PricewaterhouseCoopers, Lorelee Wiseman to head west coast sales from Pathfire, and Christopher Golden to head east coast sales from *The Hollywood Reporter*.

NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox, the AP and Reuters all use Teletrax to track their video. With surprising unanimity, executives talked of the benefits the technology has brought them. Reuters has been using the system the longest. In 2002, they became the first major client to start using Teletrax. Before then, they were essentially "flying blind," says managing director of television **Tony Donovan**. "The only information we would get on our subscribers about how, why, where and when they used our video was from the customers themselves," he told *Jack Myers Media Business Report*. "We had no empirical measure of any of those factors."

With the new technology Reuters has gotten detailed reports of where videos have been used as well as how much, in what order, what region, and even when and how the video is cut and re-cut. That gives its sales force considerable sway and helps overcome resistance to budgeters who see subscribing to video feeds as an unnecessary cost. "It moves from a pure pricing discussion to a more value discussion of, 'Look how much you've used and how much value you've gotten out of the product,'" Donovan says.

At the AP, Brooks says, the tracking has allowed it to slap subscribers' wrists for using video to which they didn't have the rights. **NBC News Channel**, the network's video feed service to local stations and international clients, pores over reports to find out what it should do more, and less, of.

"It does instantly give us a roadmap of how stations use our content," says NBC News Channel president **Bob Horner**. "We can tell if we need to do more of a certain kind of piece. We can find out if we're onto a large new story or if interest is starting to wane." NBC was recently able to pull a reporter from Kansas after finding out that stations outside the local area were no longer interested in coverage of a big tornado there.

By scrutinizing Teletrax reports, Horner's team also discovered that stations were often chopping up longer health stories into minute-long rundowns of the day's top health stories. "We've been able to send them a summary where we write it as a script and give the top medical items of the news today," he told *Jack Myers Media Business Report* in an exclusive interview. "They were quite

appreciative because it saved them quite a large amount of time." Before it had the technology, News Channel had to rely on scripts and logs that provided a far less complete picture.

The next steps for the technology will be to move from broadcast to Internet tracking, then to mobile and other devices. It could also help figure out per-use charges for video clips, something none of the sources interviewed for this column were doing yet. Philips has developed a fingerprinting technology it says can be used for tracking digital videos that *Jack Myers Media Business Report* is told it will begin showing privately this month for evaluation.

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