

## Staffordshire University

### Meeting student expectations and industry standards with an HD studio

Staffordshire University offer a range of courses centred around film, video and journalism. In order to bring their studio in line with industry standards and ensure that students were learning current practice, they upgraded their in-house news room to HD and replaced a cumbersome studio back end with NewTek's TriCaster. As the new term got underway, we dropped in to see the results...

The university wanted to upgrade everything to HD, and make sure that the signal students were outputting could be shared with displays around the studio so that their content could be monitored and assessed. "It was obvious that we needed to move the studio to high definition," said Richard, "[and the funding we'd managed to make available] meant that we'd be able to make a clean sweep, tackle all the problems and make sure that we got a full solution, rather than taking a piecemeal approach."

“The biggest problem we had [was that the studio] was SD,” explained Richard Mortimer, head of the university's media centre technical team. “But more than that, it was SD composite. Anthony from Jigsaw24 did us a report on our options, and basically that was the poorest quality signal we could get!”



The NewTek TriCaster

### \* Modernising the studio back end

Richard was aware of NewTek's TriCaster range – simple but powerful live production solutions that let you up, down and cross-convert inputs of different resolutions, add titles, graphics and virtual backdrops, and then stream them live to the web, record them or share them with digital signage.

“The team from Jigsaw24 were brilliantly, brilliantly helpful,” said Richard. “They recommended a TriCaster without any prompting from me, and I thought that was great, because that's what I was looking at anyway. They also pulled together the idea of having the HD-SDI signal from the cameras broken down to HDMI by Blackmagic Design switchers so it'll fit our HD TV screens, which is brilliant.”

The 13 screens that were installed round the open plan studio can now be put to much more varied use, able to show live feeds for assessors, pre-recorded footage on open nights, or feeds from different cameras during production.

“That's why we keep working with Jigsaw24 - we trust them to give us completely impartial advice and solutions. I've never once felt that someone at Jigsaw24 is pushing a product at the expense of what we need; they just give us a completely open and honest appraisal. And they're happy to work with us when it comes to funding as well, so we have a range of choices depending on the level of funding we get.”

Richard Mortimer, media centre technical team leader, Staffordshire University

Working with...



### In a nutshell...

#### Who are Staffordshire University?

A multi-campus university in the Midlands, Staffordshire University's mission is to deliver student-centred education through rigorous academic courses and strong links to industries throughout the UK.

#### What did they need?

The university's news room needed its cameras updating to HD and its back end simplifying. Their technical courses also needed new cameras so that students there could compare and contrast a wider range of technologies.

#### How did Jigsaw24 help?

We updated their complement of cameras so that they better reflected those used in industry, revamped their in-studio digital signage and replaced their complicated back end with a simple but powerful NewTek TriCaster.

#### What were the benefits?

- Staffordshire University's studio is now fully equipped to handle HD.
- Their infrastructure is future proof, and will stand them in good stead for years to come.
- Their studio workflow is simpler (so more appropriate for non-technical courses) but more powerful (allowing technical students the chance to stretch themselves).
- Their technology reflects the current industry standard, so graduates leave with experience of a professional workflow.
- Each department now has a USP to attract new students and retain current ones.

## \* Supporting students in different disciplines

"One of the main goals of the new setup was to make things a little bit easier for our broadcast journalism students. They're not particularly technical – they have to crew their own productions, but they're not going to go to do [technical work] for a living," said Richard. But at the same time, he wanted to be able to offer students with a more technical bent the chance to do more.

TriCaster would allow them to bring titles and graphics in-house and create their own virtual sets, while being relatively simple to use.

"In terms of an approach to teaching TriCaster, I was a bit apprehensive," admits Richard. "But, funnily enough, I managed to cover everything in an hour and a half, which was great. Once you actually work out how it functions, it's a very logical piece of equipment, and then you can break that information down and disseminate it to students so that it's not intimidating any more, it's just very powerful."

## \* Positive responses from students and staff

There was only a month to get the studio assembled, installed and running, so the staff at Staffordshire spent a day taking a crash course in TriCaster with our NewTek Certified Operator, and backed this up with additional video training. However, they're finding it easy to get students on board with the new technology.

"They've been really, really impressed," said Richard. "The feedback after the first session was excellent. They all got very excited, especially when they saw what TriCaster could do. You can see it gets their creative juices flowing, because they know they can put their virtual studio anywhere and make something that looks really professional."

"But more than that, both the technical staff and the academic staff now see the scope [of what they can teach]. Open days are a big part of what we do here, and now the news room's got that wow factor for an open day. So we're really happy with it. All the courses we've worked on with Jigsaw24 have now got a USP they can use to attract new students and retain current ones."

## \* Updating cameras across the department

As well as moving their news room to HD, Staffordshire University updated the studio cameras to a more recent model, and spent a month trialling the Canon C100 with an Atomos Ninja. This combination gave them the high image quality, shallow depth of field and portable form factor they were after, and Richard and his team eventually rolled them out across film production courses.

"We'd previously used the EX3, but we were seeing an influx of students who were shying away from using our kit and were clubbing together to buy their own DSLR hybrids," explained Richard. "The last thing we wanted was for students to be renting cameras at their own expense, but it wasn't until Anthony came in to talk about the news set and continued the conversation with a couple of us that we found out about the Ninja and how, given the price difference between the C100 and the C300, adding a Ninja to the C100 made the C300 less and less cost effective for us."

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Since then, we've helped the university add high-end cameras to their production courses, including Sony's F55 and JVC's FS700. "Now we've got mind-blowing technology we can put in front of students, things that they're not going to see until they've been in industry a while and gotten their feet under the table." The upshot? Staffordshire University's students go out into the job market with more high-end skills than their competitors, and are able to adapt to professional workflows more easily.



Jigsaw24 staff showing the TriCaster in action

**“ Every time I come to our account manager with a question he will find somebody in the team that has got the expertise to guide us, which is brill. And it's really important for us because finance is getting harder to get hold of in higher education, so we need to make sure that what we do spend, we spend correctly. And this is why we use Jigsaw24 - because it's a guarantee that when we do commit to funding that we'll end up getting a return on the investment.”**

Richard Mortimer, media centre technical team leader,  
Staffordshire University

## \* Evolving the setup further with Jigsaw24

The university's next plan is to add a RAID solution to its post-production suites, and they plan to work with us again on that project. "Every time I come to our account manager with a question, he will find somebody in the team that has got the expertise to guide us, which is brill. It's really important for us because finance is getting harder to get hold of in higher education, so we need to make sure that what we do spend, we spend correctly. And this is why we use Jigsaw24 - because it's a guarantee that when we do commit to funding that we'll end up getting a return on the investment."

**Want to know more about studio workflows and working in HD?** Get in touch with us on the details below.