

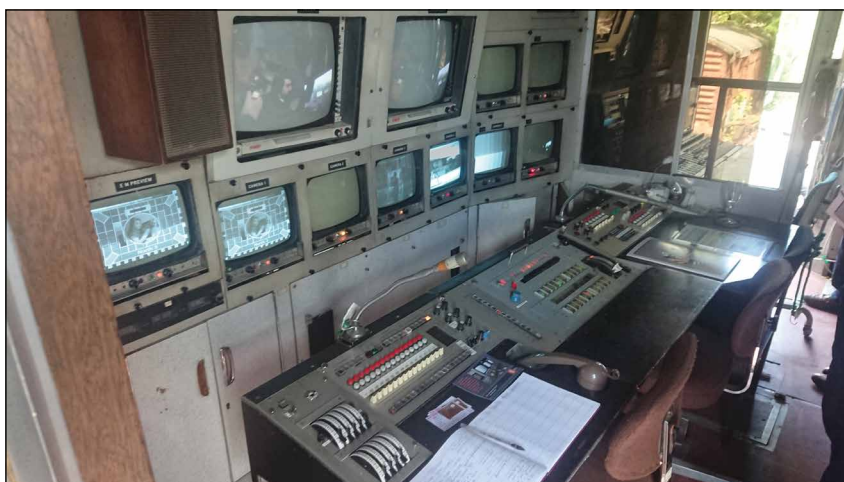


Bruce Devlin

## Media Workflows

**T**he toughest thing about being the Standards Vice President (SVP) is that everyone expects **standards** to be the most important thing. This month's *Journal* is all about media workflows, and I've yet to find any production workflow that is 100% standards-based. While it's true that the title of the SVP job gives me a clue about my priorities, I get called on to talk to folks about **workflow** that may well be standards-based but is made up of many technology pieces, from open source code, through *de facto* delivery specifications based on Trade Association, or SMPTE Specifications that in turn depend on full standards to work. I can already hear some folks saying, "In the good old days, everything used standards," but I beg to disagree.

I was honored to take part in the opening of the Pye Museum in Cambridge, U.K., as the SMPTE representative. Along with cameras and transmitters from the 1960s, there was a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) outside broadcast van with working color cameras from the 1970s. Many of the video and audio connections were indeed standards, along with the colorimetry, audio range, and other key factors. Nearly all of the control systems were proprietary, and humans performed the automation, none of which were standards.



The PAL signal in the van is a standard but the controls protocols were all proprietary.

With today's increased level of automation and efficiency, we are aiming to get more and more software and equipment to inter-operate. Some of this interoperability will require standards to build good and stable platforms upon which smart people (that's you, the reader) can innovate. The standards need to be constrained and extended to meet specific business needs. This is why trade associations get together and why SMPTE introduced the Technical



Monitoring was done by humans watching oscilloscopes. No automated quality control.

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Specification to address the need for a lighter weight, easier to iterate, published technical document. This also compliments the existing Recommended Practices and Engineering Guidelines. Now, we layer proprietary constraint and operational practice documents and then software interfaces to allow systems to talk to each other.

Not every moving part in a workflow needs to be governed by a standard, but the stable, foundational platforms cannot exist without standards from SMPTE, the Internet Engineering Task Force, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the World Wide Web Consortium, the Audio Engineering Society, and others. SMPTE is changing to address the need for software solutions, repositories, agile developments, and better interactions with other groups



An early BBC color outside broadcast vehicle on display at the Pye Museum, Cambridge, U.K.

who care passionately about making multivendor systems work well. The next time you think of workflow, remember that Bob and Ken sitting in the BBC van shooting horse racing back in the 1970s would not have recognized the word. They would

have just done the job using the technology available.

For more details on Pye, a U.K. tech company that is older than SMPTE, contact Pauline Howes [pjh@pyehistorytrust.org](mailto:pjh@pyehistorytrust.org) and <http://www.pyemuseum.org>.



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