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No Business Like Snow Business for PA People at Winter Games

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF PROVIDING venue communications for the recent Winter Olympics held in Korea was undertaken by veteran Australian company The PA People. Despite only being awarded the tender in October of 2017, the company, along with local partner OneUp Solutions, delivered as promised for the Games' 15 locations with a mixture of technology from Clear-Com.

Clear-Com's Eclipse HX matrix served as a central system, with FOR-22 module cards used for two-way-radio interfacing, an LQ-R4W8 IP interface was used for eight rings of audio interface to HelixNet, HelixNet digital partyline Main Stations, and a FreeSpeak II Base Station or E-QUE card.

In the field, 400 FreeSpeak II wireless intercom belt packs and headsets (for mobile users) were used, along with 115 FreeSpeak II transceivers and 30 splitters, 180 V-Series Lever keypanels, 440 HelixNet digital belt packs, 100 CC110 lightweight headsets, 100 CC200 lightweight headsets, 500 CC300 headsets, and 300 CC400 headsets.

"There was basically a three and a half-week period from when the systems arrived to having them deployed and operational for the Games," says PA People Managing Director Chris Dodds. "The way the Games operated in PyeongChang, is there were two national clusters.

"One constant cluster consisted of four effectively co-located venues in Olympic precincts, and then a fifth venue was within a few kilometres away, which was the second hockey venue. So, the primary cluster, the coastal venues, were hockey, skating, short track skating and curling, so it's a collection of five out of 14 venues there.

"Then you had what they call 'The mountain cluster' which is PyeongChang itself. You had the balance of the nine venues, plus the Medals Plaza and the Main Olympic Plaza, and those venues, the majority of them were quite close to PyeongChang, but not walkable, and then there's a couple that were further away, but obviously they're dictated by where the mountains are or where the snow falls. So, the entire nine alpine venues, effectively things like ski jumping, all the different skiers, and the local, and the half pipe, and all of the other snow venues, were all in the mountain cluster. So, there's a total of 14 sports venues, plus the Medals Ceremonies venue, which was the 15th system."

Three Clear-Com's matrix systems were co-located at Phoenix Park and physically interconnected via fibre cards. The Clear-Com matrix systems interfaced with the two-way radios and interfaced to the Korean LTE push-to-talk telephone system.

"It had the capacity to record a number of channels," says Dodds. "It then had studio technology announcer stations, so four announcer stations per system, for local ground announcements or audience participation announcements. What else was attached to that? So I think pretty much that's the ISB's for MCs, so all the analogue stuff's basically connected to the plain analogue and then there was a partyline system, which consisted of Clear-Com Helixnet, which was configured for eight rings of partyline and that was interfaced back to the matrix via what they call an "LQ box", which is analogue to IP, which connects back to the matrix as IP.

"The third component in every system was a comprehensive FreeSpeak system, so that's for the full duplex wireless, which was connected via what is called an E-QUE card, also in the matrix frame. So, the matrix is the hub of all the analogue stuff and then you've got IP, via an LQ box, to the Helix desk,



and then you've got also key stations, IP directly off the matrix frame."

While snow and cold weather are a given for any Winter Olympics, the conditions in Korea were particularly brutal in the lead up to the Games with even OB truck engines being affected.

"It was certainly very challenging on the bump in," says The PA People's Chris Dodds. "For most of the bump-in period temperatures were hovering around minus 20 degrees C, which by anybody's standards is not an ideal environment when you take your gloves off, and you're plugging connectors in. By the time you got to the Games it had settled down, around zero, so there were certainly some challenges. And, not by our standards either, the Koreans were telling us how cold it was."

Following the Winter Olympics, The PA People turned its attention to the Winter Paralympics which required some system reconfiguration due to three venues being used with multiple sports in each venue.

According to Dodds, "The sports presentation part doesn't necessarily change so much - the razzamatazz and the announcers - but with the requirements for every sport you've got to recognise that the Olympics is a group of sports federations that each do their own thing in the way. The way they run the sport is nothing is orchestrated in terms of everybody doing the same thing. So, every sport has their own requirements and if you've got two sports or three sports in the venue, then you need to change the configuration of the system to match the requirements of each of those sports.

"Next in term of international work, we're off to the Asian Games in Jakarta, which is August and September, so we'll work on the ceremonies there, but right now we're in the midst of the F1 Grand Prix in Melbourne, which is not an insignificant project."

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