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CEI Supports WETA Digital Re-Modernization Program



Newington, VA – 22nd March 2006 - Communications Engineering, Inc. (CEI) has been selected to support WETA-TV's digital re-modernization program.

WETA is one of America's top public broadcasters serving Washington D.C., Virginia and Maryland. CEI will be supporting the analog to digital transition at WETA's Production Center in Shirlington, Virginia, USA, as well as the re-modernization of the channel's Master Control Playout Facility.

The scope of the project includes consulting, planning, systems design, installation and testing. CEI engineers have already been working with WETA to prepare a comprehensive specification and multi-phased project plan that will serve as the blueprint for the conversion of WETA to an all digital HD/SD broadcast center.

According to CEI's Senior Project Manager, Joe Strobel, uninterrupted service is a key feature of the plan. "This is exactly the sort of project that differentiates CEI as a leading Systems Integration company," Strobel says. "We understand what it takes to deliver a seamless transition in a complex broadcasting environment."

A highly experienced engineer, Strobel has successfully delivered some of CEI's most ambitious and complex communications projects that have not only required engineering knowledge but complex managerial skills.

"When it comes to technology transitions such as WETA's move from SD to HD, CEI believes that it is always in the customer's best interest to find a more efficient way to do things rather than simply improve what we have done in the past. Simply replacing old with new just doesn't work," Strobel says.

"CEI's SD/HD transition strategy consists of three core principles," he explains.

"First, we ask broadcasters to consider 'when will the next opportunity to modernize come along?' In other words, they need to make the most of their digital upgrade. If necessary, they should ignore existing processes and get back to first principles. At the same time they shouldn't be too aggressive when bringing in change, because that will increase risk during the transition process.

"Second, we ask them not to take a 'big-bang' approach. A big-bang deployment is almost impossible in a large-scale modernization effort. By the time you develop your new system from the ground up, the target will have moved. Incremental development and deployment makes more sense.

“Our third piece of advice is to take an architecture-centric approach. Few components are ‘stand-alone’ these days. We are seeing increasing integration between component systems and people. The quality, flexibility and robustness of the foundation architecture will drive the evolution of your system. You have to think of the future,” Strobel says.

WETA-TV is heeding CEI’s advice. The joint WETA - CEI Technology Transition plan has been approved and Joe’s team has started to initiate Phase 1 which includes:

- Grass Valley Trinx/Apex Digital Routing Switcher Upgrade;
- Evertz Analog-to-Digital and Digital-to-Analog Conversion Equipment;
- RTS Digital Intercom Matrix Upgrade;
- Evertz Sync and Reference Generation Upgrade;
- Ortonics Category 6 Certified Structured Cabling Infrastructure;
- Evertz SNMP Monitoring and Control System;
- Physical renovations and additions to the overhead cable tray system;
- Abandoned Cable Removal;
- Power and Lighting modifications; and,
- Isolated Technical Ground Upgrade

Ed Kennedy, WETA’s Director of Engineering and Technology says they selected CEI because of the company’s vision and expertise.

“This is a highly complex project so it’s impossible to cover the full depth and breadth of the technology as well as the many different ways it can be applied. You need an agile and reliable technology partner like CEI because they simply think of things that I can’t,” Kennedy says.

“A non-engineer once asked the Project Team about impact of the digital transition project. We explained that it would be the equivalent of a surgeon removing their central nervous system and replacing it with a new one! That was quite a conversation stopper but...every transition to this point has been extraordinarily incident free thanks to the pre-planning of the WETA-CEI engineering team. We’ve also taken a very collaborative approach with end users. We want to provide them with the tools they need, when they need them.

“Of course, WETA is no stranger to modernization,” Kennedy adds. “We’ve always been an early adopter of technology. That’s so important for today’s broadcasters because equipment becomes obsolete very, very quickly. The digital evolutionary turnaround is happening much, much sooner and, like the business world, broadcasters need to think at ‘Internet speed.’ We need to make decisions in hours, not days or weeks so we can repurpose our content for non-traditional broadcast channels such as cable and mobile devices.”

As far as the benefits of this project are concerned, Ed Kennedy believes the pay-off are huge.

“We’re leading the way,” he says. “WETA is laying a firm foundation for the future. New content, new audiences, delivered over new technologies. That spells success for WETA and provides a powerful engineering resource for other public television stations.”

Background:

WETA

WETA-TV 26 and WETA-FM 90.9 are public broadcasting stations serving Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia with educational, cultural, news and public affairs programming and related services. WETA is committed to producing programs that highlight the history and people of the Greater Washington

area. WETA's headquarters are located in Arlington, Virginia. WETA was founded by public television pioneer and Arlington luminary Elizabeth P. Campbell. For more information on WETA and its services, visit www.weta.org.

Communications Engineering, Inc. (CEI)

CEI, located in Newington, Virginia, is a leading United States Systems Integrator. The company has helped to define the leading edge of systems engineering and implementation for the communications industry since the mid 80's. CEI also represents 500+ technology equipment manufacturers.



From left to right: Ed Kennedy, WETA's Director of Engineering and Technology and CEI Senior Project Manager, Joe Strobel in WETA's recently constructed CEI Digital Control Room.