

NEDbank Datacasting Network Celebrates 1st Year

Johannesburg, South Africa - Nedbank, the principle banking subsidiary of Nedcor- one of South Africa's top four banking groups - is probably best known throughout the world for the magnificent Nedbank Million Dollar Golf Challenge which has been a major event on the international golf calendar for the past 20 years.

A forward looking organization, almost a decade ago Nedbank decided that communicating with its employees was as important as communicating with its customers. At the time, the challenge was to find an appropriate datacasting technology platform that could deliver rich multimedia content to TV-set like monitors that would be located in all of its branches throughout South Africa.

The result was hybrid of homegrown and international applications that proved inefficient and prohibitively expensive, especially when used with the limited services offered countrywide by South Africa's single telco provider.



According to Michelle Chowles, Nedbank Ltd's Head of Data-casting, the system was unable to achieve the Bank's objectives, and although they never lost hope that the concept would work, it was difficult to manage and its viability proved impossible to measure. After ten years of difficulties, it was decided to either find a system that worked efficiently or scrap the project altogether.

"We then began to seriously investigate the local and world-wide markets for the best software to design, schedule and manage our content", said Chowles. "We didn't want to be used as a guinea pig for yet another new and unproven software solution, and thankfully we were shortly introduced to Ethniks InfoChannel - the exclusive SCALA distributors for South Africa". Ethniks' impressive country-wide installation and support branch network infrastructure, coupled with Scala's extensive worldwide deployments and over fifteen years of experience with multi-media datacasting networks, appeared to provide the technology and peace of mind that we needed".

"Once we understood the power and reliability of Scala, we decided then and there to go with the Scala InfoChannel 3 (IC3) platform. We are happy to report that we have not



been disappointed - everything that was sold to us in this solution was exactly what was delivered - and Scala's content authoring tool offered the added advantage of radically reducing our content production costs".

She adds that their experience with other hybrid multicast platforms - particularly their lack of quality and reliability - made Scala all the more appealing. Scala offered the only platform that could support the desired level of network management and control with CONFIRMED broadcasting and health monitoring from literally any location in SA - even through a relatively simple one-way satellite network.

"We can now finally sleep comfortably at night!" says Michelle.

NEDBANK quickly realized that the Scala software platform allowed more flexibility in content creation (faster and more frequent/time updates at a lower cost using less bandwidth) due

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to the powerful capability of Scala IC3, especially when compared with their previous system, which was pure MPEG based.

"We really feel that we have seen the light as far as the creation, transfer and management of our content is concerned - it's just so easy!" said Michelle.

"A series of 36 multimedia pages created in MPEG2 filled a CD ROM and would take over 22 hours to send to all of our sites. Once re-created in Scala's IC3 Designer, the slides not only looked better, but altogether took up less than 1.44MB!" The biggest challenge was to improve the confirmation and health monitoring/status feedback system to better deal with the "harsh" communications environment found in South Africa. (e.g. Using the dial-back telephone lines for the "back-channel", dealing with very variable line quality and the fact that even local telephone calls in SA can be relatively expensive especially when many hundreds of remote locations are involved as is the case with Nedbank). The Scala and Ethniks development and support teams responded rapidly and once the problems were identified, the necessary functionality was quickly added to more efficiently handle these special local conditions.

"We were very impressed with the support provided and the fact that the problems were solved fast enough to have virtually no impact on our network and operations" said Chowles.

"What started out as an investment in a messaging system to staff has now migrated into a unique business proposition which we can pass on to other departments", continues Michelle.

"Nedbank now uses this medium to communicate with BOTH customers and employees using the same network infrastructure. Sharing the same infrastructure for training and customer facing brand reinforcement provides a better ROI as different startup costs can be spread across budgets of multiple cost centres".

Michelle concludes, "The benefit of data-casting is that it adds a unique dimension to our in-house merchandising systems. Our posters and brochures are literally brought to life. We are now able to measure the impact of our network to our clients far more effectively than any of these traditional media!" Now that the concept is proven to be stable and reliable, NEDBANK has broad plans to expand the network and further explore its opportunities and

potential.

As Scala is the only platform that supports playback to BOTH passive AND interactive (e.g. touch screen) unattended remote displays, NED BANK is now considering adding interactive customer facing applications - even live broadcasts are now possible.

Ethniks Systems t/a Ethniks InfoChannel is the appointed Scala distributor in SA and is the only organization in that territory with field-proven experience in installing and maintaining large CENTRALLY CONTROLLED Digital Signage Networks with countrywide support infrastructure.

Ethniks InfoChannel is currently involved in the rollout of a number of very exciting data-casting projects throughout SA and has recently been awarded a tender for the installation of visual communication network into Post-Offices throughout South Africa.

