On target

uniqFEED provides Virtual Advertising solutions for sports through its software, which virtually overlays LED perimeter boards or creates new inventories to maximise the potential of sponsorship revenue streams, allowing multinational and regional brands to show their logo anywhere, to anyone.



uniqFEED founder and chief executive Lukas Gysin

Virtual Advertising, which utilises on-screen advertising inventory to generate additional revenues, has been making strides of late. Switzerland-based uniqFEED has created what it calls DRT – Digital Replacement Technology – an entirely software-based, non-intrusive solution to leverage additional advertising space.

Through the use of technologies including Computer Vision, AI, photorealistic rendering and AR, and sophisticated algorithms, its set-up is simpler and more flexible. Its 'AdApt' software generates multiple localised feeds out of the world feed, so that advertising output can be tailored to a continent, region or target group. These feeds can then be encoded with 'ManiCode', uniqFEED's second product, to allow the multiple feeds to be distributed with lower data usage, saving satellite or dark fibre costs.

Few companies have scored large-scale deployment of their DRT across the sports industry, but uniqFEED's non-intrusive, entirely software-based, robust, flexible and scalable solution has made substantial progress.

The Virtual Advertising solution allows brands to send target-market specific messages to their customers, and allows multiple brands from various countries to use the same space. In addition to its software, uniqFEED provides a range of add-on solutions, including real-time analytics, post-production concepts and digital carpets. Lukas Gysin, the founder and chief executive of uniqFEED, says that the company has focused on targeting the sports industry because "the sports market bears the biggest untapped sponsoring potential – our solution can optimally use this potential".

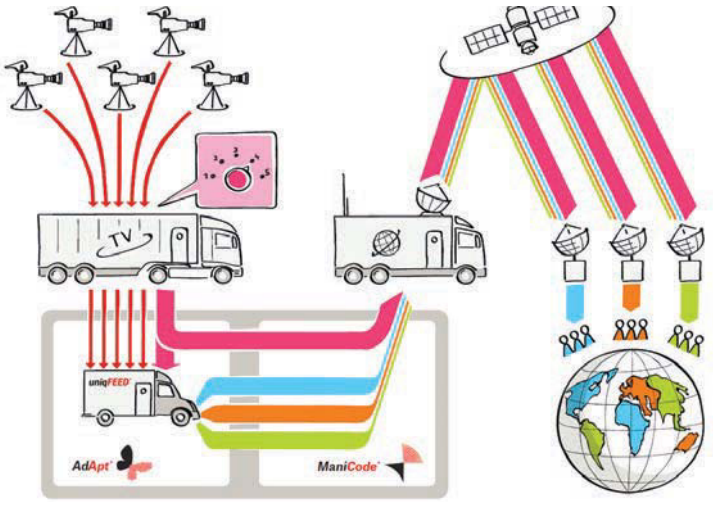
"This industry is progressing exactly as we anticipated," he adds, "and with live sports, we focus on those who can benefit from our solutions financially: the rights holders, the sponsors and the event organisers."

Currently, uniqFEED has partnered with Tennis Australia, the innovative organiser of the year's opening Grand Slam, the Australian Open, and with Tie Break Tens, an exciting new short-form tennis format. It has also recently showcased its products successfully as so-called 'Hidden Live Trials' at a range of tennis, badminton and table tennis events, including at the 2017 ATP 500 Swiss Indoors in Basel, the Laver Cup 2017 in Prague, the 2018 Badminton Swiss Open in Basel, and most recently at the WTA Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart.

Gysin explains that uniqFEED's solution has been used predominantly in court sports environments because "the main camera has significant visibility of brands during a live broadcast, and the camera motion from left to right is reduced compared to football, hockey or cricket".

"From a technical perspective, it is more challenging with camera motion and zooming," he continues. "But we are highly confident and optimistic that we can solve this in the immediate future – we can now only look forward." Gysin sees the company creating the "product-readiness for football" by 2020, when he envisages uniqFEED being ready to handle the additional camera movements necessary in that environment.

The company is currently focusing "on the main camera, but soon, this late summer, we will have the second camera available". Another challenge



uniqFEED's 'AdApt' software generates multiple localised TV feeds from the world feed, while 'ManiCode' allows these to be distributed with lower data usage



is dealing with extreme outdoor weather. "Fog, rain and snow are what we consider tricky weather conditions," says Gysin. "Finally, uniqFEED's vision is a Virtual Advertising solution that covers ten or even 20 cameras, but we are approaching things step by step, one product version at a time."

uniqFEED's DRT has several advantages over existing hardware-based rivals, such as Supponor, including the ability to manage the system remotely and cost-efficiently, the scalability to many cameras and various venues with different production partners, the flexibility of having a lean operation, and the lack of need for an LED timecode or external sensors. Gysin also stresses that no equipment like specific LED perimeter boards or cameras needs to be touched to use its innovative DRT.

"Hardware-based systems reduce the flexibility and scalability of the production," Gysin explains. "Setting them up is also labour-intensive, which means they are not practical for sports that are constantly moving from venue to venue, or where the system needs to be set up quickly – for example, because of a different event the previous night."

uniqFEED's DRT works independently across existing LED and static boards. As sponsors increasingly seek to measure their brand visibility during live broadcasts, uniqFEED can supply real-time analytics of live brand exposure, which can be changed and rearranged throughout an event for all feeds. The exposure time accumulated is then available immediately after the event ends, allowing for better management of sponsorship campaigns.

Moreover, in the unlikely case that the technology malfunctions, Gysin explains that "the worst case could be that the live conditions are not fitting to the product specs and then we have to fade out the virtual ads. The viewers or users at home would simply see the world feed with the reality instead of a virtual localised tailor-made feed."

Having trialled its Virtual Advertising solution effectively within court sports settings, football is the next challenge for uniqFEED. "Our strategy is to provide a non-intrusive, entirely software-based solution for Virtual Advertising which fits for all kinds of sports and does not detract from the sporting event," Gysin says. "So the business focus is on key players like tennis through our tennis partnerships, and then it will be accepted by all those involved because the novelty value ensures that eyeballs are drawn to the brand.

"The leagues in football such as the English Premier League – of course, football is a key target."

In the meantime, the company is in discussions with various rights holders about other trials. "We are also thinking of doing something for ice hockey, such as the National Hockey League [NHL]," says Gysin. "Our DRT solution works in remote production hubs, so it would be a perfect fit – it's non-intrusive, scalable and flexible."

The uniqFEED Virtual Advertising solution in action during the ATP 500 Swiss Indoors tennis event in Basel, Switzerland

After working hand-in-hand with rights holders in court sports, uniqFEED also aims to expand into new markets, including entertainment, and consolidate its position as a leading provider of DRT solutions in sport. It wants to form a revenue-generating machine and allow almost endless opportunities for branding.

"We are looking especially at the Asian market because it is mature and offers great potential at the same time," says Gysin. "Languages and cultural behaviours are highly segmented. Football and even smaller sports like table tennis or badminton are extremely popular in Asia. There are so many different cultures, languages and cultural behaviors that localised, tailor-made virtual feeds are a perfect fit for the Asian market." ●

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