



Photo courtesy of Advent Communications.

## SNG specialists

Advent Communications are a pioneer of modern satellite newsgathering. They manufactured the first flyaway antenna in 1989 and have been focused on the SNG and broadcast sector ever since. Helen Jameson spoke to James Wilcox of Advent Communications about SNG and recent developments.



**Question: As a manufacturer of SNG equipment and given the rise in popularity of rolling news, what would your assessment be of the demand for satellite in the broadcast sector?**

**James Wilcox:** In the broadcast sector of the market, we are seeing a very clear increase in the demand for space segment, along with a quite insatiable appetite for bandwidth – which are clearly consequences of the broadcast industry's shift to High Definition and the increase in broadband communications.

**Question: The changes in SNG technology over recent years have been quite staggering. What do you feel have been**

**the main features in the evolution of SNG?**

**James Wilcox:** SNG technology has continued to evolve towards mobility and portability. In physical terms, the equipment has become smaller, lighter, and cheaper. At the same time, it has become easier to use. However, we have probably reached a point where the laws of physics will start to constrain further developments down this path.

But High Definition is giving an impetus to a different kind of development in SNG, as HD tends to require larger vehicles with larger antennas and better compression tools. Sport is the main driver for change in this area.

High Definition news is really only in its



infancy but may follow in due course, as TV audiences will continue to upgrade their TV sets to HD.

**Question: What type of systems does Advent offer to broadcast customers?**

**James Wilcox:** Advent is a true systems and solution provider, capable of delivering a very wide choice of satellite solutions. One point that's very important to mention here is that Advent owns the IP (Intellectual Property) in its own products, which is an important factor in the engineering of bespoke solutions. It also means that the Advent products have future-proofing built in. This is not true of all suppliers in this sector.

Fixed earth stations are an important part of our offering, and we are building a good portfolio of reference sites where the integration has been completed very successfully by Advent. We're also working on DTH applications as well as the infrastructure for remote broadband.

**Question: Do news organisations and broadcasters in general form a large part of your core customer base?**

**James Wilcox:** Absolutely. More than half of our business is related to SNG.

**Question: Is demand on the up for High Definition SNG systems? What systems**

**does Advent provide for customers who are looking for HD compatibility?**

**James Wilcox:** Yes. Demand is definitely growing, particularly from sports broadcasters who were the early adopters. A number of news organisations are also looking at moving towards High Definition, but it is still early days for them. For Advent there is a strong synergy with the wireless camera products developed by our sister company, Link Research. Advent is offering a comprehensive upgrade path from SD to HD. This is a key selling factor in the new 5000 series electronics subsystems that we are offering for High Definition broadcast. We showed a new NewSwift vehicle-mounted antenna at IBC 2008 which has been enhanced to support the operational requirements of high power C and Ku-band RF and High Definition.

**Question: Advancing compression technology is having a significant impact on the filing of news reports and increasing system efficiency. How is MPEG-4 changing SNG?**

**James Wilcox:** MPEG-4 allows more intensive use of satellite space, which offers very good potential for High Definition, but it introduces significant delays compared to MPEG-2. This will be a factor in broadcasters' assessment of it. MPEG-4 is not having

a significant impact on traditional SNG so far.

**Question: How is modern newsgathering reducing costs for the broadcaster?**

**James Wilcox:** Modern SNG equipment offers the broadcaster the great advantage of being able to operate in truly remote locations without any infrastructure. There are also many complimentary content trends in a multi-channel environment. Advent is part of the Vislink Group which is providing a comprehensive range of OB solutions that are helping to streamline the broadcast and live television production workflow.

**Question: There will soon be demand for even higher rate video streaming. How is Advent preparing for next generation SNG demands?**

**James Wilcox:** This is an interesting area and very much complimentary to Advent's product offering. Advent and the Vislink Group are investing in new developments which will be central to our product strategy as we go forward.

**Question: In terms of research and development, what can we expect to see from Advent in terms of SNG in the future?**

**James Wilcox:** Watch this space! The Vislink Group certainly intends to continue being a dominant player in SNG in the future. ■



*NewSwift vehicle-mounted antenna. Photo courtesy of Advent Communications.*