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Creative Imagery - Keeping Tasmania on the Map

Tasmania may be Australia's smallest state but it plays host to its fair share of prominent sporting and cultural events, including cricket, tennis and concerts. With the larger outside broadcast service providers concentrated on the mainland, independent operators such as Hobart's Creative Imagery have stepped up to meet the demand in the market.



Creative Imagery's Fiona and Andrew Harcourt.

FOR OVER THREE DECADES, owner Andrew Harcourt and partner/production assistant Fiona Harcourt have been helping to bring Tasmanian events to the wider world. Initially conceived as a side-gig to Andrew's work as a Senior Production Camera Operator with Southern Cross Television, Creative Imagery took off some seven years ago when the company took on in-venue production for Hobart's Blundstone Arena (Bellerive Oval) handling the main PA/audio and big screens.

Creative Imagery's next leap forward, in a technological sense, came with the advent of the COVID lockdowns. Looking to help keep the community connected, the company set up shop in a church-owned, furniture warehouse and, at no cost, began producing video material and remote church services for the Salvation Army.

"There was no financial opportunity, but there was a need to bring people together," says Andrew Harcourt. "Elderly people, people that were shut in, there was a need to bring them together. We were busy, absolutely flat-out four or five days a week through COVID just producing content for people.

"Tha started the upward trajectory with other people such as the people at Gravity [Media] saying,

'oh, you've got some gear down there. You know, we need some help. Can you, can you help us out with doing this?' And then it sort of became a very upward step from there."

That upward step has included working with Gravity Media on the last two seasons of the Women's Big Bash cricket, and working with Cricket Australia on Sheffield Shield coverage. Local football leagues have also approached the company for broadcasting and live streaming services.

"We've also been doing Anzac Day for the ABC for the last six years," says Harcourt, "doing the full production for them down here. Also, the last two state elections for Seven TAS. We still have a live tally room in Tasmania, so they come and make their speeches in the tally room. Then there's working with the State Electoral Commission, integrating live data through our Ross Xpression system, bringing live data pages up to analyse election results. So, there's been quite a lot of many and varied things in there."

The increasing number of many and varied things has led Creative Imagery to embrace a more versatile configuration for its Ford Transit, long wheelbase, high-top van.

"On the tech side of it," says Harcourt, "it's all in flyaway racks. So, I can stack in what I need and take out what I need. If I want to do a smaller job that's inside a venue, I can just take a couple of racks out of it and then they just plug back in in a matter of an hour and a half, two hours. I can have the whole thing completely rebuilt.

"Whether I'm doing a small one camera live stream or I'm doing

Video's Ultrix routing system.

"I was using a Carbonite switcher beforehand, with a Blackmagic router," says Harcourt, "but with Gravity coming on board again for this last WBBL season, it made sense then to upgrade. The ABC were keen to see me upgrade a little bit as well for what they're doing down here. So, I made the commitment to get the Ultrix.



nine cameras for gravity on a WBBL, it will do anything there or in-between. We've got four metres lengthwise and a metre and a half width. So, it's quite comfortable for three to four people."

The van is based around Ross

"Last year, we had Hobart International Tennis as well, the world feed for that. Part of what they wanted was a larger facility that could just basically be an MCR for the centre court and take the outer courts, which were being

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done by somebody else, and act as a full MCR for the whole event and push it out.

"So we bit the bullet and put the Ultrix in. It's 72 x 72. With the Carbonite Blade as well, which gives you the internal ins and outs as well, it gives me plenty of I/O here."

For comms, Creative Imagery relies on Riedel.

"We have made a significant investment in Riedel, not just for the OB kit, but also we are supplying comms to larger events," says Harcourt. "We currently have seven RSP2318 panels, one 1216 panel, four Bolero wireless packs and twelve Hytera UHF radios. We are soon to extend the panel count to 10 and Bolero wireless packs to six - possibly more if the need arises. Large event comms seems to be gaining more momentum here in Tasmania and we are deploying our Riedel system on more events as well."

For cameras, Creative Imagery relies mainly on six Sony HXC-FB80 studio cameras with full chains, including CCUs. These are complemented by four Panasonic Hothead PTZs and a couple of Marshall 505 compact broadcast cameras.

"The interface here is via baseband into a DVN port or, or into LiveU," adds Harcourt. "So I'm using baseband at the moment, but trying to keep everything else digitalised, like the MADI option in the Ultrix, and then MADI to Dante conversion, so the whole audio system runs Dante."

With Tasmania being an early test bed for Australia's National Broadband Network (NBN), most buildings are fibre-to-the-premise. When not connecting to Telstra's Digital Video Network

(DVN), Creative Imagery uses LiveU's LU300 HEVC encoder over the NBN for main delivery where required or as a backup to the DVN.

"Through my provider, I can spin a port up on any Network Termination Device (NTD) in any building in a matter of 20 minutes," says Harcourt. "So it's just a case of going on a web interface, booking the port and up she comes and we run on 400 x 400 asynchronous ports and I can run two, three LiveUs, no frames dropped all day without a problem."

When partnering with Gravity Media, contrary to the industry's trend towards remote production, Creative Imagery will handle all directing and switching duties. Graphics are handled by streaming provider 5stream.

"We'll do commentators, the whole thing live, less graphics, shoot off to 5stream who will drop the graphics on it and then off she goes to Gravity."

THE FUTURE

While the National Rugby League (NRL) pursues expansion in Las Vegas, the Australian Football League (AFL) is eyeing growth in Tasmania with the establishment



of the state's first AFL team and construction of its home ground in the form of the proposed Macquarie Point Stadium.

While Andrew Harcourt sees little flow-on from home matches of the new AFL team as they will be more of an opportunity for the use of remote production technology from the larger players, he does see benefits in the development as a whole.

"If I put my personal opinion in there," he says, "you look at what Adelaide Oval's done for Adelaide, what Optus Stadium's done for WA or for Perth, I think should they build it and they get it sympathetically right, and there's a couple of different designs, so that's a different issue, but should they build it, whatever version it is, it could create a precinct with conference function venues, accommodation, etc.

"At present, the cost of putting a truck or two trucks and shipping them on the Spirit of Tasmania to get over here is probably equal to my daily rate for equipment hire, so it's more cost effective for them - and Gravity have realised that straight away - by the time you take travel time, you've got a truck off the road for five days just to do one day in Tassie, whereas we can service it down here for equal to or slightly less than the Spirit fare, so that's driving what we're doing.

"We're just looking for the opportunities, not looking to get too big because we want to be able to keep it to a level where we can manage it and manage it well. What I've prided myself on over the years is that we give a high level of service."

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