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Maple Leafs Keep Fans Locked In With Improved Video Workflow Powered by Signiant, Dalet

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With the NHL season shuttered through Jan. 14, video-production teams from across the league have found ways to keep busy during the lockout. Some have even used the work stoppage to their advantage, improving existing video-production workflows in preparation for hockey's return.

Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) — which owns the Toronto Maple Leafs as well as the Air Canada Centre, Toronto Raptors (NBA), Toronto FC (MLS), and Toronto Marlies (AHL) — turned to Signiant and Dalet to enhance the video-production workflow across its portfolio.

Using a combination of Signiant's Media Exchange and Dalet's Sports Factory platform for media-asset management, MLSE has been delivering behind-the-scenes content to Toronto sports fans and keeping Leafs faithful engaged with the brand.

"We embed producers with each of the teams: they travel on the team plane, they travel on the team bus, and they feed us back stories that we want to get turned around very quickly," says Ed Holmes, director of engineering, MLSE. "We take the game and create what we call a Game in Six, which is a six-minute highlight package, [and] we integrate that with a lot of the feature things. I mean, we shoot on the bus, we shoot anywhere we can, [and] we try to get it back here to Toronto as quickly as possible."

Before adopting the Signiant-Dalet workflow, MLSE relied on FTP sites for file transfer. Field producers are skilled at locating WiFi to upload video, turning a coffee shop or hotel lobby into a de facto workstation. The challenge stems from adhering to the team schedule.

"Because they do travel with the teams, they are under very strict timelines," explains George Kostoulias, broadcast engineer, MLSE. "If their upload doesn't finish when the bus is leaving, they have to literally cancel the upload and start it again from the airport, whereas, with Signiant, [they have] the opportunity to pause the upload, get on the bus, make it to the airport, and log back in via the airport's WiFi and continue that upload."

Signiant's Media Exchange enables users to move large media assets fast and securely over IP networks without extensive IT support. Once files are sent back to MLSE's Broadcast Centre in Toronto, Dalet's Sports Factory centralizes and organizes the content for easier search and distribution. While the system currently serves MLSE's in-house productions, Holmes and Kostoulias see potential for future expansion.

"The next phase [is] probably feeding our resources here to the other players in Canada, like TSN [and] SportsNet," says Kostoulias. "What we want to do is start using our resources to give them content, and we see Signiant as perhaps one of the easy gateways from us into them."

As MLSE anxiously awaits the beginning of the NHL season, producers are keeping busy: Raptors fans can check out daily videos from the road, while hockey fans can get their fix through a constant stream of Marlies' content posted on both the Marlies' and Leafs' Websites. Although MLSE has certainly taken advantage of the work stoppage, both Holmes and Kostoulias insist that the 80-strong video-production team will be ready the moment the lockout ends.

"We identified last year that we were losing content because of the unreliability of our FTP transfers," says Holmes. "There's no other way to do it because it has to get back here as

quickly as possible. I think we're all excited about the new season starting so we can deploy this technology."

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