American Motion Picture Society
home of the world's longest-running non-commercial film festival

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USTREAMING/Narrowcasting
sending live video over the web

FinchleyTV goes on the air

In a recent issue of a British film magazine an older member who cannot easily attend meetings wrote about his dream of a virtual film club. Now it is coming true.

On 19th November 2010 London (UK) club, **Finchley Film Makers**, tried a test transmission which Arthur and others were able to watch in Scotland, England and Utah. We chose a suitable event: a talk by two drama producers and directors for the BBC. Their talk was excellent. There are some teething problems to resolve, but this could be a way for many clubs to share their meetings with members who cannot attend and any other interested viewers.

The System

Initially we considered **Skype** and other video messaging systems, but few allow easy - and free - multiple connections. Then we found **Ustream**. This enables you to transmit sound and video live on the web. The free basic service lets you use a single webcam. More features are available from additional free software called **Ustream Producer**, which lets you send out live video, stills, recorded video files in MPEG4 format and sound files. Moreover, you can cut/dissolve between them.

This sounded ideal, but how would it work practice. At our club premises, we are fortunate to have access to Wi-Fi and a decent laptop and so we had all we needed.

- We connected the laptop to the internet using Wi-Fi
- We connected a DV camera via firewire to the laptop (with some cameras a USB connection may be possible.)
- We started **Ustream Producer**, which immediately recognised the camera feed and showed the camera image in the transmit box
- We logged onto the **Ustream** service and activated the broadcast setting
- We opened up www.ustream.tv/channel/finchleytv in

Next steps

I hope others might like to join in this experiment. Most club evenings are not suitable (do you really want to watch our annual competition?) but we do have some interesting guest speakers each year so I am looking for volunteers to log on the next time we try it.

Drop me a line at
Finchley.Film.Makers@googlemail.com
and I will keep you informed
of future transmissions

Most speakers want to show a video and we have to improve the quality for our viewers. I am currently exploring direct feed possibilities.

To cover a live event properly needs two or more cameras. Ustream offers a piece of software called **Ustream Producer Pro** which enables you to use multiple cameras as well as captions. This would be much better but it costs $199.

Our club has quite a few distant members who could continue to share in our activities and other clubs would be able to share our special events if they met on the same
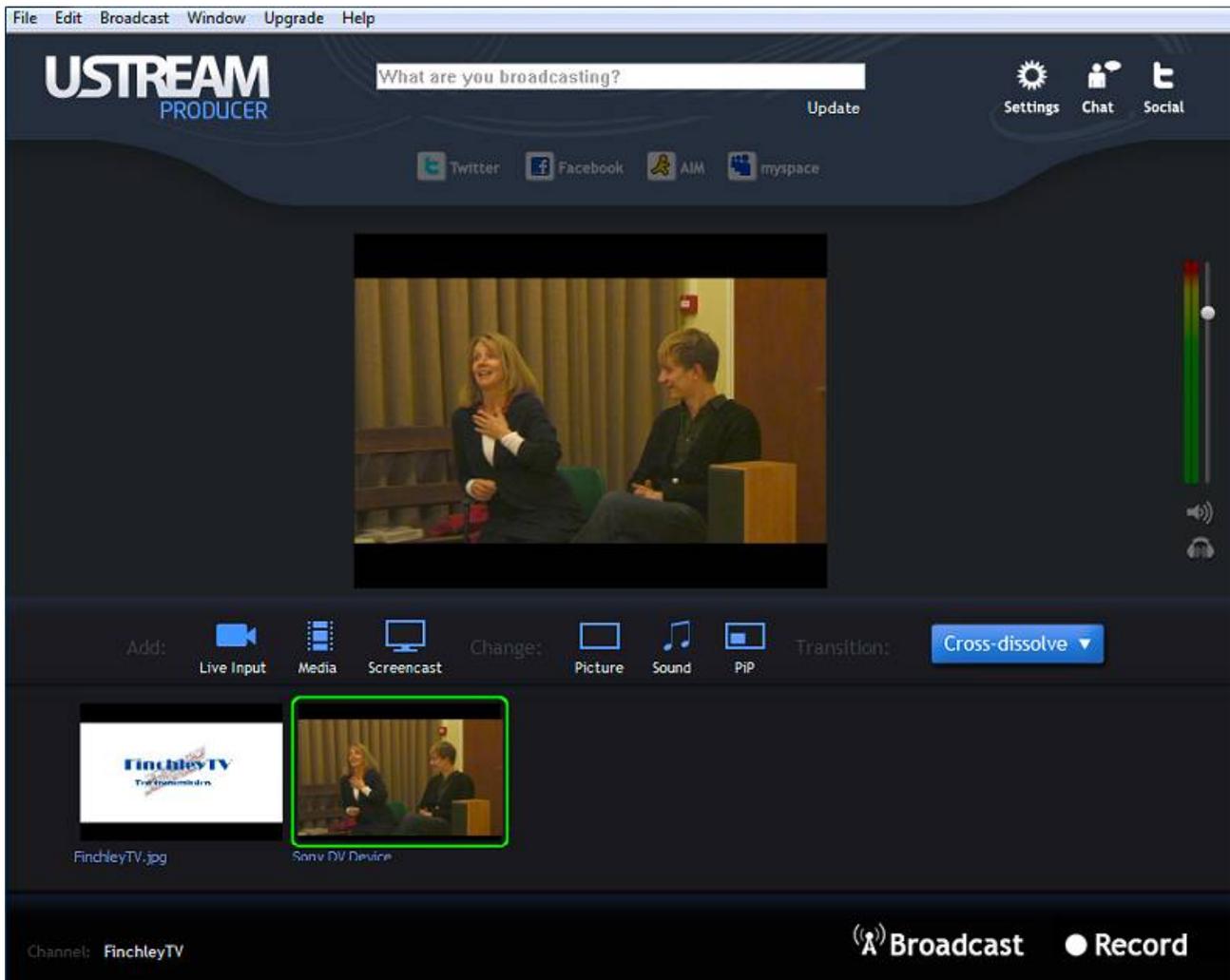
a separate browser and saw a blank rectangle - flagged as 'off air'. We set the feed running and then it got exciting.

It took only 7-10 seconds for the transmitted picture to feed all the way to Ustream's server and sent all the way back. Then we could see both the outgoing and incoming pictures on the same laptop with a 7-second delay. This was a bit much for the poor little laptop and Wi-Fi connection so *our* picture was jerky, but this was not a problem for our viewers.

- Before transmission, we set up a 'test card' - an image with '*FinchleyTV test transmission*' which could be used when we wanted to cut the picture.

evening. Alternatively, we could record an event to transmit another evening. Interclub competitions might possible - irrespective of where they were and anyone could watch.

The dream if a virtual club requires interactivity - so viewers could use a mobile phone or instant messenger to ask questions and get answers. Software companies might be interested in setting up demonstrations for multiple viewing and take questions. Competitions could be streamed across the country.

It took a while to set up. Rather than rely on the on-board mike we put a rifle mike on a stand, pointed it at our guests, and ran a cable to the camera on a tripod next to the laptop. The mike worked fine as our guests moved about. I monitored the sound on headphones from the camera and from the laptop to check captured and incoming quality.

At the appointed time, we logged on, put up our test-card,

Trying the idea in North America

At least one club had planned a similar hook-up with an equipment specialist dealer who planned to give a "long

and cut the sound - don't forget that viewers can hear every word including you cursing the kit! When our guests were introduced, we turned on the sound and dissolved to the picture. 7 seconds later, we saw that we were indeed "narrowcasting" to the internet and that we had 4 viewers - our test panel. It all worked fine except that our widescreen image ended up being squeezed. I now have the answer to that problem. However, we did have a bigger problem when our guests wanted to show some video - I pointed the camera at the projected image on our big screen but not surprisingly sound and visions were not good.

I was very gratified to receive emails saying how much the broadcast had been enjoyed. In the USA Ned Cordery was getting just as good a result as Dave in Cambridge. The following morning Arthur got in touch - ironically, he was getting a poorer picture than Ned in the USA - probably because his internet speed was lower - that was the defining factor not distance.

distance talk and demonstration". That attempt did not happen for human reasons but the technology now makes it possible.

What could be better suited for small clubs who often meet in one another's homes?

A computer with a fast internet connection is all you need to watch. To transmit you only need add a piece of free software and a video camera.

Given the vast distances between enthusiast groups in the USA and in Canada, this type of "narrowcasting" surely has a role to play.

Do let us know (email webmaster@ampsvideo.com) if you try it and take up Peter's offer of watching their trial transmissions by emailing him - see above. Finchley Club meeting usually start at 7.15 British time which is 1.15 in the afternoon CST.

- Webmaster

- Peter Kidman, Finchley Film Makers (visit their website)