



Switching Automation Systems

Introduction

Switching automation systems is a major decision—but if done right, it can result in significant cost savings and greater efficiencies in a station’s operations. Below are some suggestions on what is involved in switching to ASTRA MCR or ASTRA News automation.

Considerations for Changing Systems:

- Maintenance costs too high
- Current vendor under new management
- Little new development for your system
- Enhancement requests are expensive and with a long lead time
- Support hard to get for new devices

Advantages of Switching to ASTRA

A major benefit of ASTRA is that it works with all of your existing infrastructure and equipment. With over 18 years of experience, ASTRA has a huge device library with new devices being added all the time.

While other playout options are available that basically replaces everything with an all-in-one solution, ASTRA lets you can keep your existing traffic system, videosevers, graphics, routers, switchers, archive, and other equipment. All you replace is the existing automation hardware.

File-based and Hybrid Workflows

Often, the driving factor in switching to a new automation system is adopting a file-based workflow. Older systems may not have the features needed for efficient operations with files or are expensive to update. ASTRA supports hybrid workflows to ease the transition to a total file-based workflows. Some key consideration include:

Traffic/NRCS Interface – ASTRA already has interfaces to most traffic systems available today and if not, a new interface is minimal work, even for custom-built traffic systems. For news, ASTRA uses MOS or other various formats to interface with NRCS systems.

Ingest – ASTRA offers manual ingest capability as well as automated ingest from a list automatically generated by traffic or NRCS systems.

Clip QA/Editing – ASTRA provides the capability to QA a clip during ingest or later, and trim clips as needed.

Metadata Generation/Editing – ASTRA will automatically generate clip metadata and provides the ability to edit and add additional metadata as needed.

Playout – ASTRA excels in controlling devices for frame accurate playout with built-in and optional redundancy features.

As-Run Log – ASTRA has already interfaced with the majority of systems on the market to report back what actually played. In addition, the as-run log can be formatted in various common formats as needed.

Item	ASTRA
Traffic & NRCS I/F	Most exists, new interfaces are quick.
Videorever I/F	VDCP mostly used and easy to adjust for timing issues. Native API control available for some.
Graphic, switcher, routers devices, etc.	Most devices supported with native or common protocols. Large library exists.
As-run logs	Most supported, custom formats available.

Transition Process

A well proven method for transitioning to a new automation system is to install the new system and run it in parallel with the old system until everyone is trained and comfortable with operations.

The major issues to address for a clean transition are:

Operator Training – The most common cause for an on-air mistake is operator error. Thus every ASTRA system includes on-site operator training as well as an option for factory training. While ASTRA is easy to learn—with its user interface customized for each operator—it is still different than what most operators are used to on older systems, so operators need to practice before going live.

Interfaces – An interface to all hardware and software systems need to be completely tested in normal and under failure conditions. Traffic or NRCS interfaces may need to be modified for each customer’s workflow.

Error Conditions – All systems need to be tested and operators trained on what to do when a problem occurs. Procedures need to be developed for failure conditions so that everyone is comfortable with what they have to do.

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