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New System Rebuild at WINK-TV Streamlines Hurricane Information Process and Enhances Station Operations

TAMPA, Fla., June 16, 2006 --- With the Florida hurricane season underway once again, getting critical information out to the public in a timely, effective way presents daunting challenges, particularly if storms arrive in the midst of rebuilding a TV station's broadcasting operations center.

Such was the case for WINK-TV, the CBS affiliate and news leader in southwest FL, during two devastating hurricanes to hit the area in recent times --- Charlie and Wilma. Despite the challenges, the station kept functioning during the worst --- and most necessary --- times. Now, a complete system upgrade and installation of state-of-the-art equipment by Professional Communications Systems, Inc. (PCS) streamlines operations and ensures that the TV station will continue to serve as a vital communications center should the area be impacted again by a major hurricane. Nine radio stations also broadcast from the WINK-TV facility making it an essential medium for security forces, governmental agencies and the one million-plus residents of the Fort Myers / Naples TV market, which covers a six county area. The WINK-TV facility is located in Lee County.

WINK-TV's hurricane operation track record is, indeed, impressive. The station delivered award-winning coverage of Hurricanes Donna and Andrew, and remained on-air without interruption during both Charlie and Wilma, no easy task as the station underwent a major overhaul to its broadcasting master control and operations centers.

Televised dramas often portray dedicated professionals performing under stressful, tense circumstances, but WINK-TV's challenges in keeping emergency hurricane information flowing to area residents were the real thing. The WINK staff worked around the clock to broadcast a lifeline of information to people and organizations in the crosshairs of the hurricanes.

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(add one, "PCS Rebuilds WINK-TV")

WINK-TV was in the midst of a building and operations expansion while transitioning to digital and HD technology, with PCS as the designated systems integrator. As the project got underway, disaster first struck with Hurricane Charlie. WINK immediately put all efforts into providing and keeping emergency information on its feeds. A large in-house power generator supplied electricity during the area's extensive power outage. Its generators never ceased during the 6-½ days of widespread power failure and the station remained on-air, providing critical information to area residents.

The hurricane subsequently caused major delays in construction and the project was temporarily put on hold. "Getting the community back to normalcy had to take first priority," said Keith Stuhlmann, WINK-TV Director of Engineering. Stuhlmann is also the chief engineer for the nine radio stations that operate from the same facility. The delays dragged on for months, while communities in both Charlotte and Lee counties were rebuilt. Equipment scheduled for installation was stacked in boxes and stored on-site until the rebuild could be resumed.

Once construction was resumed, the station focused on its goal --- to keep WINK-TV at the technological forefront. Its plan called for the upgrade to digital technology with the ability to simultaneously broadcast in standard definition (SD) and high definition (HD), both over the air and to cable, and the ability to accommodate another SD channel in the future.

The project presented its own unique challenges, performed under "worst case" scenarios. A great deal of new equipment had to be installed in the control and operations centers, while remaining on-air with no interruptions in day-to-day operations. Many workarounds were required during the transition, but viewers never knew the difference.

WINK management wanted a comfort factor about the equipment chosen for this important project. To that end, the upgrade team selected equipment that would provide both reliability and durability, along with future growth capability. In the master control, tech center, production and server areas, solutions were integrated with top-of-the-line Grass Valley, Dolby, Leitch and Panasonic components. For its studio set and master control room WINK chose Panasonic plasma monitors because of the high contrast ratio that performs well even under studio set lighting

"Our philosophy is to purchase equipment that is reliable, will operate for many years, and yet provide for growth. In our business, failure is not an option," said Stuhlmann. "If you install A-line equipment, you don't have to worry that it will fail or that you've made a costly mistake"

WINK management was also very selective in its choice of a system integrator for the project. "We did a lot of research and were pleased with the referrals we received about Professional Communications Systems," said Stuhlmann. "We liked what we saw and knew PCS was going to be a good match for us. We felt they could do what was required, and do it well. That was the deciding factor for us."

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(add two, "PCS Rebuilds WINK-TV")

The upgrade has enabled the station to record both standard and high definition feeds from CBS. The HD feed is provided over the air and is fed, via fiber-optic cable, to southwest Florida cable systems. HD is broadcast in true 5.1 audio, which supplies surround-sound signals to home entertainment centers, and high quality stereo. Seventy percent of prime time HD is in Dolby 5.1. When not carrying HD programming, WINK up converts 480-line video scans to 1080 lines to allow smooth transition between HD and non-HD programming and to deliver sharp, clear pictures. The HD / SD simulcasting is interrupted during opportunities to distribute original HD programming from CBS, as was done during this year's NCAA basketball tournament.

The capabilities of the new system were put to the test when, shortly after the upgrade and construction were completed, the area was again struck by another devastating hurricane, Wilma, in October of 2005. This time, adversity provided a high-tension test for the new equipment and operations, providing a direct comparison of old vs. new. And, once again, WINK-TV performed in a stellar manner and was recognized by the FCC for its extraordinary efforts under great duress.

"Wilma gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our capabilities and test our strengths," said Glen Argirion, WINK engineer. "The new set-up allowed us to get information on the air quickly and efficiently. Wilma gave us the opportunity to see just how well the new system performed and how much more smoothly things went the second time in broadcasting news, weather and emergency information, and providing on-screen crawls. We immediately saw a vast difference between the old and the new."

WINK management also gives Professional Communications Systems high marks for its professionalism --- and patience --- during the conversion. "Our choice of PCS proved to be the right one," says Stuhlmann, who indicated that PCS' experience and expertise in broadcast systems integration was particularly important because of the project's complexity.

Automation has been a key factor in the success of the upgrade and the transition to digital. In addition to increased capacity, the station no longer has to deal with cumbersome workarounds, routing sources are more efficient, and workflow is improved.

It was a long process during which hurricanes, construction delays and crises caused roadblocks, but the end result has been successful. The rebuild has allowed WINK-TV to continue honoring its commitment to southwest Florida viewers to be at the forefront of programming and technology, and to provide better, faster news. "Our audience wants perfection and we want to give it to them. Now we can," said Stuhlmann.

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DESIGN TEAM

WINK-TV:

Keith Stuhlmann, Director of Engineering
Glen Argirion, Engineer

Professional Communications Systems (PCS):

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FACTS ABOUT PCS

Professional Communications Systems, Inc. (PCS) has been a leading provider of consulting, systems integration and equipment solutions to broadcasters and operators of audiovisual presentation technology since 1985. Headquartered in Tampa, Florida, the firm is a division of Media General, Inc., owner of television, newspaper and Internet media properties in the southeastern United States. PCS is a member of PSNI, the Professional Systems Network International group of audiovisual and broadcast integrators.

Case studies of more than a dozen completed PCS installations are presented online at www.pcomsys.com, along with additional information about the company's products and services. Major installations include award-winning KCEN-TV in Waco, KWTW in Oklahoma City, Charleston's WCBD-TV, WTVC in Chattanooga, and Orlando's leading PBS outlet, WMFE-TV, along with WFLA-TV, Nielsen Media Research and Raymond James Stadium in the Tampa Bay region.

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