

grandMA

Case Study

QVC, Inc. Studios



- grandMA – maximum power at full speed

QVC Studios

New lighting control system with extensive networking capabilities



QVC, Inc., the archetypal electronic retailer, broadcasts live 24 hours a day, 364 days a year from its world headquarters in West Chester, PA (outside of Philadelphia). As the third largest television network in the United States (in terms of revenue) reaching more than 86 million homes, QVC has a remarkably efficient lighting department. Lighting engineers look after the needs of the entire studio complex day and night.

Each studio at QVC features multiple sets that can change from day to day. New sets are built to accommodate new products, and old sets are occasionally updated. The exceptional high quality of QVC's productions, and the reluctance to even consider broadcasting footage from tape, means that lighting setups regularly have to be reproduced months or even years after they had been originally designed because of the ever-changing and varied schedule.

In order to better accommodate the diverse needs of this dynamic production environment, QVC planned a major upgrade to their existing lighting systems. Moving lights and motorized pantographs featured heavily in the new scheme. The ultimate goal was to have a collection of completely automated studios, which could easily change from one lighting setup to another.

Networking to enhance the working environment

In order to facilitate the new vision of the QVC studios, the lighting team would need to change their existing lighting control system. It had to be easy to use, with the ability to control both moving lights and conventional lighting; and for future applications be able to control LEDs and video projection. It also needed to have extensive networking capabilities. Networking would allow the QVC lighting staff to remotely adjust the lighting in any studio while they were in another studio, or even in a completely different part of the building. Once the team at QVC started to think about what networking could do to enhance their working environment, the list of required features kept growing: central show backup, support for DMX over Ethernet devices, visualization software that was compatible with the set design department's existing software, and so on. Stage managers and other non-lighting personnel regularly play back lighting presets for rehearsals, so any new lighting system would also have to be simple to operate and secure.

Ultimately, MA Lighting, and its North American distributors, A.C.T Lighting, Inc., were chosen to work closely with the lighting team at QVC to deliver a system that met and exceeded the original specifications.

The solution to QVC's needs was a networked system based on MA Lighting's grandMA range of consoles. The grandMA's multiuser capabilities allow a single show to be divided into separate

realms of control using the grandMA's "Worlds" feature. This feature was key in QVC's decision to use grandMA.

The QVC staff were also impressed by how simple the grandMA was to use, configure, and tailor to their requirements. They were also impressed by the grandMA's complete range of accessories and software programs that were available to help 'flesh out' the system.

Using Ethernet for DMX distribution

The grandMA's multi-user programming environment is the heart of the system at QVC. Although there are six distinct studios in the studio complex, the workload and restricted sight lines dictated that certain studios would require more than one console. It was decided that a multi-user session would be created for each studio, and that all consoles in that studio would be part of the session. Each lighting setup is divided up using the Worlds feature so that a user can only affect the stage in front of them, while the console is still acting as a tracking backup for the other consoles in the studio.

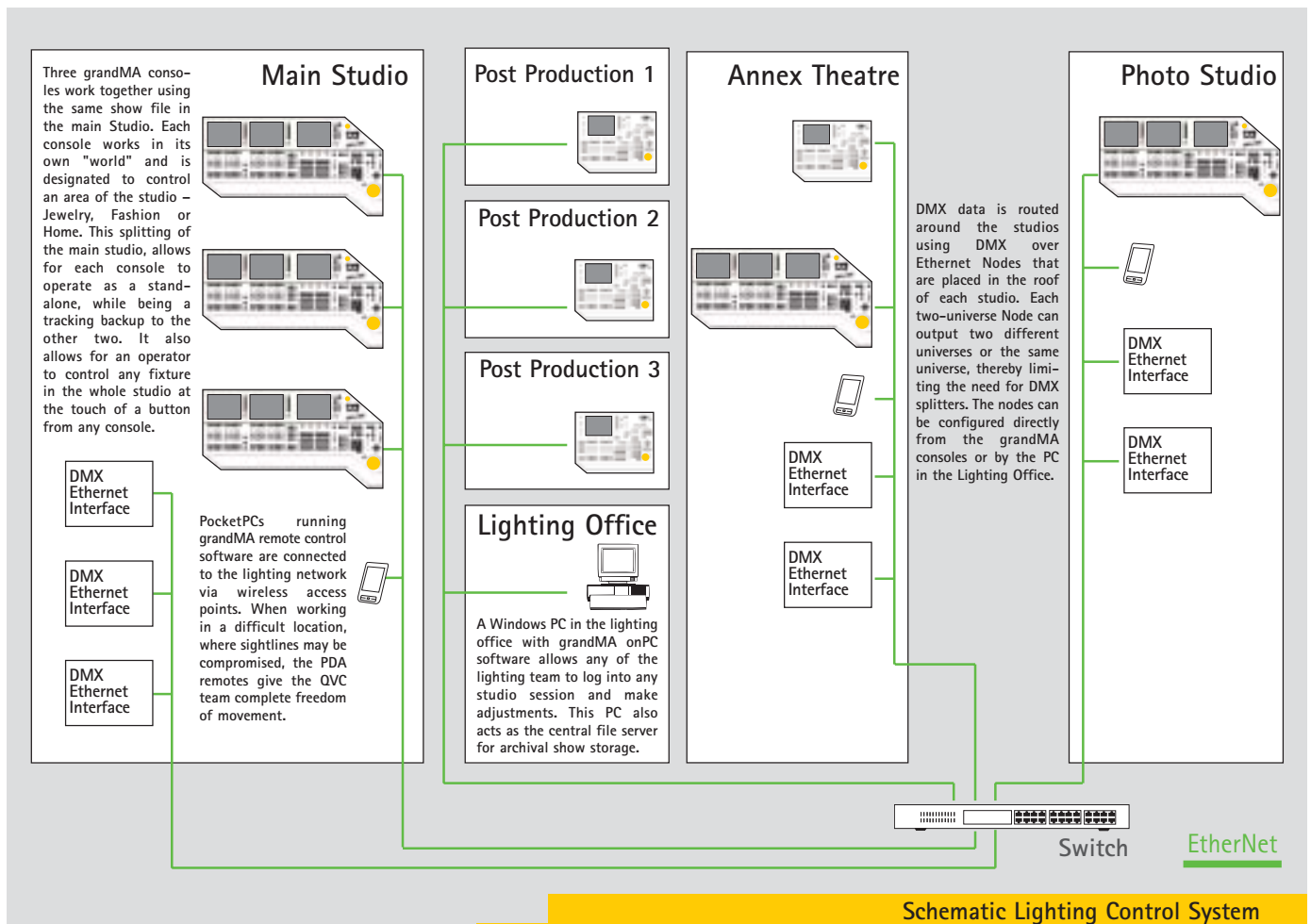
Any member of the lighting team, whether he or she is sitting at the computer, in the lighting office, or at a console in one of the six studios, can browse the network and log in to one of the studios' sessions. The show data is automatically downloaded into the console or PC that they are using and then any changes can be made remotely to that show, including live on-air adjustments. This also allows the lighting team to troubleshoot problems and help less experienced users without leaving their current location.

An Ethernet backbone was installed throughout the studio complex. Every grandMA console in the studio complex is connected together via this specially installed lighting control network. DMX data is routed throughout the studios using DMX/Ethernet nodes that are placed in the lighting grids of each studio. Each two-universe node can output two different universes or the same universe, thereby limiting the need for DMX splitters. All nodes can be configured directly from the grandMA consoles or by a PC in the lighting office. Since the distribution of data is handled electronically, a problem with one console can easily be resolved by having a second console take over control of the DMX/Ethernet nodes. The use of Ethernet for DMX distribution also means that each console only requires a single Ethernet cable and a power cable, making the grandMA consoles easy to move around the studios.

A PocketPC can be used as a remote control

In addition to the extensive wired Ethernet network, QVC now uses 802.11b wireless LAN technology with 128-bit encryption and a randomly generated pre-shared key. Each shift lighting designer has a PocketPC that can be used as a wireless remote control for any of the consoles in each studio. Designers can make changes from the studio floor or from the top of access equipment. By specifying which console they want to log in to, they do not have to worry about affecting lighting on other sets in the studio due to the logical separation of the Worlds feature.

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A Tablet PC running grandMA onPC software is also used to provide a completely portable, hand-held control surface that has all the complete functionality of a full grandMA console. With six grandMA consoles (five grandMA full-size and a grandMA light) as well as two PCs running grandMA onPC, backing up data is a top priority. Shows are automatically archived to the PC in the lighting office. Shows can also be loaded remotely from the QVC lighting office server by any console on the lighting network.

The system at QVC was created through the collaboration of MA Lighting, its North American distributor A.C.T Lighting, and the entire lighting team at QVC. As MA Lighting responded to QVC's requests and ideas, new concepts and possibilities were constantly being realized. The collaborative process has produced a stable yet highly flexible system that the lighting team at QVC are constantly pushing in ways that were never envisioned at the start of the project.

The grandMA system is in a constant state of evolution. QVC's future needs, as well as those of users worldwide, are now only limited by imagination rather than by technology.

The statements and opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of QVC, Inc.

Company Profile

■ MA Lighting International, based in Paderborn, Germany, is the dedicated sales, support and service entity for the renowned grandMA control systems, digital dimming systems, networking tools and media servers of MA Lighting Technology, based near Wuerzburg (GER). The product range offers cutting-edge solutions for control and dimming and contains the award-winning grandMA consoles, the renowned Light- & Scancommander, but also the reliable digital dimmer racks and packs. With its media server grandMA video MA bridges the lighting and video worlds and integrates media servers like a fixture into lighting control.

Today, MA Lighting is well known for its technical know-how and has achieved a unique international reputation for its operational philosophy. The company looks back with 25 years experience. MA Lighting strictly follows a professional user-centric approach and is getting as close as possible to the market via its own international offices as well as competence and support centres in the UK, North America, Latin America, the Middle East/India and Asia Pacific – supported by a world-wide distribution and service network.



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All technical specifications are subject to change without notification.

We do not assume liability for any incorrect information in this case study.