

Graduating to Cambridge

A CEDAR Cambridge system is now at the heart of Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Centre for IT Services (CITS), Event and Media Support Section, writes **Barney Jameson**



CEDAR Audio managing director Gordon Reid

AS ONE OF ASIA'S LEADING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, NTU is the kind of place where every shade of talent is easy to find, yet the scope of the university's ambition still has the capacity to surprise. Pro Audio Asia has previously reported on the impressive theatrical and A/V facilities found within the Singapore institution, but it has never before touched on the accompanying postproduction facilities.

That work takes place within the Event and Media Support Section. They may not always know it but every day more than 32,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students of the university are touched by the department's efforts.

'The Event and Media Support Section services all of NTU's faculties and departments including the NIE (National Institute of Education),' explains the Section's senior assistant director, Eric Wei. 'We provide services related to video and audio pre- and postproduction, graphic design, motion graphics, 3D animation, photography and print. We also manage, deploy and do the programming for ChannelNTU, which is NTU's campus-wide digital signage system.'

Just as the Section undertakes many of the tasks of a commercial media outlet, so the challenges it faces remain similar. 'Quite often we encounter issues with the audio channel of our video recordings,' says Mr Wei. 'We get interference noises and only discover them after the shoot is over. We needed a system that could reduce or even remove them.'

It's by no means a new problem – Mr Wei and his colleagues have long sought a solution but previous efforts with software plug-ins failed to live up to expectations. Instead, they have now graduated to a CEDAR Cambridge audio restoration system, supplied and installed courtesy of CDA Pro Audio (Asia), which represents CEDAR in Singapore and Malaysia.

'CEDAR's association with NTU runs much longer and deeper



Cedar Audio's Cambridge audio restoration system

than people might imagine,' begins CEDAR Audio managing director Gordon Reid, who visited NTU to deliver training on the Cambridge system. 'One of our directors, Professor Peter Rayner, was on no less than five occasions in the 1980s and 1990s a visiting professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering at NTU and, together with one of CEDAR's former employees, also collaborated on research into image restoration at NTU,' he continues. 'When I visited NTU in June 2015 to perform the training for Eric and his staff, I discovered that Eric and I had also met in the 1990s when I demonstrated the original CEDAR for Windows system. This went a long way to explaining his in-

depth understanding of the CEDAR Cambridge system and the issues surrounding audio restoration and noise reduction.'

'I was very impressed all those years ago when I heard the demo,' Mr Wei recalls. 'When we had the opportunity and financial resources to purchase the CEDAR Cambridge system, it was an easy "no brainer" decision.'

Mr Reid adds that the 'integration was quite straightforward, what is more important is the ability to use the system properly. As the saying goes, "a moment to learn, a lifetime to master." It really helped when Gordon did the training with us.'

Mr Reid picks up the story. 'At any given time, I trained up to five of Eric's colleagues. I was delighted with their existing knowledge of the system which was due, in large part, to support from CDA Pro Audio (Asia)'s general manager Joel Chia and MD Rick Dowel, who had already conducted sessions on specific modules such as Declick, Declip, and Auto dehis, as well as running through the overall picture of what CEDAR Cambridge can do. Rick emphasised that there is no magic wand in audio restoration, which made my job much easier!'

The university was also well prepared in terms of accompanying equipment. 'NTU had installed a pair of ATC SCM25A Pro active monitors, which meant that they could hear the initial problems clearly and gauge the noise reduction necessary for best results,' says Mr Reid. 'This isn't a trivial matter – elsewhere in the past, I have been asked to train people who are trying to listen through tiny, plastic computer speakers, which imposes some interesting challenges.'

'I generally find that our customers understand the various filters in a restoration system, and learn how to use them quickly and easily. So, when training, I spend much of my time discussing the architecture of the system and showing how the various types of processes – streaming processes, track processes and spot processes – can be combined to achieve results that can't be obtained from a more limited 'plugin' type of architecture. NTU's studios also experience the same time pressures as commercial studios so we concentrated on achieving the best results in the quickest possible time.'

With the training complete, Mr Wei now observes that the 'most obvious difference is the quality of the audio after the unwanted artefacts have been removed. The original, high-quality audio signal is still intact. I don't think I have come across any system that can beat what CEDAR can do in terms of noise removal.' He concludes that the technology has benefitted NTU 'greatly! In the future when any of our video recordings have unwanted noise, we are more than well-equipped to handle the situation'.

Nor is Mr Wei alone in his enthusiasm. 'Eric showed Joel and me around NTU's remarkable Nanyang Auditorium, which seats more than 1,600 people,' recalls Mr Reid. 'The standard of the auditorium and its facilities is exceptional. I thoroughly enjoyed my days at NTU, and very much look forward to returning in the future.'



Joel Chia of CDA Pro Audio (Asia) and Eric Wei of NTU with the new CEDAR Cambridge system

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