

# BEHIND THE SCENES ON AVOD OR WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU NEED TO CHANGE SOMETHING?

Once upon a time, in the good old days, if a trailer wasn't available for a movie, it didn't really have a big impact. The cassettes were still duplicated without any interference from anyone, and the airline just didn't include that trailer in its promotion of what was onboard. How many passengers really noticed the difference?

The arrival of AVOD has changed this peaceful scene. There are, no doubt, hundreds of people in our industry who are still unaware of the amount of work just the absence of a trailer causes. Surely it can't make all that difference, can it? Additionally, when the airline's AVOD navigational system allows for the passenger to select to view the trailer of the movie, it is really important for the integrator and service provider to know upfront if there isn't a trailer, or if it isn't loaded onboard. In some cases the button to select will remain on the screen but nothing will play. All of this makes for a less-than-satisfactory passenger experience, so it's vital that the distributor and lab check the order carefully and don't sign off on something they cannot deliver.

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As most of the industry knows, lead times for AVOD are significantly longer than for cassettes, mainly due to the huge amount of very detailed information that has to be provided to integrators of the content. Without going into the specific technical requirements of the integration process, the parts that can most affect what the passenger actually sees—the screens and the navigation—have to get finalised around six weeks before anything goes onboard. This deadline is one of the most critical for everyone in our industry to understand and respect.

A broad overview of the timelines involved includes:

- 8-9 weeks** Final sign off of content by the airline
- 7-8 weeks** File names assigned (allowing encoding to commence)
- 6 weeks** Screen meta-data (synopses, etc.) cutoff point
- 4-5 weeks** Encoded materials due at integrators

**WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?**

The main thing to understand is that at six weeks from play date, everything has to be completely final—that’s not just the overall line up, but exact run times, content file names,

languages, versions, synopses (and in many cases translations), trailers (with file names), jpeg images (with file names), screen ratio, spelling, episode names and numbers—in short everything.

**HOW IS THIS COMMUNICATED?**

For each airline’s load each month, a very detailed document is provided to the integrators—both hardware and screen integrators. The moment they receive it, they start work on the integration process, so when they receive the encoded files, everything starts to match up. Every single change has to be notified immediately to all parties concerned, so that everyone is in sync—so the right title shows on the passenger’s screen, with the correct language options, images, and synopses, and if a trailer is provided.

**HOW LONG DOES ALL THIS BEHIND-THE-SCENES ADMIN TAKE?**

It’s a scramble from the moment the airline approves the program to getting all the synopses and images together, entering them into a template that is customized for each airline, according to their GUI requirements—character count, synopsis style and languages, plus level of detail required. This template can vary from a Word document to Excel, to online, with every “cell” being entered as a separate field and linked to the file name, jpeg file name, and trailer

PO #	Type	GUI GENRE - MOVIE								GUI GENRE - TV								From	To	Title	Episode
		Latest	Classics	Action	Comedy	Drama	Family	World Cinema	Comedy	Drama	Entertainment	Sport	Documentary	Family							
0307VOD01	Movie	X		X												1-Mar	####	Casino Royale			
0307VOD02	Movie	X		X												1-Mar	####	Casino Royale			
0307VOD03	Movie	X				X										1-Mar	####	Stranger Than Fiction			
0307VOD04	Movie	X				X										1-Mar	####	Stranger Than Fiction			
HOLDOVER	Movie	X					X									1-Feb	####	The Prestige			
HOLDOVER	Movie	X					X									1-Feb	####	The Prestige			
0307VOD05	Movie	X		X				X								1-Mar	####	Night At the Museum			
HOLDOVER	Movie	X					X									1-Feb	####	A Good Year			
0307VOD06	Movie	X					X									1-Mar	####	The History Boys			
0307VOD07	Movie	X					X									1-Mar	####	Happy Feet			
0307VOD15	TV									X						1-Mar	####	Malcolm in the Middle Two and a Half Men	ep CAB320 Jury Duty s3 ep 4 Your Dismissive Attitud Boobs		
0307VOD16	TV									X						1-Mar	####	Frasier	s9 ep 199 Bla-2-Boy		
0307VOD17	TV									X						1-Mar	####	Will and Grace	s6 ep 6002 Last Ex To Brookly		
0307VOD18	TV									X						1-Mar	####	The Office: An American Workplace	s2 ep 17 Booze Cruise		
0307VOD19	TV									X						1-Mar	####	The European Tour Season Review	2006		
0307VOD20	TV										X					1-Mar	####				

Small, Partial Sample of an AVOD Grid

file name—all of which are different. The checking and proofreading processes are very time-intensive, and the slightest error will affect what the passenger sees.

So how long does it take? Depending on the complexity of the airline's program, anything from four hours to 10 days—assuming there are no changes in the meantime to make and communicate to everyone, with a secondary check that they all made the changes on their end.

### WHAT IF SOMETHING CHANGES AFTER THE SIX-WEEK WINDOW?

Apart from seriously affecting the long-term sanity of many in our industry, there can be a huge aftershock effect with any changes. Each time there is a change, a string of people need to be notified because they are already working on the integration process. That includes the lab doing the encoding, the integrators, the service company, the translators, the airline, the distributor, and more.

Each individual change has to be communicated FAST—it's not just a question of making one correction on one program line up, everyone in the food chain has to be notified so they can update their part of the process.

If a distributor advises that a specific language cannot be provided in time, in addition to searching for a suitable replacement which then potentially causes even more changes, the additional unseen factors that can change are:

- File name
- Translations required
- Delivery date

### EDITED VERSIONS

With the recent changes in the MPAA ratings allowing one instance of the f-word in PG13 rated movies, there has been a tendency by directors to put one in, and this can sometimes be the only thing that would need editing for airlines that require a clean version.

There has been an increasing trend over the last months for distributors to make available only one version to airlines—with the offending word removed—and variously named theatrical (which it isn't) edited (which it is, of course) or even theatrical special edit (which is a contradiction in terms). It's vital that everything is correctly described, as this affects the file naming—not just the orders to the labs.

Unknown to many, the version of the movie (theatrical/edited) actually affects the file-naming protocol for some systems. So a "simple" change from theatrical to edited is a big deal and will cause considerable work behind the scenes.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMETHING IS RUNNING LATE?

We've all been there ... promised that a language track or a master was going to appear on a given date, but it doesn't

Dist	R/T	T/E	Rating	Trailer	Languages				Subs	File Name			Lab	Due at lab	Due at integrator	Received		
					1	2	3	4		Bit Rate	Movie	Trailer				JPEG	Feature	Trailer
Sony	##	T	PG13	YES	En	Ge	Fr	It		2	M1739T.MPG	T1753T.MPG	M1739T.JPG	CINE	10-Jan	31-Jan	26-Jan	26-Jan
Sony	##	T	PG13	NO	En				Chs	2	M1740T.MPG	N/A	G	CINE	10-Jan	31-Jan	31-Jan	n/a
EIM	##	T	PG13	YES	En	Ge	Fr	It		1.5	M1741T.MPG	T1754T.MPG	M1741T.JPG	PME	10-Jan	31-Jan	24-Jan	24-Jan
EIM	##	T	PG13	NO	En				Chs	1.5	M1742T.MPG	N/A	G	PME	10-Jan	31-Jan	24-Jan	n/a
WB	##	T	PG13	YES	En	Ge	Fr	It		2	M1694T.MPG	T1710T.MPG	M1694T.JPG	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER
WB	##	T	PG13	NO	En				Chs	2	M1695T.MPG	N/A	M1695T.JPG	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER
FOX	##	T	PG	YES	En	Ge	Fr			2	M1743T.MPG	T1755T.MPG	M1743T.JPG	CINE	10-Jan	31-Jan	19-Jan	19-Jan
Fox	##	T	PG13	YES	En	Ge				2	M1698T.MPG	T1712T.MPG	M1698T.JPG	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER	HOLDOVER
FOX	##	T	R	YES	En					2	M1744T.MPG	T1756T.MPG	M1744T.JPG	CINE	10-Jan	31-Jan	19-Jan	19-Jan
WB	##	T	PG	YES	En	Ge	Fr	It		2	M1745T.MPG	T1757T.MPG	M1745T.JPG	PME	10-Jan	31-Jan	26-Jan	26-Jan
FOX	22	T	NR	No	En					2	S1725T.MPG	N/A	S1725T.JPG	TBA	10-Jan	26-Jan	22-Jan	n/a
WB	22	T	NR	No	En					2	S1726T.MPG	N/A	S1726T.JPG	CREST	10-Jan	26-Jan	22-Jan	n/a
CBS	22	T	NR	No	En					2	S1727T.MPG	N/A	S1727T.JPG	TBA	10-Jan	26-Jan	22-Jan	n/a
TSI	22	T	NR	No	En					2	S1728T.MPG	N/A	S1728T.JPG	TBA	10-Jan	26-Jan	22-Jan	n/a
NBC	22	T	NR	No	En					2	S1729T.MPG	N/A	S1729T.JPG	CREST	10-Jan	26-Jan	22-Jan	n/a
TWI	52	T	NR	No	En					2	S1730T.MPG	N/A	S1730T.JPG	TBA	10-Jan	26-Jan	24-Jan	n/a

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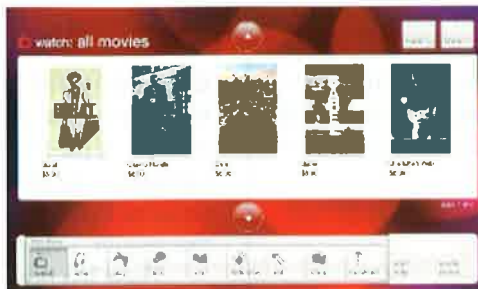
quite happen. "It'll be there Monday" becomes Tuesday, or Wednesday, and while a couple of days doesn't seem to matter that much to start with, we suddenly find that we're past the dreaded six-week date, and there's even a serious doubt as to whether the master is going to appear at all.

Surely the title can just be pulled—apologies all around, but ... if the screen is already set, the passenger is going to be faced with "This selection is unavailable. Please choose another title." Not a good message, and certainly not one any IFE manager or passenger, wants to see.

**HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO FIX A PROBLEM?**

Ahhhhh ... if only cut and paste worked on AVOD.

One of AVOD's biggest impacts relates to the time it now takes to rectify a problem. It's not a question of pulling a cassette anymore. Because of the processes and lead times



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involved, it is rarely possible to fix anything for the current month or even the following month.

Virtually every step of the whole process needs to be gone through all over again for the offending title. That starts with reissuing the meta-data documentation to all parties, having the translations redone according to the airline's requirement, rewriting the configuration files, re-integrating the new content and screen updates—this isn't cut and paste.

As many are aware, in the case earlier this year on some editing difficulties with THE QUEEN, the problem was identified in mid-January after complaints from passengers. This was already too late to be changed for February on AVOD systems, and for some airlines it even was very tight on deadlines for March, with the result that despite everyone's best efforts to rectify the problem, it was at least six weeks before the remedy was onboard, compared with the one week it took to replace

# When did you see our work?

## The last time you flew



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cassettes with the corrected version.

So how long does it take to fix? WAAAYYY too long, so it's best all around if nothing needs fixing in the first place.

### **SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO THE IFE PROFESSIONAL?**

We can only make this better by working in cooperation with one another, and every part of the chain has a responsibility all the way up and down. There is far less risk of error if everyone is given adequate time to complete their part in a timely fashion.

**Airlines** – Place your orders as early as possible so that any problems that arise can be resolved before the point of no return. Consider the time it takes to complete the processes, and don't expect everyone else to meet deadlines if you haven't kept yours.

**Service companies** – Ensure orders are placed quickly and accurately, and at all stages of the process, make sure everyone is aware of a potential issue so a contingency plan can be made.

**Distributors** – Make absolutely sure when you sign off the orders that you really can deliver what you've agreed to.

Hope for the best, but plan for the worst. Don't hope you'll be able to get a language track out of Mediterranean Europe in August—the airline will not thank you for a blank selection screen.

**Encoding facilities** – If you're missing some elements, let everyone know about the problem so they can plan accordingly.

**Integrators** – Make sure your deadlines are realistic, and let all relevant parties know immediately if files are late or problematic.

*Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!*

And next time you haven't got the trailer you thought you had—TELL SOMEONE!

*Editor's Note: For additional insights into IFE film editing and delivery, visit the Resource Library in the Members Only section of the WAEA's Web site ([www.waea.org](http://www.waea.org)) and read AVION's most informative article "Cut It Out! The Art of Editing Feature Films for the IFE Market" written by Debbie Chariton, head of the Sony Pictures TV/Airline Editorial Department.*



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