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News release: Optocore the Hub of Major Audio Upgrade at GM Place in Vancouver

For immediate release (Toronto, November 18, 2008) -- The Vancouver Canucks of the National Hockey League have completed a major upgrade of the audio system at General Motors Place in time for the start of the 2008-09 NHL season. The entire system, from the new Soundcraft Vi6 console to the L-Acoustics loudspeaker line arrays, is connected and managed via a dual redundant Optocore fiber optic digital audio network.

The Optocore installation in Vancouver follows the deployment of a similar Optocore network in the Bird's Nest Stadium at the Beijing Summer Olympics in August. In response to ensuing increases in business and technical support demands, Optocore is ramping up its world-wide operations, and recently expanded its North American office in Toronto.

"Optocore is the key to everything we're trying to do here. It was a very important choice for us," said Fred Michael, president of Rocky Mountain Production Services (RMPS), who installed the new \$1.7M sound system that features improvements to the performance sound reinforcement system, intercom, and system infrastructures at General Motors Place.

Via Optocore, all audio on the network is available everywhere in the facility. "The fiber ring travels some 200 degrees around level Zero at the bottom floor of the building and up a riser to the 500 level where it rings around the other side of the rink. From there, it runs up to the 600 level where the clock and amplifiers are located. It then returns to the 500 level and goes the other way in the tray, and then down a different riser back to the ground where it hooks back up to the beginning. Theoretically 512 channels of audio are available at every location in the building where there is an Optocore interface box," said Canucks Sports & Entertainment's chief audio technician John Riley, who designed the new sound system.

Riley had been considering CobraNet and EtherSound digital audio networks, but was discouraged by the high inherent latency of non-dedicated digital audio networks, which is a severe limitation in live performance situations. "We were getting into milliseconds of latency. Then I went to InfoComm in June and saw Optocore, and the light went on for me because not only did it do everything on fiber, on a single pair, but it offered us latency way down in the microseconds," he said.

Optocore's very low latency of 41.6µs between any points in the synchronous network fiber optic network permits its use in stage and in-ear monitor applications. On opening night at GM Place October 9, rocker Tom Cochrane performed on-ice using in-ear monitors with no discernable latency. "Latency through the system is completely non-existent. The issue just doesn't come up," Michael reported.

Thanks to Optocore, GM Place's new Soundcraft Vi6 console can be used in any of three locations: the game location on the 300 level, a floor location for concerts, and an office location on the Zero level. A fiber connection point is available for the console at a bulkhead in each location. The operator removes a jumper at the bulkhead and replaces it with the console, thereby incorporating the console into the network at that position.

The network conveniently provides the operator with Internet access and all system operating software at each of the three locations. "From the mix position, the operator can manage the Optocore network and operate the console, the wireless microphones up on the 600 level, and the Riedel intercom system software, executing commands on that software via the Optocore network. So this is a big, unique plus for the Optocore installation. And it's all off-the-shelf components—we did not have to build anything custom," Michael noted.

Although not included in the GM Place installation, Optocore also accommodates DMX and Ethernet lighting consoles as well as digital video equipment. It also accommodates MIDI and control data, such as RS422 and RS485. Other signals may be transmitted via Ethernet using converter boxes; for example, intercom, USB, and RS232. This allows for total signal integration on one fiber, eliminating the requirement to run additional cabling.

Bill Coons, newly appointed Director for Optocore North America said, "GM Place is the first of many large sports facilities we've been working on that have been strategically designed around Optocore systems. Major consultants in the USA supported the product after we had the opportunity to explain all the functionality that addresses their needs and challenges. It's very exciting that Optocore has been incorporated into some of the world's most forward-thinking designs, ranging from broadcast and theater to huge theme parks.

"Optocore already has some significant history in various sizes of installations throughout the USA and Canada, from churches to production companies, but we've just crossed over into some very serious projects that no other product appears to be able to address as well as we do. I think a lot of that also has to do with the endless support of Optocore's team in Munich and our regional managers, like Fred Gilpin in Vancouver, who strive to pull all the various entities together to make it all work as a package," he said.

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