

# CTV Montreal's new studio



By Steve Faguy

Just over an hour until the first  
newscast and there's a problem:  
The logo is sideways.

It's Sept. 6, and CTV Montreal is getting its new studio ready for its launch at noon. Operations Manager and Chief Director Dave Maynard is trying to solve all the last-minute problems that have crept up in the final morning of a construction project that took all summer.



Above: A new element of the set allows for face-to-face sit-down interviews in front of a TV screen and windows

Left: The logo is sideways and chief director Dave Maynard troubleshoots the issue an hour before the first live newscast

Part of the new set is a plasma screen mounted vertically on a large support column, which shows an animated CTV News logo. The opening of the newscast features a shot that shows the TV in the foreground and slowly pans across to reveal the anchors at their desk in the background. Because the TV rotated 90 degrees, a special video feed with a rotated logo is fed into it. But, as Maynard has just discovered, the same feed is going into other TVs mounted horizontally in the set's background. Whatever appears in one will be rotated 90 degrees in the other.

Fortunately for Maynard, the problem is minor. The horizontal screens are in the far corners of the set and the pan can be done in a way that doesn't show them. Viewers didn't see anything amiss.

What they did see was a slick, expensive new studio. They also noticed that even with all this change, the video they were getting was still 4:3 standard definition.

Ideas for a new studio were first discussed informally two years ago, but it was only last fall that the green light was given and real work began.

Quebecor Media had a lot to do with that. In February, 2010, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission approved a licence for a French-language specialty channel called TVA Sports. Facing direct competition for its RDS all-sports channel for the first time, CTV-globemedia (now Bell Media) approved upgrades to RDS's equipment to allow it to broadcast in high definition (until that point, HD programming was limited mainly to Canadiens games and programming from other broadcasters) and new studios to make it look better.

Because RDS shares a building with CTV Montreal on Papineau Ave. in downtown Montreal, CTV decided to upgrade both at the same time.

CTV's old studio was split in two and given to RDS, while office space in a corner of the ground floor was rebuilt into a storefront studio for CTV Montreal's newscast. Because the construction projects happened simultaneously over the summer (when ratings are lower and there's no hockey being played), CTV had to do daily newscasts in July and August from a tiny set in its newsroom. The temporary set was so tiny the anchor desk could only fit one chair behind it and all interviews had to be done split-screen with the guest sitting in front of another camera on the other side of the newsroom. Awkward, to say the least.

Changing about 3,200 square feet from office space to studio space presented more than a few challenges. The most obvious was the height of the ceiling. The former studio was two storeys high, which left plenty of vertical space for lighting. The new studio needed more lights (I stopped



**Broadcast Products**

### **3K93C HDTV Connectors**

Professional Broadcasters' preferred choice around the world

Hybrid Configuration with

2 fiber, 2 power and 2 signal contacts

Conforms to SMPTE, ARIB, EBU

Made in Switzerland

Over 20,000 mating cycles

Cable Assemblies - Made to Order

### **Triax-to-Fiber Video Media Converter**

**- Meerkat -**

Extends Triax camera range to 2 km or 20 km

### **HD/SDI-to-Fiber Video Media Converter**

**- Serbal -**

4 Channel, Coax-to-Fiber, bi-directional link

**For more information, contact**

**[www.BIRDE.ca](http://www.BIRDE.ca)**

**514-335-4050**





counting at about 100), mounted on a grid of pipes that are T-fitted together instead of crossing above and below each other, saving an extra couple of inches.

The structure of the building also means there are four large support columns in the middle of the studio. The design took this into account, putting two on either side of the anchor desk and putting plasma screens on the others in addition to dressing them all up so they can be shot from any angle.

Unlike the former studio, the new one doesn't have a garage door to bring in large pieces of furniture. This meant the set had to be brought in piece by piece and assembled on site.

But Maynard said the biggest headache was the floor. The studio's robotic cameras need an absolutely smooth surface to glide on because any imperfection is amplified when the camera moves during filming. The first attempt at a new floor was wobbly. It was sanded down, but with the same result. The floor had to be redone three times before it was good enough, and the delays in redoing the floor pushed back most of the work on the set that sits on top of it.

As late as two weeks before it was scheduled to launch, "we were wondering if we were going to make our deadline of Sept. 6," Maynard said.

But they made it. The first newscast began at noon the day after Labour Day, on schedule, and was almost flawless.

Although technically smaller—the former studio was about 4,000 square feet—the new studio has more space for the newscast. The old one lost a corner to the RDS program *l'Antichambre*, and another to its camera control station, leaving about half the total space for the anchor desks, interview area and green wall for weather.

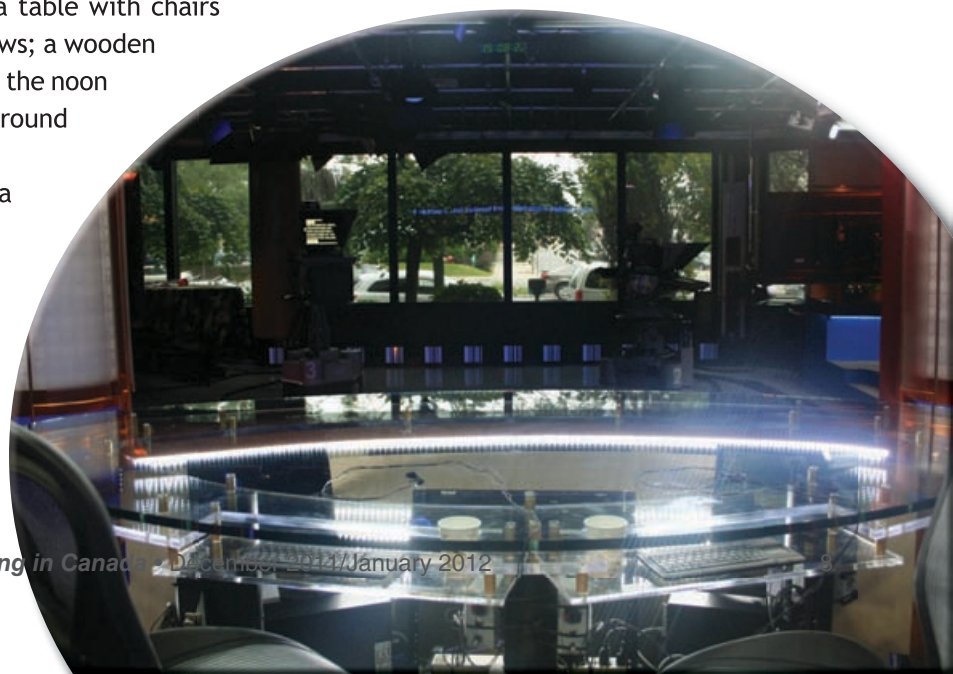
The new space has a desk for the weather presenter, an expanded "cozy corner" for sit-down interviews and a giant 103-inch plasma TV (used during the Vancouver Olympics) that anchors and reporters can stand beside to open newscasts or introduce special reports. There are also movable elements that can be brought in as needed (usually for pre-recorded segments): a table with chairs on each side for more formal face-to-face interviews; a wooden table that can be used for cooking segments during the noon newscast; and a fake brick wall used as a background during a weekly sports commentary segment.

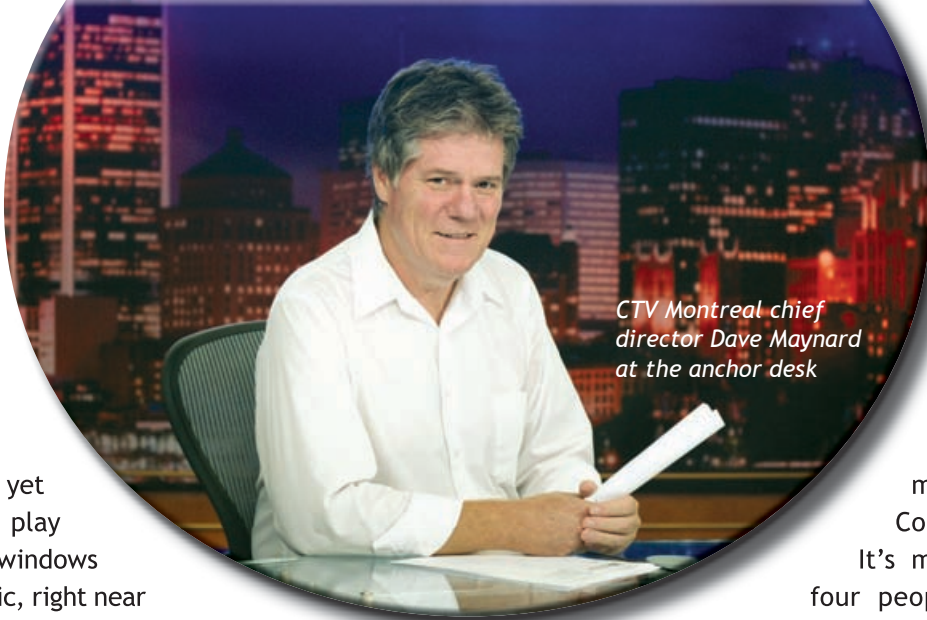
Despite all the changes, the set still feels like a CTV set, with blue as the predominant colour. Its look was based partly off CTV Toronto's studio, but was designed specifically for Montreal.

Though most of the time they aren't visible on camera, the windows are the set's biggest new feature. The station wanted a storefront look, so people inside the studio could see out and people passing by could see

Above: *The "cozy corner" where interviews are done*

Below: *Anchors' view of the studio*





*CTV Montreal chief director Dave Maynard at the anchor desk*

in. They're not sure yet how that's going to play out. The corner the windows face has a lot of traffic, right near the eastern end of the Ville-Marie Expressway, but few pedestrians. Nobody's expecting a huge crowd like you'd see on NBC's *Today* show, but "it'll be interesting to see how it goes," Maynard said.

So far, there have been a few waves (they get a wave back, if the anchors aren't live on camera), and a few people banging on the glass, but nothing of great concern.

Just in case, the windows are bullet-resistant—a requirement in case they interview important politicians or other controversial figures.

Adding windows creates some new technical challenges as well, particularly for lighting. Part of the solution are three neutral-density filters on motorized rollers that can be lowered in front of the windows when needed. The studio's lighting is also set at a colour temperature equivalent to daylight to minimize colour differential.

The studio lights are all LED, which reduces power consumption by 80 per cent, Maynard said. And because they don't lose energy as heat, the lights can be left on all day without the studio heating up.

The anchor desk is new (the old one was donated with other elements of the old set to the journalism depart-

ment at Montreal's Concordia University).

It's more curved so the four people behind it (two anchors, a weather presenter and sportscaster) can see each other without having to lean over. Because Maynard didn't want to see laptops on the desk (their randomly-changing positions interfere with symmetry, he said), computers and their monitors are installed under the glass top for anchors to make last-minute script changes during the newscast.

Another one of those minor last-minute problems: The desk was custom-built to include shelves for two keyboards. But the shelves leave no room for mice. The solution: Get a smaller keyboard that includes a trackpad. The tiny keyboard was a hit for anchor Mutsumi Takahashi, who has small fingers. It was less so for co-anchor Todd van der Heyden, who doesn't.

Another issue for the anchors are the strips of super bright LED lights embedded in the anchor desk, which contribute to lighting them up but make it very difficult to see their computer monitors.

But it's still better than the old desk. "The other desk was cramped," Takahashi said, while this one has a lot more legroom, even with all the stuff underneath.

Behind the desk is a backdrop that has three images on





**Your Best *Digital* Broadcast Solution**  
**Let LARCAN Move You. Anywhere.**

**We deliver our best to Canadian broadcasters. Digital TV is here to stay, ensure your partners for success are the right ones.**

**Call: 905-564-9222    Connect: sales@larcan.com    Click: www.larcan.com**



```

0 1 0 0 0
0 0 1 1 0
1 1 1 0
0 1 0 1 0 0

```

a roller: A daytime city skyline used for newscasts during the day, a nighttime city skyline used at night, and a giant CTV News logo which is envisioned for special occasions such as elections. CTV Montreal News Director Jed Kahane confessed that some alterations were made to the skyline image. Corporate logos on skyscrapers were removed, and Montreal's iconic Place Ville-Marie was made to look taller.

Overall, the set gets high marks from the station's star anchors.

"I love it," Takahashi said, "except for the distance." The old studio was just down the stairs from the control room, and could be reached in seconds. The new one requires a longer walk (and an access card), which means leaving the newsroom earlier in order to be in the studio on time.

"I really like the storefront," van der Heyden said. "It feels like you're almost a part of the city itself."

Above the backdrop behind the desk is a bright blue LED news ticker with headlines fed by The Canadian Press news wire.

There are plenty of changes that are less visible to viewers, made in anticipation of an eventual move to high definition. The studio is HD-ready, meaning that all cables are HD-grade and the set's elements are of fine enough detail that they won't look fake on HD cameras. "It's far richer than any set we've had before," Maynard said.

But to many viewers' disappointment, the newscast is still far from being in HD. That requires replacing not just the three studio cameras and the field cameras used by journalists, but their editing systems, feed centre and control rooms as well.



*Anchors Todd van der Heyden and Mutsumi Takahashi check out their desk in front of chief director Dave Maynard*



*Weather presenter Lori Graham in front of the green screen*

**Smart Broadcast.**

**antonbauer**

One World. One Smart Choice.™

Americas +1 (203) 929-1100    Europe +31 45 563 9220    Asia +65 6297 5784  
 americas@antonbauer.com    europe@antonbauer.com    asia@antonbauer.com  
 www.antonbauer.com

Anton/Bauer  
A Vitec Group brand

CTV Montreal General Manager Don Bastien said recently the transition to an HD newscast is still 12-24 months away. CTV has prioritized its high-revenue specialty channels such as Discovery and Space for upgrades to HD before local news stations. CTV Montreal's dominance in its market (it has five times the audience of its competitors' newscasts combined) has also meant little competitive pressure, even though both CBC and Global have at least moved to 16:9 and have some elements of their newscasts in HD. CTV Montreal's newscast remains with a 4:3 aspect ratio as part of a network policy not to fake HD.

That's not to say the station isn't eager to upgrade, especially as HD equipment is brought in at RDS next door. The two teams work well together (even with the linguistic divide, which is less pronounced among technical staff), and "a lot of the (studio upgrade) project was managed by RDS because they have the staff to do it," Maynard said.

Still, whenever the RDS folks ask CTV for a favour, Maynard jokingly tries to barter it for an HD camera.

It's a sign of comfortable familiarity among colleagues but also a sign that everyone at CTV Montreal is eager to get started with the next chapter of this station's upgrade.

*Steve Faguy is a copy editor for the Montreal Gazette and writes a blog about media at <http://blog.fagstein.com/>. He may be reached at [steve@fagstein.com](mailto:steve@fagstein.com).*