

Expanding MediaTech into New Industries

Riikka Koponen in conversation with Richard Rees (QuickLink), Chris Merrill (Panasonic) and André Torsvik (Fonn Group)

IAMT Studio Visual Podcast Series

Duration: 30:36

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the IAMT visual podcast. My name is Riikka. I'm the principal analyst in our organisation, and in this podcast session we are talking about entering new market verticals, because we see increasingly our members selling their solutions to new market segments. And I'm super excited to be here with three gentlemen. So we could actually start from Richard. Could you please introduce yourself?

Okay. Hi. I'm Richard, CEO of QuickLink. QuickLink's been... Ooh, I should have prepped on this one. I think it's about 20, 22, something like that, years old now. Started off with remote contribution from journalists in the field. So when the tanks rolled into Baghdad, there was QuickLink's technology bringing it in with most of the broadcasters then. And then the big shift from basically dealing with field journalists to remote contribution, public contribution. So I mean, it went crazy during the COVID era, as everybody realised that we were locked down, so QuickLink technology went to the moon in usage in those days. And it was also interesting for us because the topic we're picking up on today is really applicable, because that's really when we saw a big change in the customer base on that side. So we've been doing it for the last five years, basically, all this transition, so a really interesting one to be involved in, this panel today.

Excellent. Chris.

Thanks. Sure. Chris Merrill. I'm the Director of Product Management and also Marketing for Panasonic North America. We're known for our end devices and the cameras, the switchers, those things that we're making for production of live content. And actually, I'm excited to be a part of this panel because it talks really to where we're addressing right now. Across all of those market verticals, whether that's broadcaster or house of worship, sports, corporate, education, those are all markets that we play in. So it's exciting to be part of this discussion.

Fantastic. André, yeah.

Yes. My name is André Torsvik. I work as EVP Operations at Fonn Group. We're the company behind Saga and Mimir. So we build cloud-native software that's fully serverless, so no hardware on our side, which means we have a slightly different angle into this discussion. But it's super interesting to be part of it, because I think it affects all of us, because it's no longer a question of broadcast. It's a question of video and audio and where it goes.

Absolutely. So maybe we start with the preparation for the introduced market segment. So how intentional was the approach?

I mean, going back to my opening one there, basically, and the way we saw the shift of the customer base during COVID, from pure broadcasters to pretty well anybody that wanted to bring content in — so we were very, very lucky to get the early exposure to what people wanted.

And very, very quickly we were able to learn what people required in the various sectors. And yes, you're correct. We've re-engineered all our products. I mean, the key thing is, you were dealing with different people with broadcasting skills. You've had people — degrees, PhDs in broadcast — and now you're moving to end users here who basically have a completely different skill set, which requires a completely different way of working. And that's why we've really had a great few years really engineering and looking at those workflows for them. And that's the key one: it's all down to workflows at the end of the day. And yep, so that's what we've been doing.

Absolutely. Interesting. Chris, how or when did you start your journey?

Yes, I'm just trying to think about how, when. It's been decades. But that's part of the nature of our organisation, right? We work on long-term plans, and really it's because as we approach a market or vertical of one kind or another, we intend to be there for a long time. Obviously, everyone gets those projects that come along and say, "Hey, I've got this big opportunity. We're going to do this. It's going to make millions," and... But we tend to say, "Okay, but let's look at the fundamentals," because we're there. This isn't just a quick in and out. This is a long-term relationship that we want to hold on to. So doing those fundamentals, just the basics: do I have the right products? Am I promoting in the right places? Do I have a channel for it? All of those kinds of things are critical to establish as you move into it, so that you can establish a long-term business that happens there.

Right. Absolutely.

Yeah, I think that when it comes to entering new verticals and new parts of the market, one of our strengths is — and I'll use the word cloud native a lot, I'm sorry about that — but of course, one of the things about being cloud native and serverless, and the way we've built the software from the ground up, is that it is incredibly easy to integrate with, right? We've focused a lot of our engineering effort on open APIs, on webhooks, client hooks, on being easy to integrate with. And that means that the slightly different tool sets that are in different verticals are easier to integrate into our workflow. And beyond that, when it comes specifically to stuff like enterprise, et cetera, then there are demands that you have to take into consideration. I don't mean specifically necessarily from a feature perspective, but as you say, it's workflows, right? And there has to be a focus on workflows that will function in that area, and not just in the traditional broadcast technology area.

Right, you actually touched my next question, the impact on technology. So could you still continue on that a little bit? How exactly do you see the impact on technology in this?

So there's... I know we'll talk about security later, so I'll leave that alone, because that, I think, is a separate thing. From our perspective, we focus on — as I said in the beginning, we want to build something that works really well for video and audio. And it doesn't really matter from that perspective if it's being used in broadcast or enterprise or a school or a church or wherever. That doesn't really matter. The core of the technology is that. But then of course, if you look at those verticals specifically, you have to consider some things like usability, user-friendliness, and an unacceptance of compromising on that part of the experience, that might be different from broadcast, where you have seasoned engineers who are used to using things that, at least on the surface, are very, very complex, right?

Yeah, I'd jump in on that. That user perspective can be very different between markets, and that's critical to recognise. Sometimes people say, "You know, you can take this and apply it over there," but the people who are using it have widely varying differences in their abilities, their understanding of what the equipment is. It might be built on a similar fundamental technology platform, but how they're going to apply it, even their understanding... I mean, if I give you a menu with 36 options and they're all very detailed, it's just too much for that average user, who may be just looking for, "I just want to drag and drop and touch." So it's very different kinds of experiences depending on who's using that.

That's really... Yeah, and in Panasonic, in your organisation, as you started early — you said 20 years ago you started this journey — so how do you see that design of the product targeting those segments has evolved then?

Yeah, well, we've certainly come from a very engineering-style kind of interaction, where you had to know what you were entering into the system, to much more kind of intuitive: "This looks like it's fun to play with. I'll touch this," or, "If I move it..." And so moving much more to almost a consumer, prosumer style of interface for many of those verticals, because the people who are coming into them haven't been in that industry for 20 years. They're fresh, and they're sitting down and they're saying, "I want it to look like my iPhone. Why doesn't it look like my phone?" And so that's the challenge that you have: migrating from somebody who used to run that with a slide rule, to somebody who's used to doing it on their phone.

Exactly. I mean, picking up on that side of it, it's removing the complexity, really, from these workflows. I mean, you take, for instance, what we did within our switcher environment. Traditional switchers are all based on M/E architecture. And the first thing we looked at when we were looking to enter this market is: what are these people's tools? What do they use every day? And one of the classics is PowerPoint, for instance. If they know how to use PowerPoint, they know how to use QuickLink Studio. So that's sort of removing the whole workflow, which is a traditional broadcast workflow, and moving it into an environment where it's everyday tools these people are using every day, or they've gone through university, they've gone through their educational cycle, they've used them. Why can't they just use them in an everyday environment? Why can't they make great broadcast-quality productions using standard tools?

Yeah, that's right. And also you mentioned mobile. The expectation of the user-friendliness of a mobile screen is easily being shifted to any other device or any interface that you use.

There's one other thing that fits into that, and both of these gentlemen are well into that, and that's: if I'm going to give you a very graphical user interface and all of those kinds of things, then I've increased the amount of software. Maybe I've gone completely to software, instead of relying on the older kind of style of all buttons, and FPGAs, and the M/E structure that you talked about — those are all very internally hardware-based kinds of things. And you're having to make a transition then from that to the software world. And that occurs on all of those levels.

And I think that expectation also actually comes all the way into how you deliver a product, right? Because, I mean, the way we deliver is continuous delivery, so there's no downtime, there's no upgrade projects. And in different verticals, there would be no acceptance of the fact — like a MAM system, for example, one of our tools — you couldn't take down the MAM for two days to upgrade it because it's half a year since the last time you did an upgrade, right? We do it three

times a week, on the fly, as they are producing. And that's a hard pill to swallow for some broadcasters. But it is 100% normal for people who are used to modern style of, as you say, software, right? They're used to using Slack or Notion or Spotify, for that matter, right? It doesn't go down to upgrade. That would be ridiculous, right? So that expectation is also something that has to be taken into consideration.

Right. That actually leads well to the supply chain and how to build that. In your organisation, what kind of measures have you taken, or did it require some different action to build those supply chains and to sell those?

I mean, I think it was basically fine-tuning what we already had in place. I found the traditional broadcast and the corporate, the new markets — there's a lot of commonality across, we found, basically. So, for us, it was not as painful as we thought it would be.

Right. And for you, Chris, yourself?

It's a tricky question. It really depends on what you're trying to implement, but it really is: do I understand what my customer is asking? Because that then defines everything that I've got to deliver. And that is the challenge in trying to understand, and it's probably different for every vertical. So it's tough to give you a roadmap of what that is, because each of them has some key aspects of what your product or service is that they really, really like. And then there's other things that they would just deprecate in importance. But it changes based on the vertical. And so that's the tricky bit of needing to understand each one of those and how it changes.

You already, André, said a lot.

Yeah, I can add on to that. So we built on AWS, on serverless infrastructure and with Lambdas, but of course, we integrate with a lot of different vendors. And one of the things we now have to take very carefully into consideration is their capabilities in terms of stuff like GDPR and being good subprocessors, having stuff like editorial compliance, chain of custody, audit logging. These things are becoming increasingly important not just in journalism, but also in other fields, in other verticals. So you have to build the software with a slightly, I think, different approach than you used to in the past.

Sure. Thinking of the diversity now, and then to whom you deliver — those buyer profiles are changing very quickly. And I remember when we had conversations, you were mentioning very diverse, new, interesting customers approaching you and using your solution. So what would you say, what kind of buyers are you currently... Naturally, you don't need to mention the names or the companies, but just what buyers you are facing.

Yeah, of course. So let me talk about industries, then, rather than names, so I don't get sued. No, but we have a very diverse customer portfolio outside of traditional broadcasting. It includes stuff like — we have a subsea company in the North Sea that inspects cables under the sea using video, right? We've got a big hotel chain that's storing all of their content, and hundreds of thousands of assets, inside of our MAM. So we see it very differently. When it comes to the buyer specifically, it's sort of two-sided, at least in my experience. I'd be interested to hear what these gentlemen think. But there are some who have gone out and hired broadcast professionals to buy broadcast-grade stuff for their enterprise. And then on the other hand, it's often the IT department that gets the job of buying. And then on the third hand, it might be just

left up to marketing, because they are the ones who need video, audio solutions. So we have to be able to cater to and talk to all of those three.

It's interesting you mention, because yesterday I was talking with a tech supplier on the show floor, and they said, "Yeah, we just had a big group of Morgan Stanley people coming over, and all of them were ex-broadcast engineers. So they really knew what they were buying." So definitely, yeah, it's as you say. Chris, what about you? What kind of... You also very diverse.

Yeah, I agree with him. You do get that group of people who've gone out of broadcast and wanted some other industry, and so they're there. Oftentimes it's freelancers who said, "I'm looking for stability, and therefore I'm going to go into some organisation that can provide that for me." And they typically do sort of build their own truck inside of a building, because that's their mentality, right? And that's where they go. But I might be dealing with operations or marketing. Maybe it's the training department. And every one of those has a very different level of ability. They know what they want as an end result, but they may not know how to get there. And so you're doing a lot of problem-solving for them, to help them understand what is required in order to achieve that. And it absolutely changes how you have to approach them. For some, it's strictly a financial discussion. For some, they don't care about finances. It's really about what's the end result. So how you have to approach them really depends on who's buying that, and it ranges greatly.

I mean, I'll put it down to one simple sentence, basically: you're dealing with a committee rather than specialists. See? And that's the easy way I look at it. And the people you have on the committee — a lot of them were mentioned there. I mean, I see it: you're talking to the IT department, you're talking to the security teams. I mean, they're the real gatekeepers at the end of the day. It doesn't matter what product you're selling, if you can't get it past those two teams, they will not plug it onto their network. And that's what comes... Because all our equipment is connected to the network, so again, they're some of the key people you've actually have to sell to. You see?

And that IT piece is an interesting sell, because oftentimes in sort of a broadcast world, if I can convince the EIC, the engineering kind of types, I'm good, right? If I'm trying to convince IT, I actually have to go way up in the organisation before I can actually find somebody who can make a decision that changes how they're going to approach it. Because IT's job is to keep you out. That's what they do.

You're talking anything. You've got a 20-page document, spreadsheet to fill out, before they'll even carry on talking to you.

Yeah. They're doing what they were hired to do. But so then you have to get to the policymaker in order to be able to have the policy changed so that you can put video on a network.

Yeah, no, the security concern is... I totally agree with that. And oftentimes you are then dealing with people who have not dealt with, in our case, this kind of cloud-native technology. That applies across broadcast and tech and enterprise as well. So you first have to sort of teach a lot about how this kind of technology works. You have to give a lot of confidence and a lot of information, a lot of evidence that this is actually as secure or more secure. Because we often say, "I mean, look, your security team is now the AWS security team. They're pretty good at their job." And this is how it works, and this is how it plugs into your specific use case. But this is very

often a place where, at least, we have to provide a lot of information — 20-page questionnaire — before we can have that real conversation.

And you're not going to take their network down. That's what they're petrified about: you plug the device in, the minute they plug that into the port, the whole of their corporate network collapses, basically, with video traffic, which is what they all talk about.

And the other assumption is, I can do a Teams call or a Zoom call, therefore we can do video on the network. And that's just not at all the same thing. So there's a lot of education, as you said, that has to happen there.

Yeah, this education actually leads to my next question: this interaction and building this vendor relationship. So you mentioned that you need to educate more the customers in this segment. What are your thoughts? Have you encountered similar? How do you build those customer relations? You said that you had to get very high up to have the right conversations. Is it also that, in terms of the expectation for the time to value, it's different compared to the broadcast segment?

It's relationship building. It always is. I mean, ultimately, that is understanding. If you're going into a new industry, you're probably talking to someone who's an early adopter. Right? But they've got some influence, and they're able to get you in. But they may actually not be the person who's the final decision. So you're continuing to understand, work your way up through building those relationships. It can take a while to get that adoption.

I mean, it's this one we're launching at the show here, basically. We call it the QuickLink Platform Services, and it's really to embrace that relationship through the whole product life cycle. Maybe five, 10 years you're basically dealing with them. But you're continually working with them, so they have that touch point with you constantly. Something happens security-wise with them, you're there, available for their security team and all. And then that's what the platform service, we feel, is such a differentiator: to have that continual access to you, or that continual relationship at all the different engineering levels.

What about in your organisation?

Yeah, I mean, I would echo what both of you are saying, and I think it's a very important word. I mean, relationship building — and you're plugging things into their network, so there has to be a level of trust before you're allowed to do that. So trust is a key word still. I mean, it doesn't matter if it's broadcast or if it's another big organisation, that's something you have to build and earn before you're allowed to do this, right? And that can be by being the one who has the knowledge and shares it with them. It also, we find, is a lot about being able to do limited and quick POCs, so that they're able to test out this new technology, experiment with it in a secure environment, however they want to do, without necessarily going straight to plugging it in and getting any challenges with that. So those two things in combination is often something that we have to go through with all organisations.

And security now.

Big topic.

Oh, boy.

And it is. It's completely different. I remember the days, if you go back to some of those early instances — the broadcasters, they'd have an ADSL line sitting completely off their network. Security was just what was on that router, and they would just bring feeds in, and they would come here as SDI, for instance, so there was no security at all, really. Now, oh boy, hasn't it changed, with those 20-page documents I was talking about earlier? And it is. It's again down to the trust. It's building that trust, making sure you follow the standards out there. And yeah, security, I would say.

Does this differ in your view? I mean, you're a global organisation, so does that differ? Are there differences, that European customers would be more concerned?

No, I think the fundamental difference between the European and US or Asia, for instance, is just the words on the documents you've got to go through. It's slightly different wordings. You know, "colours" in Europe's got a U and it hasn't in the US. I think it's that simple, basically. But again, the contents is all the same, basically, and rightfully so. It's a big concern — security — for everyone, and we embrace it, basically.

And security, regardless of the vertical, is still important, right? Sometimes we make the assumption that for some it's more important than others. And that's not really the case.

I totally agree with that.

Everyone now is worried about getting their system hacked and having... And it's not necessarily just outside bad actors. It's the internal — making sure that everything functions properly. All of that's part of that security question. I've got to get a signal from here to there, and I can't see the line that's taking it there, so therefore I've got to make sure that all of the security protocols are in place.

And I totally agree there. I mean, it goes across all sectors. There is no difference to security from your traditional broadcasters to your top corporates, or even worse, anybody. It's identical across the board now.

And also you mentioned the subsea company, for example — those security concerns are really...

I mean, yes, very much so. And there is an expectation... Well, first of all, there's an expectation now of stuff like ISO 27001, of SOC 2, of being compliant with the big standards out there. That's almost table stakes at this point, right? And there is an expectation of audit logging, of being able to trail especially material, and especially now that we're getting into the age of C2PA, and being able to trace material from the point of origin all the way to the point of distribution. And all of these things are the same expectations almost across any vertical. And I would say, from maybe being more of a check in the box in the past, now security is very much a go/no-go gate, right? You have to comply or there will be no business.

Well, one more question, actually, for you before we wrap up, is AI. And in the discussions that we've had, we also talk with customers on the non-media side, and the adoption of AI is advancing very quickly everywhere. So, and also once you start working more with those segments, what is the role, in your view, of AI when working with, first, probably also the core broadcast and media market, but then also the non-broadcast segments? And how do you see... What is the role of AI in this, or do you see it having any role?

Well, for us as a company, I mean, it's gone across every single department. Every single section is now AI-enabled with us. Right, not just from the solution, from the product. I mean, this webcast we're doing here now — we have a product which does all this automated. Sorry over there for putting you out of work, but we do have a product that does all this automatically, really intelligently on that side. But all departments, basically, every single department, even down to security questionnaires and stuff, we get assistance in all areas. So I think AI is fundamentally a game changer in companies. And also, I think it actually means that when you're a smaller company, you instantly become a big company, because you don't carry the legacy of large corporates or large companies. You have so much more growth, so you're up by a factor of at least four or five. So let's say you have 100 employees, you've instantly got 500 employees. It's a game changer. It's an absolute game changer.

Interesting. Yeah.

It's an interesting question. I think most people are still a little afraid of the sort of generative AIs. I don't want AI being my content. But can I use it as a tool set to help me create better content? And that absolutely is where it has a great role today and can really be an enabler. The challenge always then comes: do I trust the kind of information that it's providing for me? Is it hallucinating, right? Is it giving me a false sense of security?

Totally. You have to proof everything. Everything has to be proofed, and you've got to treat it like a small child.

There you go.

If you don't treat it like a small child — with our people, the first thing you do is think of it as a child. Train it. Whatever answer it gives you, don't believe it. Keep asking it. I mean, there's a whole training mechanism that has to go behind AI. So I totally agree with you there. It is a small child at the moment. It's growing up every day. The more you train it, the older it becomes.

Yeah. The other, I think, aspect of that is people are worried about AI replacing human jobs, right? And okay, there may be some of that at a low-level kind of aspect. But for the most part, AI — I mean, the industries that I'm talking to, everyone's being asked to create a ton more media. The end result has grown so much more. But the people who are responsible for it haven't grown, right? That quantity is still finite. So how do I expand infinitely on this side with a finite quantity on this side? It's by using those tools. It's allowing me to do that in a much more effective, efficient way.

As you said, the content that people have been asked to create — every day it's increasing. Every day.

Yeah. Right. That's very interesting. André, any thoughts?

Yeah, no, I think — answering specifically around our products and how that relates to AI, because I think it's a really interesting aspect of it. We use, for example, in Mimir, our cloud-native MAM, AI to generate metadata to make everything more searchable, right? But one of the really important things for us is we are not an AI company. We try and act as a gateway to media AI. So we make it possible for people to plug into the models that they choose, because I think that will become increasingly important, because, as we see, there are now thousands and thousands of AI companies. It feels like every day a new one pops up, right? And I cannot tell

you, today or in three months, who will be the best at transcribing Korean. I can't tell you today, but my customers could, right? But they must be able to switch and swap between models, between providers, between different companies they wish to work with to do these things. And then that goes back to what I said at the beginning in terms of integratability in these things. You have to build an architecture in a fashion now that makes it possible for people to connect to these models, but also to disconnect and move to a different one if that becomes what is best for their business.

Very much so. I think you've hit the nail on the head. It's that one doesn't fit all. You've got to embrace them all, basically, and keep changing, keep morphing with the movement. Yeah.

Yeah. And I think the whole move from monolithic to more modular, agile on the broadcast segment... What we hear is, all the time, that we want to keep all the options open — broadcast customers, meaning that they really want to be able to change the direction if they want. So that applies to also all those, as we know how all this develops. Hey, thank you so much for your time. It was very interesting to discuss with all of you, and thank you for these excellent insights. And yeah, stay tuned for the next episodes to come, and please stay in the loop for the next episodes of our podcast. Thank you so much for this time.

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