

## ESPN's Goal Is To Score Big With Ambitious 2010 FIFA World Cup Coverage

With the kickoff of the first FIFA World Cup soccer match in Johannesburg, South Africa on June 11, ESPN will be relying on television and online operations that are larger and more cutting edge than any other in its 31-year history. The cable sports network, which holds the English language rights to televise the international soccer competition in the United States, has ambitious plans to bring live action, informed commentary and insightful perspective on a variety of media platforms to millions of fans who will be tuned into the world's most-watched sporting event. ESPN has planned a multimedia blitz that includes radio, broadband, mobile television, special web sites and iPhone ap-

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plications in addition to television and cable coverage for the month-long tournament. All 64 matches will be carried live and in high-definition on ESPN, ESPN2 or ABC, and 25 matches will be televised in 3-D. In addition to all of the on-pitch action, the company is planning more than 65 hours of live studio programming from South Africa, including a daily 30-minute program on World Cup news, as well as live reports before and after matches and during half-time breaks. ESPN Deportes will feature up to 40 matches and 10 hours of live daily news and updates in Portuguese. ESPN3.com will also showcase the games, and fans will be able to choose from coverage in six different languages.

While this year marks ESPN's seventh time covering FIFA World Cup, advanced IP technologies have transformed operations and distribution, opening up new opportunities for comprehensive coverage. "The fascinating thing with World Cup is that it's held every four years and - in the technology world - four years is a remarkably long time," says Jed Drake, ESPN's executive producer for FIFA World Cup 2010. "When you look at how we accomplish production and distribution, things have changed dramatically." In South Africa, ESPN's massive operation is using state-of-the-art broadcasting and networking technology to deliver an immersive experience to soccer fans and bring them closer to the action on the pitch, Drake says.

Producing live, month-long coverage overseas on such a sweeping scale has taken years of planning with a variety of partners. Coordinating production across 10 venues in nine different cities, many of them hundreds of miles apart from each other in a country that is 8,000 miles from ESPN's home base in Bristol, Connecticut, has posed a host of logistical challenges, says Drake. "It's a long way from home, there's a high level of ambition and it's in a country that is developing rapidly," he says.

A key enabling technology for the on-site coverage is Cisco's TelePresence solution, which uses high-definition video and audio to create a virtual, face-to-face experience. ESPN will be able to use Cisco TelePresence to conduct interviews between hosts at its main World Cup studio in Johannesburg and commentators, athletes and guests at remote sites in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, two cities where games are being held but are hundreds of miles away. With the Cisco TelePresence platform, ESPN won't have to send separate production crews and satellite trucks out into the field, which will help streamline operations and save money.

Instead, interviews can be conducted and real time reports filed from the Cisco TelePresence "virtual studios" at the far-flung sites, seamlessly linking the venues for up-to-the-minute coverage and providing greater access than ever before.

Interviews with players, coaches and commentators, previews and analysis of matches and background reporting on each of the 32 participating teams will round out the play-by-play coverage. "The event is one of the most important that we've televised at ESPN," Drake says. "We're giving it everything."

In the fast-moving, highly competitive sports television market, ESPN has been leveraging technology to expand and enhance its programming and to meet the ever-changing demands of its viewers for years, whether they are watching matches at home in 3-D or checking scores and standings from their mobile phones. "When you look at all the different platforms on which our coverage will be seen, it's our responsibility to make it available in the format that our fans want," Drake says. To accomplish that, the

network is packaging and optimizing its World Cup content for the various media platforms on which it will be delivered. For example, ESPN will repurpose much of its television coverage for online, including interviews captured using the Cisco TelePresence platform.

ESPN's experience in South Africa will lay the foundation for its coverage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, for which it also holds English language U.S. television rights. "The challenges this year are significant, but inevitably we will learn a great deal," says Drake. "What we do in South Africa will form a good basis for what we do in Brazil." The upshot for sports fans? They can expect more innovative programming with new options for keeping on top of all the action. "Consumers will benefit," says Drake. "We will make their experience more robust, more impactful."

Jed Drake  
ESPN

