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HELVAR SHINES LIGHT ON SILENT WITNESS

Lighting plays an important role in TV production. It has many functions, from simple illumination of actors through to creating atmosphere in line with the artistic requirements of the director. Many new generation crime dramas rely heavily on lighting to create a brooding atmosphere to complement the gritty subject matter.

The award-winning *Silent Witness* is one of the BBC's most successful crime dramas. A series about a team of forensic pathology experts, the storylines blend mystery, science and detection into a formula that has turned the programme into a huge success in the UK. The 15th series of the show is currently being filmed out on location and at a BBC studio in West London and in preparation for the series, the on-set lighting scheme was upgraded to include DALI lighting control using a new Helvar DIGIDIM Router system.

The set is located in a large warehouse that has been converted specifically for the purposes of filming the series. The team of forensic pathologists: Dr. Harry Cunningham (Tom Ward), Dr. Nikki Alexander (Emilia Fox) and Professor Leo Dalton (William Gaminara) are based at the 'The Thomas Lyell Centre' - a hi-tech scientific laboratory which is carefully reconstructed on the set.

There are two main areas of the set that feature the DIGIDIM Router system, Professor Dalton's Office - a large and plush imposing interior, and the Autopsy Room - the stark looking facility where the pathologists painstakingly examine bodies of the deceased in search of vital clues that may reveal causes of death.

The new lighting system was designed by Joe Burke Lighting Design in conjunction with Littledown, a DALI lighting control specialist, and installed by Moonlight, a TV lighting supplier and installer. Steve Reid, a partner with Littledown worked with Joe Burke to develop a solution that would bring commercial grade lighting control to satisfy the flexible requirements of a TV film set. Steve had worked with Helvar before so knew that he and Joe were on safe ground when they began specifying the system elements with the DIGIDIM Router at the centre.

REDUCING CARBON FOOTPRINTS

"I've worked with Helvar equipment for many years," says Steve. "and I've always been impressed with the reliability of the equipment. The functionality is also excellent so we had a combination that would work in the demanding environment of a TV set. The dramatic storylines have ensured that the system has really been put through its paces and thankfully, we've been able to satisfy on all counts. Although this is a bit of a one-off, the project has been a big challenge and a real achievement."

With a long history of designing Lighting and Electrical schemes for TV and Film productions, Joe Burke had a firm idea of the type of system he wanted. "Traditionally incandescent lighting is used on-set and would be controlled via





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a DMX lighting control desk and dimmers". The BBC gave him a brief to update the on-set lighting scheme, but at the same time reduce the carbon footprint of the show. "I decided to replace the majority of the lighting fixtures, both on and off set, with high output dimmable fluorescents". "I needed a control system that would be cost effective, reliable, user friendly and provide a similar level of control as the DMX systems provide". He approached Steve for his thoughts, who suggested the Helvar system.

"I incorporated DIGIDIM keypads into the dressed set so the crew could have local individual control of all the on-set lights, enabling them to not only control the light level, but switch off out of vision lights to prevent their light interfering with the lighting of the actors and to eliminate unwanted reflections in the many panes of glass that are on set. The keypads were also programmed with a number of preset scenes which the actors could operate in vision".

Some of the episodes can be fairly bleak and dramatic and the correct lighting levels are important in creating the right mood: "The individual control of each fitting on the system allows the lighting team to set a custom light level for each and every scene," Steve adds.

Following completion of the installation the system was fully commissioned by Littledown. During this process, all devices on the DALI network were identified, tested, named and grouped to ensure a smooth handover of the system to the client.

At the heart of the system is the Helvar 910 DIGIDIM Router. The Router uses an Ethernet connection (10/100 Mbps) as a network backbone, to combine all the DALI networks seamlessly together and basic functionality is available 'out-of-box'. Helvar's Designer Software is used for advanced configuration and programming of the Router. Furthermore, a PC can also be connected to the system for diagnostics and remote logging purposes. ■

SYSTEM FACTS

- 910 DIGIDIM Routers
- 444 DIGIDIM Mini Input Units
- 452 DIGIDIM 1000 W Universal dimmers
- 494 DIGIDIM 4-channel Relay Units
- 942 DIGIDIM Input Units
- DIGIDIM Modular Panels