

NEP CASE STUDY: *BIG BROTHER*

24/7 Coverage and 2.6 Million Viewers? No Problem.



When *Big Brother U.K.* moved from Britain's Channel 4 to Channel 5, it required not just an upgrade to full HD, but a nearly complete build-out of the show's studio and production spaces, which had shifted most of their locations within Elstree Studios, north of London, where Big Brother is filmed. In fact, the only thing that remained the same was the

iconic *Big Brother* house, which stayed in situ at Elstree.

Big Brother on Channel 5 needed production gear able to handle the reality TV series' grueling 24/7, 85-day production schedule and space housing the vast amount of staff and production equipment running the show. Additionally, it also had to accommodate production for *Big Brother's Bit on the Side*, a daily news show about *Big Brother* and a live stage show once or twice a week.

Luckily, Roll to Record (R2R), a U.K.-based division of NEP and the principal technology provider for *Big Brother U.K.* since the show's inception in 2000, was there to smooth the way.

R2R got started right away in transitioning *Big Brother* to HD, purchasing, among other pieces of HD gear, roughly 40 HD cameras with the Camera Corps Q-Ball HD/SD pan-and-tilt camera system to provide fixed and robotic shots for the shows. R2R staff members also recognized that a sizeable router was needed to run the shows, so they invested in an Evertz HD router with approximately 526 channels squared.

Running 24/7 coverage for 85 days requires vast amounts of staff of all stripes—from camera operators and sound engineers to producers and lighting control people. R2R needed to hire enough staff to fill roughly 3,500 different types of work shifts, so it did what it does best, and planned the hiring process far in advance of the show's premiere on Channel 5. These staff members also needed a place to work. To this end, R2R built from the ground up a gallery housing the production teams, producers, voice-over booths, hot-head operators and camera and lighting control.

Once *Big Brother* goes on air, nothing can go wrong, according to Roll to Record Account Manager Michael Bass. “You really got to plan redundancy and maintenance, because you’ve got to stay on air.” To avoid any glitches, R2R built a dedicated Master Control Room (MCR) housing engineering shifts organized to cover any eventuality. It oversees all on-site activity, including the live output to Channel 5.

Other issues also came up in planning *Big Brother*’s move to Channel 5. Bit on the Side originates from a stage located 300 feet from the main MCR area, so R2R installed a fully redundant fiber optic rig to connect the stage and the production control rooms to the MCR, and the outgoing BT fiber lines to Channel 5. As for the live show, it originates from a pair of purpose-built cabins housing a large production control room, VTRs and sound and vision. R2R connected both cabins to the fiber optic rig as well.

Two seasons of *Big Brother* have already aired on Channel 5, averaging around 2.6 million viewers. No doubt a part of this success has to do with R2R’s hard work behind the scenes.

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