Gold standard

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Despite the omnipresence of today's smartphones and gadgets, yachts have struggled to keep up with tech developments onshore. But that's changing - and fast, as Risa Merl discovers.
The service allows yacht owners and managers to scale bandwidth up and down, depending on usage and the amount of people onboard at any one time.

"You need clients can sign up for a 12-month package, but suspend their service in the off-season," says Myers, who revealed that the company is also looking at offering three-month packages in the future to further service this need for bandwidth flexibility.

Adaptability is also key when it comes to a yacht's build. "One of the biggest challenges during any yacht project is that technology keeps evolving, and you don't want a new yacht with old tech," says Casper Kleinman of Dutch company VBH, which creates audio, video and IT products for new-build yachts as well as refits. VBH confirms that in the past systems needed to be connected physically, which added to the challenge of designing a yacht that needed to be upkeep at a launch three years down the line. But this is now changing thanks to software-based connections. "By using a flexible software-based backbone, it's easier to connect new hardware late in the build," Kleinman says. "We've used this on a recent 87-metre yacht.

Once installed, technology also has to work within multipurpose spaces, which can become increasingly popular onboard. A helideck might host yoga in the morning, a round of TopGolf in the afternoon and a live music performance, nightclub or movie under the stars come nightfall — and it needs to be able to allow a helicopter to land if required. "Providing multifunctional areas and spaces or so-called 'points of interest' throughout the day, including the main saloon and beach club, requires technology that is able to adapt from one experience or functionality to another," says Alistair Levine, director of sales and marketing at California Audio Technology.

"This type of flexibility harnesses everything from video walls and audio systems to lighting control and motorised shades, so that you can manipulate the visual and auditory experience to suit your needs — but this level of functionality needs to be discussed at the design stage."

THE ALL-IN-ONE APP

In recent years we've become attached — some might argue addicted — to our smartphones, so it's no surprise that we now want and expect them to control our onboard tech. As yacht automotive streamlines into a "smart yachts" experience, clients and crew want to be able to control all the onboard systems from one easy-to-use location.

VideoWork's currently offers just this, integrating all of the yacht's domestic and onboard systems into a single device. Instead of the popular Crestron remote control, owners might opt for a dedicated multi-service app that also allows them to manage all of their systems from a smartphone. "It's not just about having an app, the real challenge is to make it intuitive and easy to use," says Kleinman. What users are interested in is a smart yachting experience. "It's about being able to control everything from one app, and that can transform a superyacht space using content displayed on screens. "Instead of such screens only being used for showing movies or television shows, we can use them as integrative backgrounds," says Kleinman. "They can add extra depth and meaning to a boat's space."

Perhaps as a much-needed salve to all this overload in technology, VideoWork's has developed what it calls the Emotional Room, a system that utilizes an algorithm on a neural network to assess the mood of the people in a space and adapt the lighting and music accordingly. Cameras in the room will gauge guests' faces to determine their emotions by mapping "points of interest" on their faces, such as the eyes, lips and cheeks. The neural network will then learn how different settings — from lighting up and putting on music to, say, relaxation in the room affect human emotions. This self-learning system evolves the more it's used, and is designed to replicate conditions that it knows are the most pleasing.

Emotional Rooms will start appearing on yachts from late spring this year, including in a project with one of the top Italian builders. Not only is superyacht technology getting better at giving us what we want, it will soon do it without us even asking.

SAFE AND SOUND

Super yachts can have all the latest kit, then. Yet while advances in audiovisual technology are impressive, having efficient cybersecurity to keep onboard internet connections safe hasn't become standard practice.

"Research shows us that 64 per cent of super yachts rely on insecure firewalls or crew-assisted solutions to protect against cyber risks — and 96 per cent don't have onboard firewalls to look after cybersecurity," says Myers. Inmarsat has developed a service called Fleet Secure UTU (unified threat management) to address this problem. It is designed to prevent cyberattacks, detect vulnerabilities and respond to threats — and the bandwidth used doesn't come out of the yacht owner's monthly allowance.

At the 2018 Marine Equipment Trade Show in Amsterdam introduced its Crestron ASA 35066, a new dedicated onboard cybersecurity device. "Crestron ASA is a state-of-the-art cybersecurity product," claims Minossi. The network security device incorporates threat-defence software, which allows for real-time identification and prevention of viruses and threats from the web. Several levels of security are permitted via a single platform, and can also look at network activity to see vulnerabilities in any apps or files, with an automated system assessing potential threats.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"The modern consumer is all about the experience that their technology delivers to them, not the underlying technology," says Levine. "Millenials are starting to drive these conversations. Whether they are the children or grandchildren of the owners, they are far more willing to pay for exceptional experiences than things." Meeting this demand is the relief of luxury and convenience and so-called "emotional" tech onboard, which is designed to enhance a guest's experience.

"As a company based in California, Audio Technology creates "dynamic entertainment experiences", and is looking to do much more with the addition of software. We are working on an audio specification that will allow onboard DJs or bands to be accompanied simply by their laptops or instruments without the need to bring on a bulky PA system, and the time and logistics that are required for set-up. Working with production company Blue International Talent, we are developing software that will be designed to deliver low-level background audio, yet most yachts don't have the aesthetic integration possible that a yacht requires," says Levine. "This specification will allow for a whole new range of experiences for both charter guests and owners, by giving them the opportunity to have everything from a stand-up comedian to a jazz trio to someone like Coldplay, David Guetta or Elton John playing a private concert on the back of their yacht in a remote part of the world."

Meanwhile, VBH is focusing on setting the mood, and helping to create even more extravagant examples of interactive bars, walls and hallways that can transform a superyacht space using content displayed on screens. "Instead of such screens only being used for showing movies or television shows, we can use them as integrative backgrounds," says Kleinman. "They can add extra depth and meaning to a boat’s space."

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Clockwise from top left: Solo is trialling Kaleidescape’s curated content service; multipurpose areas such as yoga and beach clubs are a particular technological challenge; the Burgess app has brought potential new clients to the broker.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BLUEIPROD