

Spot Verification

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A common and ongoing problem in the radio industry has been ad play-out verification. For satellite radio networks, the problem is compounded due to the sheer size of the network, and the semi-independence of station operations.

Networks rely upon station managers to sign affidavits attesting to the fact that all intended ads did in fact make it to air. But this has proven to be unworkable. Even scrupulously honest station managers cannot reasonably be expected to listen to each and every moment of on-air time. And even if they did, could they really tell the difference between a national ad versus a local or regionally targeted ad? The entire affidavit system is now recognized (especially among advertisers) to be at best 'pro-forma', and yielding little trustworthy information regarding the actual play out of their ads.

What is needed is an *automated* system which takes the human element out of the equation.

The WEGENER® iPump® 6420 is a combined satellite receiver and file based commercial insertion unit. Regionalized or local ads may be placed upon the iPump 6420 and then directed to be inserted over the live satellite format at exact spot insertion times, triggered by schedules or real time events at the network. Groups of such spots may even be bundled together into a playlist so, for example, a group of one 30 second and two 15 second ads may be inserted onto a single one minute 'avail' slot.

To aid in the spot verification effort, the iPump 6420 logs every insertion of an ad that occurs over the live format. These log events then may be returned over the Internet to the network side, where they can be reconciled against the intended ad play-out schedule. Billing for the confirmed ads may then take place, as well as the rescheduling of 'make good' spots for any that, for whatever reason, did not play out originally.

Figure 1 shows the flow of information in such a system.

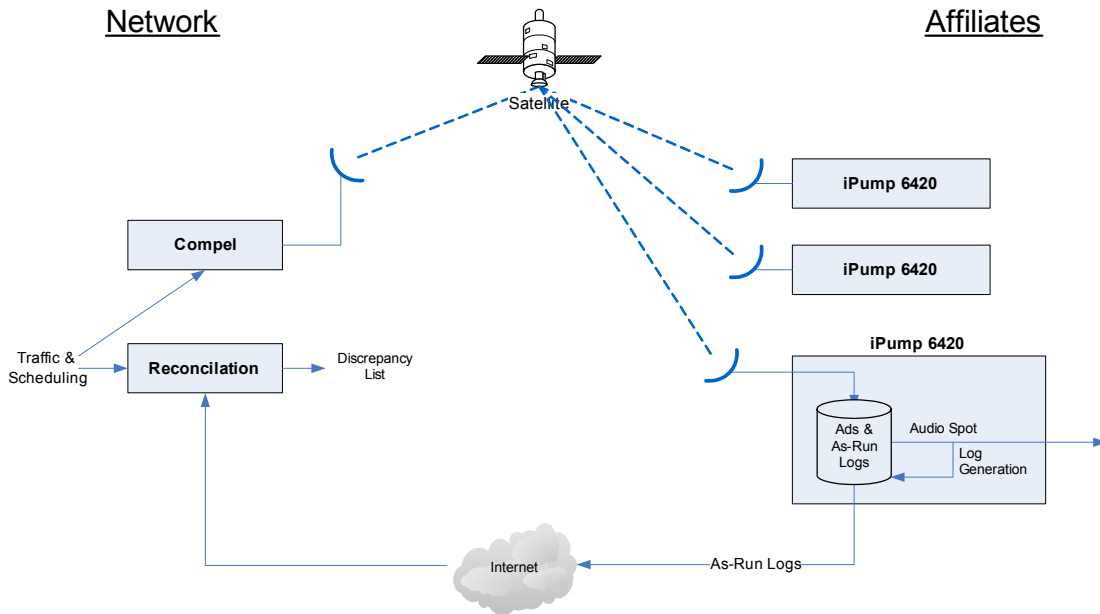


Figure 1
Ad Confirmation via As-Run Logs

The iPump 6420 logs not only the start of a playlist action, but the start of each individual file that played out within that playlist as well. In fact, the iPump 6420 logs the end of each file play-out so that it can be verified that an entire, say, 30 second ad played out (if that was the expected length of the file) and that the file was not corrupted, nor was the play-out interrupted in any manner.

Taking Verification to the Next Level

For some networks or advertisers, even this level of verification is not enough. For example, what if the audio output of the iPump itself did not make it to the 'air' for some reason? This could occur for a variety of technical reasons, or by station personnel using 'downstream' ad insertion equipment to inject their own local ad, in violation of agreements they have with the network.

For those cases, the iPump 6420 offers an enhanced end-to-end verification scheme: **Off Air Recording (OAR)**.

The iPump 6420 contains two independent software tunable AM/FM receivers, along with circuitry and software to allow a digital recording to be made of the current 'off-air' audio signal.

Figure 2 shows how this is used.

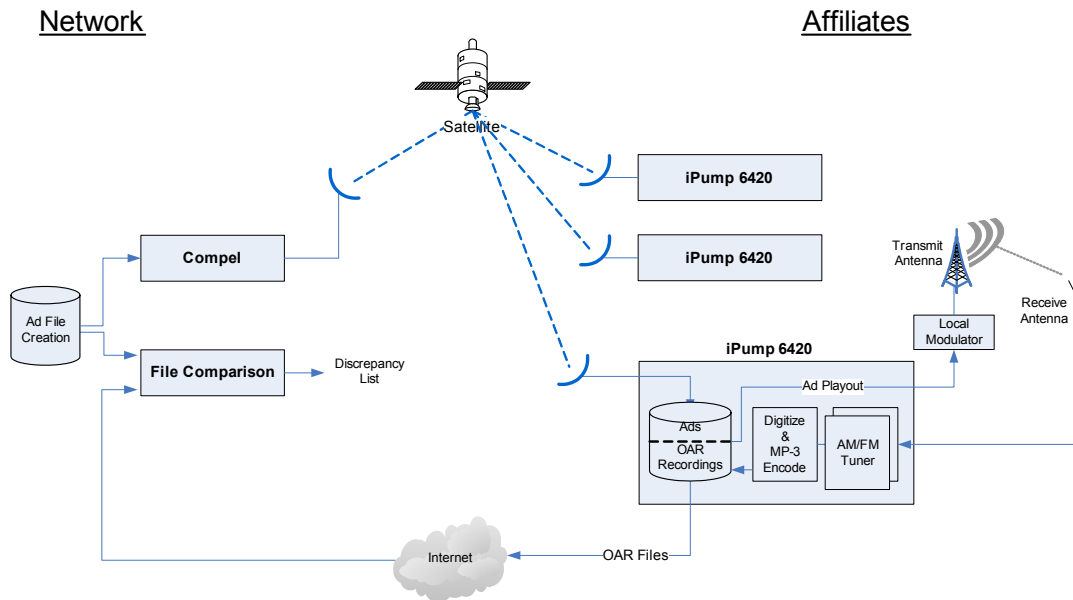


Figure 2
Ad Confirmation via File Comparison

First, the control system (Compel®) statically ‘tunes’ each of the AM/FM tuners within each iPump 6420. That is, each tuner is set to the band and frequency of the actual local on-air channel that the corresponding iPump 6420 decoder is ‘feeding’. Then, when a network initiated localized ad (or playlist) is played, a command is sent from Compel to the iPump 6420 to begin recording from the corresponding OAR tuner, for a specified time period matching the advertisement.

The iPump 6420 digitizes this audio captured from the off-air signal and then compresses it into an MP3 encoded file. These file(s) reside on the hard drive of the iPump 6420 until Compel sends a command to the iPump 6420 to return the file(s) over the IP return path (typically the Internet). When received back at the network, the encoded file may be compared to that audio file that the network intended.

This system can be effective if used even sporadically. For example, a network operator may choose to only perform the verification for iPumps that are deployed in markets of a certain minimum size. Also, not all ads need to be captured to ensure compliance. One could easily set up a system so that, randomly, only 1 in 10 or 1 in 25 ad spots are sampled.

Thus, through a combination of meticulous As-Run logs and Off Air Recording, Compel and the iPump 6420 allow a radio network operator to offer advertisers the absolute highest level of confidence in their ad play-out. And all with little or no labor required from the affiliated stations!

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