



# Fast, Direct, and Money-Saving

► As ALPA's multimedia production specialist, Mark Angolia often works like a one-man band. That's a low-tech moniker for the high-tech, up-to-the-minute audiovisual presentations of union events, messages, and initiatives he directs to keep the Association's members instantly in touch.

In just a few years, the communications stream at ALPA has increased exponentially as a result of Association leaders' increased desire to inform ALPA's pilots audiovisually on union issues and activities.

Angolia is the technical wizard of the Association's video production service, which offers everything from a 3-minute message to a script-to-screen production. The outcome from the new multimedia studio at ALPA's headquarters in Herndon, Va.—videos streamed on the web or burned onto DVDs for pilots and their families to watch at home—is more personal than the printed page and allows more control over quality at a much lower cost.

"Because many pilots are always flying when events happen," Angolia says, "most of them can't be there. One of ALPA's strengths is keeping pilots informed, and when they get home, they go to the TV or the computer. And that's where they will find ALPA news."

Angolia takes his Sony DSR 370 video camera on location to record union leaders working for and with ALPA's members—the biennial Board of Directors meeting, Executive Board meetings, road shows, the Leadership Conference—or an MEC chairman will simply come to the studio to record a message to his pilots. An event like the annual ALPA Air Safety Forum demands a full-scale production, which calls for a full ALPA team envisioning and working on the project.

"Pilots can't be at all these events," Angolia says, "so we go to the events



Mark Angolia shoots a video of F/O Chris Collins, Mesaba Council 106 secretary/treasurer, in a mock interview with ALPA Communications Specialist Ron Lovas, right, during a media training segment in ALPA's studio.

and give them the material they need to make informed choices for their careers. We put out facts, not rumors, because we're recording directly. And I stay away from editing events like road shows so no question about accuracy can come up."

In December 2004, more than 300 Alaska pilots attended a rally with Capt. Duane Woerth, and streaming video on the Alaska MEC website brought the rally to another 1,000-plus pilots who couldn't attend. In 2005, the MEC used web streaming video to educate its pilots about a tentative agreement that would have replaced the arbitration award the MEC received 2 months earlier.

"Being able to videotape the road show and put it online gave pilots who were unable to attend access to information critical in making an informed choice when they voted," says

the Alaska MEC chairman, Capt. Mark Bryant. "It also gave pilots who'd attended [the road show] the option of reviewing what they'd heard before deciding."

When United's MEC chairman, Capt. Mark Bathurst, wants to communicate with his pilot group about the serious issues their airline has been facing, he often does it in person, from the studio.

"In this era of instant communications and the expectation of our members for detailed information, we have found the use of streaming video to be an invaluable tool in our communications arsenal," Capt. Bathurst says. "There is simply no substitute for face-to-face communication. We've used this medium extensively and effectively."

ALPA's three-room studio is outfitted with everything needed to



make first-rate video productions. That convenience wasn't always the case. Just a few years ago, when ALPA wanted a video recording of an important event, it was outsourced.

"It was very expensive," Angolia says, "and at the end we had nothing to show for it other than the produced piece—no hardware was left over to do the next one. For the cost of renting an editing workstation, we could have owned it. Also, we had to hire a crew.

"At major meetings like the BOD or the Leadership Conference, the hotel wanted upward of \$15,000 to do the audiovisual. When we brought our own mixer and microphones, the hotel wouldn't let us tap into its sound system. So we brought our own speakers, and now the only thing we use is their screen. By buying the equipment, and using the labor we have already on staff, we save a lot of money, and we spend it more effectively," Angolia says.

The rising demand, in fact, has required a return to some outsourcing to fill the orders.

A tour of the three-room production area is an introduction to the techniques and technologies that TV and movie crews use every day. The studio is dominated by the "green screen" cyclorama, an "endless wall" that serves as background for stand-up message delivery and can be enhanced electronically with a software program to insert any sort of background image, from bookshelves to a runway, just like the maps of radar and barometric pressures that appear behind the TV weatherman.

A high-tech light board has replaced cables running to sockets and is so finely tuned that Angolia can almost paint the scene with light. "Lighting can make a person look sinister or angelic," he says. "It's all about setting moods."

In the editing room, viewing two

computer monitors and a video monitor, Angolia uses editing, graphics, and music software to turn raw footage into a professional-looking product.

A trip to the ALPA website and the "Events" tab on the center box will bring up the archive of last year's Air Safety Forum, a good example of a full-scale production. The list of the event's streaming videos includes the Superior Airmanship Awards, enhanced with reenactments of the events that led to the awards, produced by ALPA Communications Specialist Barbara Gottshalk and directed by Angolia. The reenactments were videotaped in a flight simulator, with stand-ins for the pilots and a scripted voice-over, and dressed up with "B-roll" footage—airplanes in the air, a snowy runway, an airport at sunset—which Angolia shoots, stores, and inserts for just such occasions.

But quality takes time. Angolia, whose previous production experience was at NBC and ABC, says the rule of thumb for easy jobs is an hour

of shooting, capturing, editing, and releasing for each minute of finished footage, and an hour per second for more complicated ones. When he flew to Denver last month to videotape an interview with 100-year-old Capt. Jack Holst on his life as a United pilot and ALPA leader, he spent hours paring down a 2-hour conversation to the best 6 minutes.

Angolia and ALPA are always looking toward the future of communications, both to and for pilots. He's hoping to have pilots test Real Networks' initiative to place video on mobile devices, which would allow viewing ALPA news on cell phones. Another prospect is the creation of video news releases—ALPA news packages that can be distributed to the media with supporting graphics.

In the end, Angolia says, "If it's cost-effective and saves money, that's what we want to do. We try to give the pilots more than what they pay for."—*Susan Burke, Publications Specialist*



In the ALPA multimedia studio's editing suite, Mark Angolia inserts an electronically imaged background, to replace the green screen that is actually behind the US Airways MEC chairman, Capt. Bill Pollock.