

HERE IS THE NEWS ...ITN HAS INSTALLED AN EC90

Strand's revolutionary EC90 dimming system, reported extensively in the last issue of *Lights!* has taken off in a big way, with the first major order going to Independent Television News for its new studios in central London.

The studio, on the site of the former *Times* building in Grays Inn Road, is due to open on Christmas Eve. The move from ITN's existing four sites around Wells Street marks the dawn of a new era for the company, which is now committed to becoming 'much more commercial' in its business approach. This means that the company's studios have to be of a sufficiently high standard to allow them to be hired out for independent productions.

Within the new complex, ITN will have four studios, two of them both 260m² in area. ITN already uses a Galaxy 3 system and an M24 and is committed to a policy of continuing up-grading of facilities.

Given that the basic business of ITN is gathering and presenting news, heavy investment in a system such as EC90 may, on the face of it, seem excessive. Yet when you consider the scope of problems the production team is likely to face, it quickly slips into perspective.

WE ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF LIVE TELEVISION AND ALL THE ATTENDANT PROBLEMS THAT BRINGS

ITN employs about 1000 people and in addition to its central London headquarters, has bureaux in the United States and Moscow.

Project engineer Phil Holland explained, 'The very nature of news means that you never know in advance who is coming in for an interview. This presents a host of technical problems which have to be dealt with.'

'For example, we do not know until the last minute if the people coming in are black, white, bald or what colour clothes they are wearing. We are in the business of live television and all the attendant problems that brings. During the course of a day, across the network, we are presenting a total of eight hours of live television.'

The point was expanded by Building Services Manager Jim Mitchell. He said,



■ Julia Somerville — as seen on screen.

'Very often when they start running the news they do not know how it is going to finish, if a late news item comes in. This presents problems which need a rapid response, since it is live television.'

There are enormous changes ahead in the broadcasting environment with the passing of the Broadcasting Bill. ITN will be a profit centre and is confident that it will continue to be the main supplier of the news for ITV.

Jim Mitchell, who is overseeing the new technical installation, said, 'We have just got to run as a commercial enterprise. The philosophy is that if we have a studio, then we will use it.'

In ITN's case it was a question of perfect timing that presented the opportunity for EC90. The company was in the process of concluding a new contract for PIP dimmers but because EC90 was at that time in an advanced stage of development by Strand R + D engineers, Strand's Alan Luxford suggested that it might be more suitable.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT EC90 IS REVOLUTIONARY. WE WERE STAGGERED BY IT

Working at such a frantic pace, ITN's most urgent problem is the lack of time for experimenting with lighting levels. Any alterations to the lighting often need to be immediate and exact, which is where EC90 comes into its own.

Phil Holland explained, 'The beauty of the EC90 system is that, for example, if there was a news flash, then someone could walk into the studio without knowing anything about the Galaxy

and just push a button in the back-up control station and there would be a pre-set fade for them.'

But the Strand involvement did not stop at merely providing and installing the necessary hardware. For with Strand's in-house expertise, the company was able to assist ITN's own engineers in designing the new studios, and worked closely to devise the layout and technical configuration.

The changeover from the present studios at Wells Street to Grays Inn Road will be a masterpiece of organisation. Throughout the move, the ITN bulletins will keep on the air at regular intervals.

ITN's existing Galaxy 2 system is being up-graded to a Galaxy 3, with a fault reporting facility. This allows the Galaxy to receive a constant up-date from EC90 about faults, should they occur anywhere in the lighting system. The existing PTM dimmers, installed by Strand in 1968, have been up-graded.

Jim Mitchell explained, 'The whole approach to lighting has changed in recent years. The younger ones who are far more adventurous are coming to the fore now. The change has come about in the last 18 months and it is mainly due to the fact that new technology gives lighting designers new ideas.'

'As far as EC90 is concerned, there is no doubt that it is revolutionary. We were absolutely staggered by it.'

The first programme to go on air using the EC90 system will be Channel 4 news at 7p.m. on December 24th.



■ New orders for EC90 systems have now been received from London Weekend Television and from BBC South West.