CASE STUDY

Wheel of Fortune

10 years of entertainment with eStudio

About Brainstorm

Established in 1993, Brainstorm Multimedia provides industry-leading real-time 3D interactive graphics solutions for all broadcast graphics types and workflows as well as for feature film production and 3D real-time presentations. Brainstorm customers' list include most of the world's leading broadcasters plus many smaller and regional stations.

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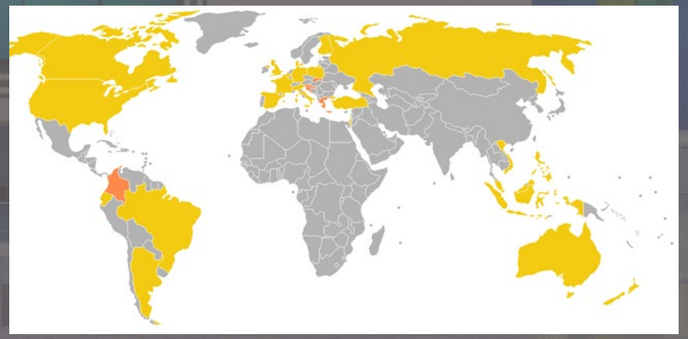
History

"La Ruleta de la Fortuna" is the Spanish version for "Wheel of Fortune", the famous TV show created in 1973 in the USA by Merv Griffin and originally broadcasted at the NBC. Its Spanish version was the program with which Antena3 TV started its regular emisions in 1990, meaning it was the first entertainment TV show broadcasted by a private television channel in Spain.

"Wheel of Fortune" was created in 1973 by Merv Griffin, responsible of many other successful TV formats such as Jeopardy, was firstly broadcasted in 1975 by the NBC. The show is still produced today by Sony Pictures Television and distributed by CBS Television Distribution. Wheel of Fortune is the TV contest with the longest duration in the US television history, and reached the 5.000 programmes in 2009. The format has been licensed and adapted in more than 30 countries.



With different presenters and originally named "La Ruleta de la Fortuna", the show had its great first period in Antena3, a second one in Telecinco and a third round back in Antena 3 since 2006, changing its name to "La Ruleta de la Suerte". Since then the production company, Martingala, owner of the "Wheel of Fortune rights" for Spain, started the challenge of improving the contest adapting it to the latest technology. At that time the physical panel changed to a fully virtual one created with eStudio.

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At the beginning we were uncertain on how we would cope with this challenge, but the Brainstorm team was. Working with Brainstorm is very easy, as from the very beginning they understood our needs, providing us a fundamental technical support. Also, the Brainstorm systems have been running stable since day one.

Nacho Correa
Director of "La Ruleta de la Suerte"

The title of the program is a reference of the giant roulette with different options that the players spin all over the game to uncover boxes from an enlightened panel, a word puzzle, to uncover the hidden words or sentences.

The panel originally consisted on turntable elements that illuminated and turned to display the letters they contained as required, but step by step started to incorporate virtual and digital technology to flexibilize its options and give the game further possibilities.

The program counts with different types of panels and software applications specifically designed for them: speed tests, normal games with roulette spins, and, at last, the final roulette. The programs are recorded two days a week, recording three programs everyday, excluding specials, so the channel could broadcast the show five days a week. The fast turnaround of the players require an intense phone casting labour, but according to Nacho Correa, director of the show, "There has always been great interest in coming to this show. It's a lot of fun, the players have a good time, and they win some money. It's just perfect, isn't it?

When Martingala faced with the challenge of producing the current period of "La Ruleta de la Suerte", their responsibles found themselves with the difficulty of having to start from scratch, producing a show that was already recognized by the audience but at the same time required an important facelift to regain freshness. Also, the format was broadcasted all over the world, and the goal was to match, at least, the best visual result achieved anytime, anywhere in the world. The decision was to get rid of the physical panel, changing it with a virtual screen where the letters could attractively appear on demand.

When selecting the technology for the show, the fundamental requirements were the reliability of the system, the warranty of working in real time and the upgrading and evolution possibilities. The first technical challenge was to significantly simplify the existing system, a complex installation on which each single letter was controlled by a dedicated video server. Brainstorm, that had collaborated previously with Martingala in other shows, decided to accomplish the challenge using just one system to control the whole show from a single control panel. Now the panel is a single video signal that clears the limitations of the former server system.

The complete system consist on 3 workstations, each one controlling one aspect of the game: panel, graphics and player's displays, and it is thought to be controlled by just one operator at the production control room.

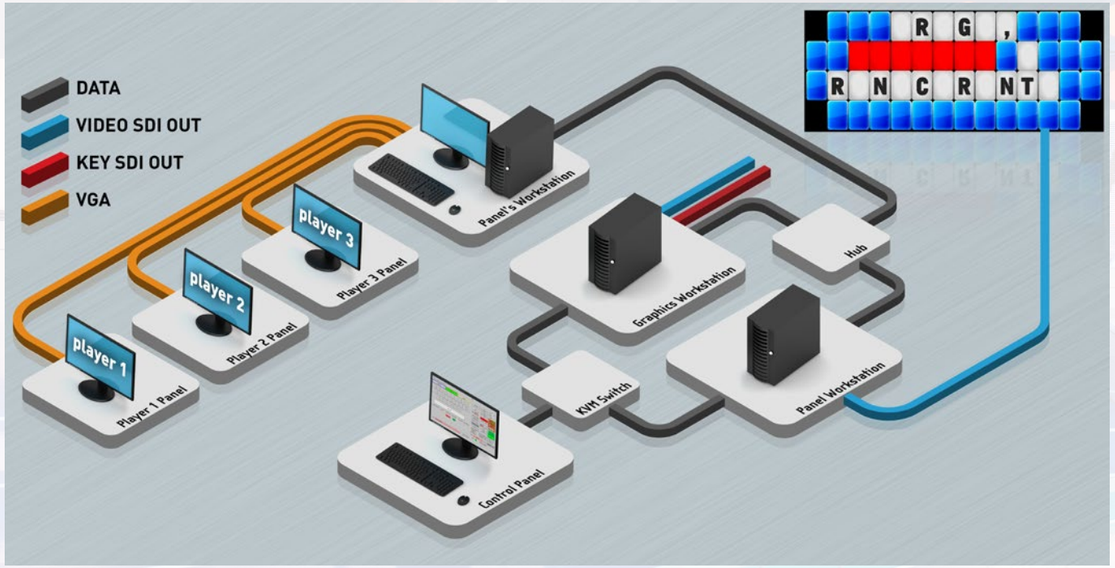
The operator drives a specifically created control panel that integrates the logic of the program and controls all aspects of the game, from uncovering and displaying the letters to add or subtract the quantities obtained by the players.

This panel gives the instructions to the different workstations to generate the graphics needed in real time. Then, one of the workstations provides a video+key signal with the graphics, a second one creates the panel with the sentence and the third provides the VGA signal for the player's displays.

"La Ruleta de la Suerte" is a live game, and during its trajectory different games have been created for the show, while game options and alternatives had to be incorporated to the show's logic by Brainstorm Production Services, which increased their experience in this particular environment.

So many years of shows give time to many anecdotes, but Nacho states that "although the game is quite easy, the players keep surprising us because nerves always play tricks on them, as for instance not getting right the Belgium's capital city famous for its cabbage... or repeatedly asking for the a letter that is already on!

As a curiosity, the show does not admit decimals in the money amounts, so when we half an odd number the result is rounded down, that is what the presenter calls "our commission".



Martingala and Brainstorm

During the last decade Martingala has turned into one of the most important production companies on the Spanish broadcast market, both because its good audience data and for the high quality of its productions. Martingala specialized in magazines on its beginnings, achieving a weekly emission time of up to 28 hours on air, for which they received several industry prizes.

Martingala has produced shows for almost all relevant public, private and regional broadcaster in Spain, including some of the best regarded TV contest in Spain since 2004, such as the Spanish versions of "¿Who wants to be a Millionaire?" or "Wheel of Fortune", both of them with great audience data. Its portfolio includes other successful TV shows such as "Jeopardy", "El Destape", "Crosswords" and formats of their own like "A por todas" ("Go for it!").

The production company has relied regularly on Brainstorm, and to their long-going collaboration on "Wheel of Fortune" we have to add up the creation of several virtual studios and graphics for programs such as "Bichos y Cía" (Pets and Co.) a show of home videos on pets, or "Diario del analista catódico" (Diary of the Cathodic Analist), dedicated to video zappings. After 6 years on air, the current season of "Wheel of Fortune" still achieves average share rates of around 20% in its time frame.