



Case Study | Chicago PBS Station WTTW

CHICAGO PBS STATION REBOOTS NEWS PROGRAM WITH IMMERSIVE SET DESIGN





ABOUT

Live interviews. Background visuals. Onset guests. Few workplaces rely on technology the way news stations do – especially during a live news broadcast. From the first cue to the last, every audiovisual element of the production must look flawless to those watching at home, or the broadcast loses its luster. That's why WTTW, the PBS member station in Chicago, turned to FORTÉ to update the studio for their flagship nightly news program, Chicago Tonight.

CHALLENGE

The 30-year-old Chicago Tonight studio and set had grown outdated and stale. Producers wanted a fresh look with upgraded audiovisual capabilities to enhance their long-form storytelling and increase viewership. But impressing viewers when you're in the third-largest TV market in the country is no easy task. So, they set out to design a studio experience that not only attracts a broader demographic and increases viewership but also makes Chicago Tonight the premier news entity in Chicago.

The logo for Chicago Tonight, with 'CHICAGO' in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font, and 'TONIGHT' in a smaller, bold, orange sans-serif font directly below it.

CHICAGO
TONIGHT

FORTÉ

To highlight the art of the possible for new studio design, the FORTÉ project team took producers on a tour of other TV stations. From there, FORTÉ completed a needs analysis and worked with WTTW's producers and technology team to create a design and develop renderings. Their solution is an experience the Chicago news market has never seen.

"Audiences don't want to watch someone read the news. They want to feel like they're part of the story. Chicago Tonight's new studio creates an immersive experience for the viewer and brings WTTW to the leading edge of what's possible in TV news," said Pete DeBenny, FORTÉ Sales Manager.

SOLUTION

The new Chicago Tonight set blends physical scenery with virtual elements and surrounding technology. Producers can easily change the set's entire background or seamlessly add elements like music and graphics.

The on-set cameras are robotic Ross CamBots, and there's a Furio SkyDolly ceiling-mounted track camera that's controlled remotely. The cameras and other on-set tech are driven by the latest control room and audio suite solutions – a Ross Ultrachrome multi-channel keyer and a Ross Acuity production switcher.



WTTW's Chicago Tonight studio includes three Ross CamBots driven by a control room team.

FORTÉ



Sound engineers for Chicago Tonight have all the controls at their fingertips.

“I was impressed with how FORTÉ’s design team got into the nitty gritty detail to put this studio together. It shows they really know what they’re doing,” said Mike Tompary, WTTW’s director of Broadcast and Technology.

The changes impact every aspect of the show’s visual design and production. And because TV stations are notoriously complex environments, the project required deep expertise in not just the equipment and solutions but understanding what it’s like to work at a television news station. FORTÉ designers worked closely with each technology



From the Chicago Tonight control room, producers and technicians manage every facet of show production.

manufacturer and the station’s engineers and technical staff to integrate the new equipment into the space.

Related viewing: [Chicago Tonight Studio Build Timelapse](#)

“Customers get new equipment all the time,” said Chad Thielen, Design Engineer at FORTÉ. “But in a case like this – where every piece of equipment is new, and it’s never worked together as a system – customers see the value of working with an experienced systems integrator like FORTÉ.”



RESULT

Chicago Tonight debuted its new studio set on October 3, 2022. Since then, they've been leveraging their new audiovisual capabilities to advance the station's mission of producing and presenting best-in-class content.

Each night, the show covers three to four stories, spending eight to 12 minutes on each story. The updated technology helps them go in-depth and deliver more vivid storytelling, host more thoughtful interview conversations, and share more content that reflects their diverse community.

"The new set is a shining moment for us as a PBS station and has made Chicago Tonight a more compelling and dynamic show," added Tompany. "We have FORTÉ to thank for that. They were an essential part of this project's success."

Donor recognition: The Chicago Tonight set design and technology are made possible by Alexandra and John Nichols. Studio facility and infrastructure are provided by The Crown Family. Studio control and audio suite are provided by The Grainger Foundation.

"I was impressed with how FORTÉ's design team got into the nitty gritty detail to put this studio together. It shows they really know what they're doing."

Mike Tompany

Director of Broadcast and Technology, WTTW

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS

- Ross CamBots robotic cameras
- Furio SkyDolly ceiling-mounted camera
- Ross Ultrachrome multi-channel keyers
- Ross Acuity production switcher
- Studio routing switcher
- House router