

# Channel 4: The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games

How Simplestream powered the Tokyo 2020 edition of the Paralympic Games on Channel 4, with out-of-the-box OTT services on a fully accessible, responsive website

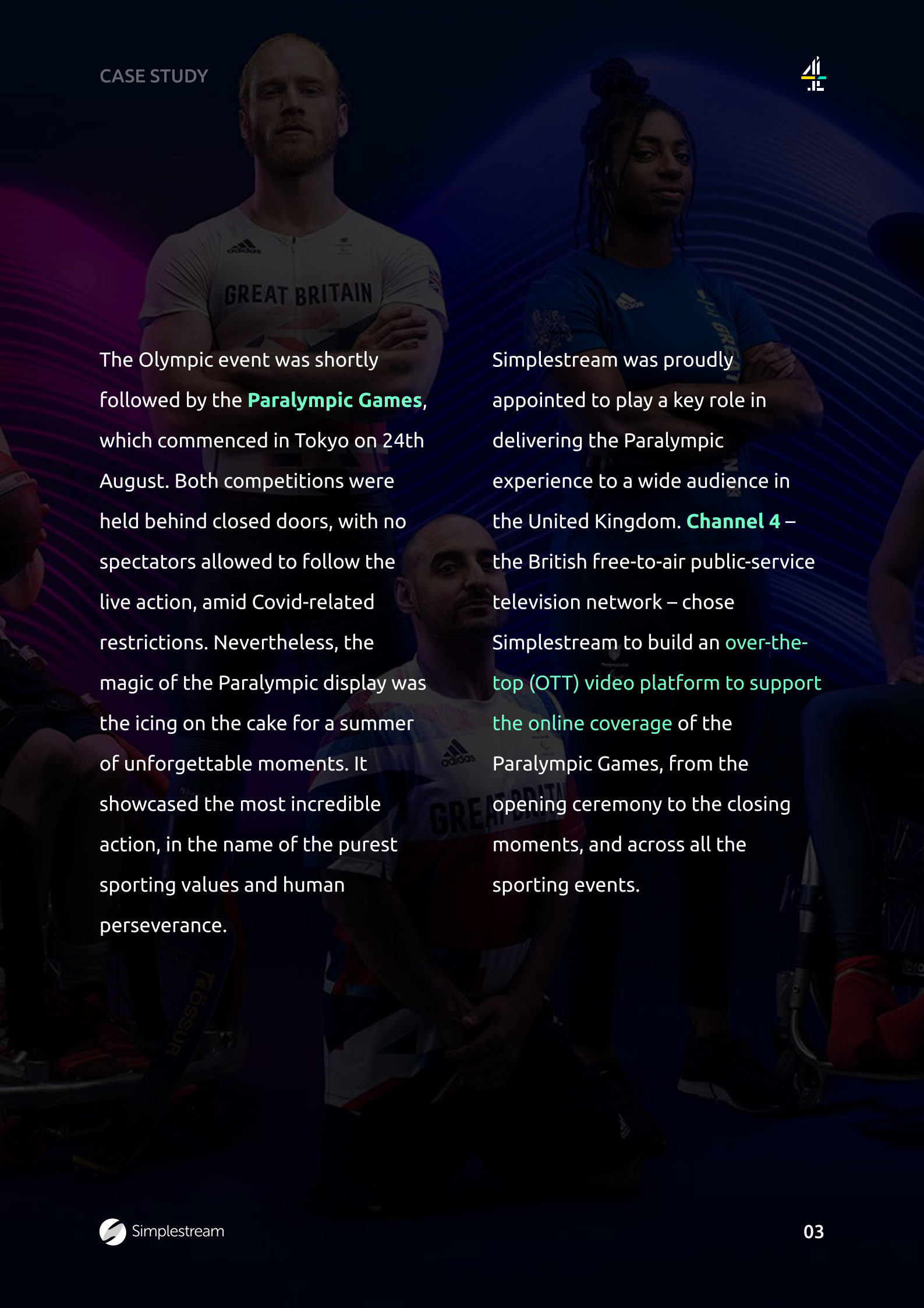
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# Introduction

In the wake of what arguably was the hardest year in sport – at least in the modern-day world amid the Covid-19 pandemic – 2021 marked the return to some sort of normality. Summertime brought to our screens the flagship sporting events that were necessarily pushed back in 2020 among legitimate public health concerns. Football kicked off the season with the Euro 2020 campaign in full display across several cities in Europe. It soon came time to fly over to Tokyo, for the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, held in Japan for the first time since 1964.







The Olympic event was shortly followed by the **Paralympic Games**, which commenced in Tokyo on 24th August. Both competitions were held behind closed doors, with no spectators allowed to follow the live action, amid Covid-related restrictions. Nevertheless, the magic of the Paralympic display was the icing on the cake for a summer of unforgettable moments. It showcased the most incredible action, in the name of the purest sporting values and human perseverance.

Simplestream was proudly appointed to play a key role in delivering the Paralympic experience to a wide audience in the United Kingdom. **Channel 4** – the British free-to-air public-service television network – chose Simplestream to build an **over-the-top (OTT) video platform** to support **the online coverage** of the Paralympic Games, from the opening ceremony to the closing moments, and across all the sporting events.

IN THIS CASE STUDY, WE TELL THE STORY OF A COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING PROJECT. IN PARTICULAR, WE EXPLORE:

**01** How Simplestream built, delivered, and maintained a customisable solution adopted by Channel 4 to bring the video experience to millions of households, through App Platform

**02** How Simplestream provided a website that complied with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards

**03** How Simplestream live-streamed 325 events across the 12-day Games, with an on-site event team coordinated from the London hub

**04** The cloud-based OTT workflows that sat at the core of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games delivery, across 1,300 hours of streamed content, and up to 16 concurrent feeds



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## Challenges

**Channel 4 was awarded the broadcast rights for the Paralympic Games for the first time in 2012. The deal with the International Paralympic Committee has since paved the way to a progressive transformation of the perception of disabled sports in the United Kingdom. The broadcaster offers viewers blanket coverage of the entire set of sporting events shown by Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS).**





For the 2020 edition held in Tokyo, Channel 4 needed a customisable solution to be easily integrated with existing services, and to accommodate the company's brand guidelines. Channel 4 not only chose Simplestream to build an OTT video platform to support the online coverage of the Games but also included the requirement for the platform to encompass a number of accessibility features, to make sure the event could be enjoyed by as wide an audience as possible.

With the competition unfolding in Japan, and the time difference between the Asian region and Greenwich Time, it became more important than ever for Channel 4's digital offering to provide thorough coverage of the event. Hence the need for a customisable, flexible, low latency, and accessible platform, to allow the broadcaster's editorial teams to focus solely on the curation of their own content, in order to enrich the end-user experience.

Ultimately, it was paramount for Simplestream to provide a fully managed support team, 24/7, throughout the 12-day period.





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## Solutions

Simplestream took on the challenge of simplifying what was conceived to be a complex and challenging project. The solution of choice was powered by **App Platform** — the out-of-the-box product designed to streamline the launch of premium video services, built upon cloud-based, flexible modules, interchangeable and customisable.

The workflow covered both live and on-demand environments. Through the **Live-2-VOD module**, the footage was made available for on-demand viewing within 60 seconds of broadcast. Channel 4 had the ability to **scale without any limits**, simplifying the live infrastructure, enabling editorial teams to focus on seamless curation of content.



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It was critical for Channel 4 to be able to offer the live streams to OTT viewers in an accessible environment. Simplestream's platform was easy to integrate with our services, it satisfied our requirement of flexibility to work with third parties – such as for live subtitling – and high levels of stability and availability of the service throughout the Games.

## Channel 4



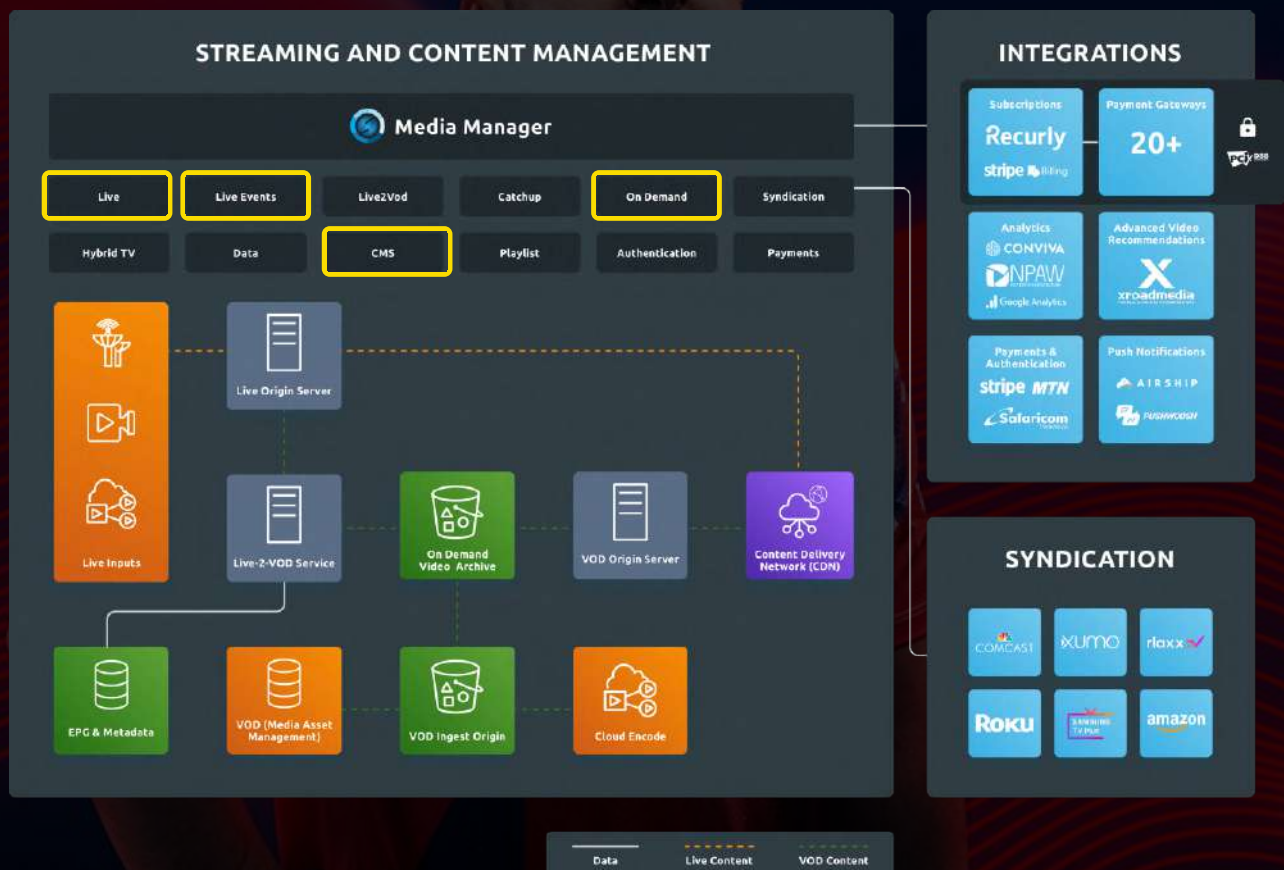




## Simplestream built a service that revolved around a number of key elements:

- 01** A platform able to handle up to 16 concurrent live streams, including adaptive bitrate encoding (ABR) for up to ten profiles
- 02** Low latency live streaming with live event scheduling and the management of news articles and relevant metadata
- 03** Live-2-VOD and VOD workflows to present key moments before, during and after the action
- 04** Responsive web design principles to support optimisation of content for each device type
- 05** Digital rights management (DRM) support, including FairPlay, Marlin, PlayReady, and Widevine
- 06** The website built to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards, and integrated with Channel 4's Freewheel and Adobe Analytics platforms
- 07** Integration with Channel 4's other existing partners, including Akamai, Conviva, Grabyo, and Red Bee





## MEDIA MONITORING

**Media Monitoring** is the 'mosaic' feature of Simplestream's **Media Manager**. It allows operators to monitor all of the existing streams running simultaneously, at a glance. By simply using an **all-encompassing dashboard**, any operator can instantly check the **health of streams**, expand the view to **full screen**, or even **enable/disable the audio** for a specific transmission. Media Monitoring includes a variety of functionalities, such as event end notifications based on configured event start and end times, automatic refreshes, and identification badges – to show which encoders are being used – helpful especially when using fully redundant services.



Most importantly, the role of Simplestream didn't come to an end once the OTT platform was successfully launched. The team provided Channel 4 with an end-to-end solution, comprising both back end streaming and the handling of relationships with other third parties involved. Two Simplestream teams were deployed throughout the entire duration of the event. Four engineers were stationed in Thailand – unable to enter Japan due to Covid 19-related restrictions – while four more worked remotely, from the London hub. A Project Manager and Account Manager were also deployed to coordinate the operation and provide a daily report to Channel 4 stakeholders.

Once the live feeds were ready to be distributed, Simplestream acted as the lead entity in the Channel 4 ecosystem, coordinating the effort with other parties such as OBS, which was providing the original feeds; Red Bee Media, responsible for real-time subtitling (together with another subcontractor) from Los Angeles, USA; Grabyo, handling the video clipping.





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# Results

The multi-layered approach to the project granted Channel 4 the possibility to distribute more hours of coverage than ever before. The broadcaster was able to complement linear TV coverage by leveraging a digital service that offered more choice, and more content to all viewers. This was also integral to a hugely successful social media campaign built by Channel 4 across multiple channels.





**325**

events covered

**1,300+**HOURS OF STREAMED  
CONTENT**UP TO  
16**CONCURRENT  
STREAMS

Simplestream covered all the **325 sporting events** during the competition in Tokyo, for more than **1,300 hours of streamed content**, and up to 16 concurrent streams. Channel 4's coverage of the Paralympic Games was viewed – overall – by a third of the UK population, counting a fifth of young people aged 16-34 (22%). The broadcast recorded over **2.6 million streams on All 4**, via the OTT platform deployed.<sup>1</sup>

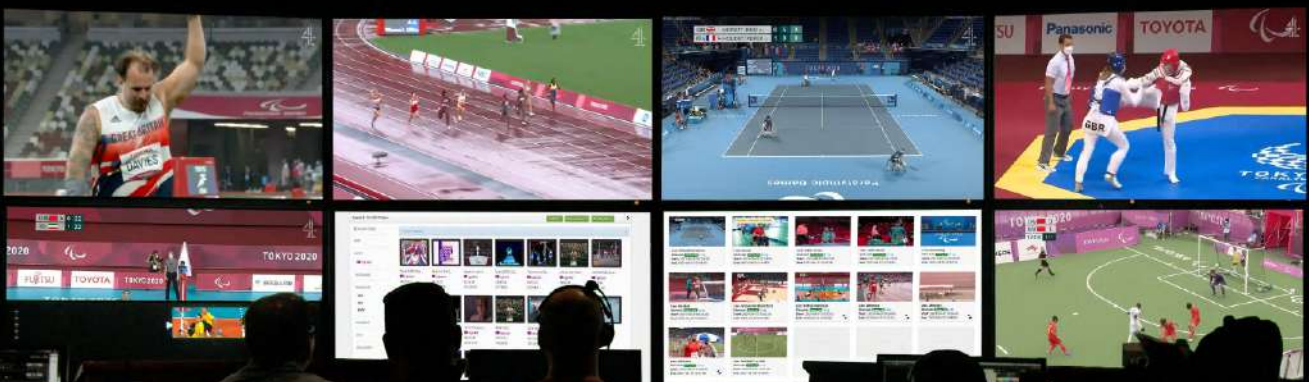
1. <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/channel-4s-coverage-tokyo-2020-paralympic-games-reaches-20-million-viewers>

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For Simplestream, the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games represented the largest single event ever undertaken. We were proud to work along with Channel 4 and the broadcaster's other partners to contribute to a successful digital delivery of the live and on-demand content. This project can now be held up as a case study for the services we can provide as a business for some of the world's biggest sporting events.

**Adam Smith**

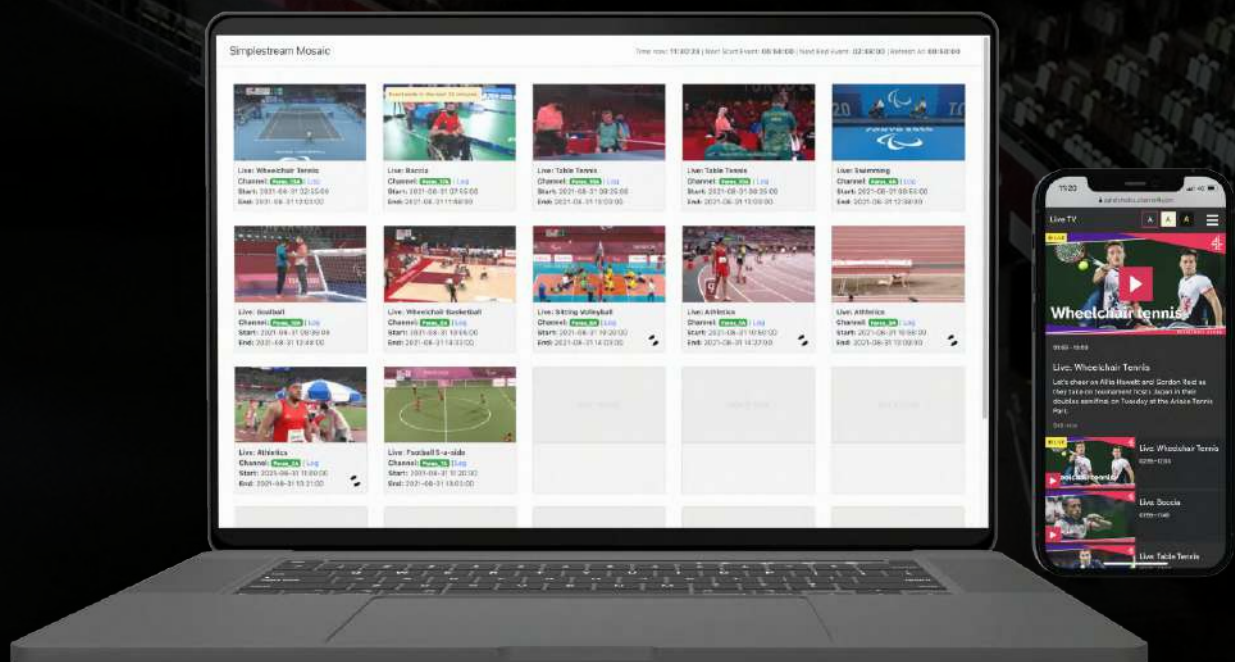
Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer  
Simplestream





Despite the challenges presented by unprecedented circumstances and the natural complexity that sits at the core of a major, global sporting event, Simplestream successfully helped Channel 4 to deliver what can be considered as the biggest Paralympic experience ever. Millions of viewers could enjoy the action live and on demand across the platform. The accessible website was also built to remain as a repository of VOD content beyond the duration of the Games in Tokyo.

The success of the project was finally sealed by the **fully managed support team** deployed by Simplestream for a **24/7 operation**. This ensured a mint distribution of the content – with no downtime registered throughout the event – and a continuous communications flow across all parties involved, integral to the fan experience on the front end.





# About Simplestream

Simplestream is the global leader in live, live-2-VOD, and on demand TV services across all OTT platforms. Founded in 2010 with headquarters in London, Simplestream enables broadcasters, platform operators, content owners, and distributors to quickly launch next-generation TV services, increasing reach and revenues. Simplestream's suite of products includes Media Manager – the powerful, modular backend to upload and manage content for distribution – and App Platform, a fully managed, end-to-end solution to enhance premium content across devices, supporting a range of monetisation models. Among the other solutions are live events capabilities, Hybrid TV, and Media Flow for seamless content syndication.

Simplestream provides simplified workflows and cloud-based solutions to industry leaders, including Channel 4, UKTV, A+E Networks, AMC Networks International, GB News, News Corp, Sony, Sky Racing, Racing TV, and QVC.

## GET IN TOUCH

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