Saga owns four stations in Asheville: WISE-AM (sports), WYSE-AM (sports), WTMT-FM (rock) and WOXL-FM (classic hits). The station group was built over the course of several years, and with each station acquisition, the existing studio site was expanded to accommodate.

The new studio/office site was selected mainly because of its advantageous business location. On the west side of the metro, the facility is in a business area that is easy for listeners to find, which is important for prize pickup and helps strengthen the stations’ ties with the community. The chosen building was previously a restaurant. Saga added to three sides of the building to increase the overall floor space from 4,280 square feet to 7,210 square feet. Once expanded, the interior build-out began. This is when one of the first challenges was met: The station lost its full-time engineer.

To keep the project on schedule, Saga looked to outside help. Greg Urbiel, director of engineering for Saga, contacted Larry Lamoray at Balsys Technology Group to take over the project. This was the first time Saga used an integrator for an installation.

When Balsys came in, the first project modification was made after the studs were in place but just before the drywall was ready to be installed. Lamoray first realized that the conduit entries for each studio’s cables were not in an optimal location and some last-minute relocations avoided what could have been a significant problem.

While the studio space construction was underway, Balsys began building the custom furniture and assembling the studio wiring in its facility near Orlando. The wiring for the technical operations center (TOC) could not be integrated off-site because there were too many factors that would be determined on-site.

One of those factors was the final layout of the TOC. With slightly less floor space than originally planned, providing sufficient rack space for the operation could have been a problem. The solution was to go vertical. Middle Atlantic GRK racks were used. Each rack provides 52 rack spaces and stands 8’ tall.

This was going to be a digital facility, and with that in mind, Saga selected Axia for the audio network and Imediatouch for the automation system. With an IP audio system planned for the operation, Ethernet-ready cable was installed for each studio. Again, Saga used an outside service to handle the cabling. The phone system installers wired the office phones and office network, and also ran all the CAT6 cabling for the on-air operation. All the house wiring is CAT6. Each studio has 16 CAT6 drops, two coaxial cable drops, and a stranded #2 ground wire attached to copper bus bars at each end to create the star ground system.

In each studio, Krone blocks and IT-style Ethernet patch bays are used for interconnects. A studio’s audio sources are punched down to one side of a Krone block. The Krone block has RJ45 connectors on the other side, and an Ethernet jumper runs from the Krone block to an Ethernet patch bay. The CAT6 drop into the studio is connected to the Ethernet patch bay.

While the Axia system can use distributed nodes to provide I/O as needed, the only nodes in the studios are for the microphones. Any other studio audio sources run analog or digital audio back to the TOC via the CAT6 cable. This was done to reduce some costs of installing additional Axia nodes. The Imediatouch computers and Axia engines all live in the TOC, where the signals remain as direct IP runs. The Imediatouch computers use the Axia IP audio driver to attach to the audio network.