

ASYLUM ENTERTAINMENT

Asylum Entertainment Boosts Productivity and Accelerates Creativity for Post-production with Panasas® ActiveStor®

Asylum Entertainment is known for producing a broad range of premium video programming, largely for cable television. This includes acclaimed documentaries (ESPN's "30 for 30" series, the Fox Sports "Beyond The Glory" series) and popular cable reality shows ("Beverly Hills Pawn" and the Emmy-winning dramatic mini-series "The Kennedys"). Framework Post is Asylum's rapidly growing television post-production arm for quality broadcast content.

SUMMARY

CLIENT

Asylum Entertainment / Framework Post
(*Legendary Entertainment acquired Asylum in December 2013*)

INDUSTRY

Television Production

CHALLENGE

The quadrupling of Asylum's post-production business in the last two years exceeded the throughput and storage performance capacity of existing storage products, resulting in lengthy and inefficient production workflows, bottlenecked creativity, and increased management effort. Ensuring data privacy across editing projects was an added challenge.

SOLUTION

Panasas ActiveStor 14 hybrid scale-out NAS high performance storage

RESULT

- A 33 percent acceleration in production time while eliminating resolution conversion
- All editing bays unified on a single, easily managed network under a single global namespace, eliminating islands of storage and reducing data privacy issues
- High-resolution editing of source media via increased storage performance and higher data throughput
- Editors now work on multiple platforms and multiple software clients on the same storage solution, at the same speeds across the entire network

THE CHALLENGE

Asylum Entertainment and its Framework Post television post-production operations face daily pressures to deliver high-quality final content for television shows and TV mini-series. Meeting production deadlines is critical. Consistent high data throughput, high storage capacity, seamless scalability, and high data availability for production data are imperative to keep workflows on track.

However, Framework Post has a serious growth challenge: The company's post-production business has doubled two years in a row, placing increasing demands on its underlying technical infrastructure, particularly its legacy storage solution. Previous efforts to scale storage performance to meet the needs of increased editing workflows had forced the deployment of additional storage systems to address growth. The additional storage systems created disconnected islands of storage, without addressing the need for higher media throughput.

Framework Post uses an Avid software environment for post-production editing, and has historically operated on Avid Isis 5500 shared media storage systems. Each existing storage system was limited to 99 users. However, to meet its increasing business growth, Framework Post was making plans to expand its infrastructure to 170 edit bays, which would require deployment of additional storage islands to satisfy the new performance requirements.

Allen Dial, SVP, Post-production for Asylum, manages Framework Post. He recalls the complexity of the previous environment, with multiple storage solutions on separate networks, without a single sign-on. "I had seven different servers hosting elements of different projects, and you had to log into each of them in different ways."

And without system-wide log-in management for multiple storage servers, Dial was unable to limit access to other projects on shared drives. In a traditional Avid workflow, he said, it's difficult to apply data privacy. "After sign-on to Avid's Connection Manager, an editor could see and access everyone else's projects. We were unable to enforce this kind of security."

Editing performance also noticeably slowed well before user limits were reached, as existing storage did not scale linearly, limiting aggregate performance. "Throughput and capacity are two things that we're always battling in post-production," said Dial.

"You have to have enough capacity to store all of your footage and that capacity needs to be affordable. You also need high enough throughput so that you can play that stored footage across your network in real time."

Asylum's lack of adequate storage performance led to inefficient editing processes. In most Avid workflows, editors take the original full resolution media from the camera, and then download it to



low-resolution files for editing. This stage in the editing process is necessary because many media storage solutions don't have the storage capacity and throughput power to process and manipulate huge high-resolution data in real-time. Instead, editors work on low-res, off-line proxy and this edited low-res file is then re-linked to the original high-resolution source media.

For example, as Dial notes, it's common in editing reality TV shows to take dialogue spoken in one shot and place it over a different shot as a kind of voice-over montage. It's only when the editors see the footage later in high-res that they can see for certain if the character is mouthing something else—or if a shot is out of focus. If so, editors need to swap in new footage, often at the last minute—resulting in wasted time and inefficiencies.

Framework Post needed a single scalable storage system with a virtually unlimited global namespace to overcome the limitations imposed by a fragmented storage system. Without such a system, the only way to add more users was to add more storage systems—thus continuing the proliferation of storage islands. And without more powerful storage performance and higher throughput, editors had no alternative but to continue inefficient editing processes that involve manipulation of low-res proxy files.

THE PANASAS SOLUTION

After carefully evaluating several Avid-compatible storage solutions, Dial chose the Panasas ActiveStor 14 hybrid scale-out NAS solution.

“With ActiveStor, I can have a virtually unlimited number of users editing off a single global namespace, all with a single login. You cannot imagine how much this has helped manageability,” said Dial. “We no longer have the need to deploy and manage additional storage islands to address performance and user count limitations.”

And with a single namespace, “ActiveStor allowed us to get entirely on a single network,” said Dial. “Panasas positions itself as storage but it is so much more. It is essentially a server platform with integrated storage.”

Security and data privacy were also improved after consolidating servers and ActiveStor onto the single network. “We are now able to limit a person editing one project from seeing unauthorized projects,” according to Dial.

Furthermore, undesirable offline post-production processes were completely eliminated as a result of deploying ActiveStor.

“The elimination of the down-res process and subsequent relinking to the high-def media source was an unexpected productivity benefit that has revolutionized our post-production process,” said Dial. “Panasas is such a scalable solution, where capacity and bandwidth scale in parallel, that we are able to eliminate our offline process entirely.”

ActiveStor is so fast and so scalable, said Dial, that “we have been able to take the source media we shoot, bring it into ActiveStor in its native codex, and directly edit the source media. **It's as if ActiveStor has doubled our efficiency. But being conservative, I'd say we are 33 percent more efficient with ActiveStor.**”

With ActiveStor, editors can work on multiple platforms and multiple software clients—including Avid, Premier, FinalCut Pro, Smoke, and others—on the same storage platform at the same speeds across the entire facility.

“Panasas has allowed the computerized aspect of our business to accelerate at the same rate as the creative aspect in our industry,” Dial said. “We are now able to edit in high-resolution because ActiveStor delivers scalability and bandwidth that feels unlimited. After our team edited in hi-res, I heard comments that the improvement was unbelievable and a night-and-day difference from previous low-res editing. The reality for us is that high-res editing means better television and has eliminated problems found late in post-production that were time-consuming and awkward to correct.”

“It's comforting to feel like I've partnered with a technology that will grow with me. Asylum doesn't plan on stopping growing, and I don't believe Panasas does either.”

Dial reports that the move to high-res editing also increased the speed of communications in production. The previous low-res editing process did not reveal media problems until the media was prepped for edit, perhaps months later. With Panasas, said Dial, “if a camera was too red or too blue, or if there was a lens problem, it will be noticed immediately because everyone is working on the high-res source media all the time.”

SUMMARY

Because of Panasas, Asylum has been able to take video post-production to an entirely new level of efficiency and quality. “ActiveStor has freed up our ability to work efficiently,” said Dial. “We're able to have media go from one platform to another without having to change the storage solution it's running on.”

With Panasas ActiveStor, Asylum has unified all editing bays under one easily managed network with a single, global namespace. The throughput performance and storage capacity of ActiveStor allowed Asylum to eliminate multiple islands of storage while making storage management practically effortless. Data privacy between editing projects was also enforceable after Panasas-driven network consolidation.

Mostly importantly, ActiveStor enabled the direct editing of high-definition source media, eliminating multiple time-wasting production processes while improving the overall quality of final productions. In the end, Asylum estimates production time savings of one third, along with significant gains in production quality.

Although difficult to quantify, Dial said they are making better and higher quality television programs by working directly with the media as it was originally shot.

“Because of Panasas, we are doing things that no one else in our industry is doing—we bring in video in high-res, we edit in high-res, we output in high-res,” said Dial.