



StorNext and Scalar Series

Quantum StorNext Plays Starring Role for Award-Winning Visual Effects Leader

Even Oscar winners need tools to cope with the rapid transition from film to digital. In the case of leading post-production studio Framestore, that meant choosing StorNext File System and Storage Manager to improve its digital workflow and automate data management, increasing efficiency by as much as 60 percent.

DATA FILE GROWTH DEMANDS BETTER MANAGEMENT

Showing up at the awards shows is the easy part for Framestore, a leading visual effects and computer animation studio based in the UK and North America. Whether it is a full-length feature film destined for movie theaters or a 30-second commercial headed for television or the Internet, the hard work is behind the scenes, where the volume of digital files has become an increasing challenge for post-production studios like Framestore.

Andy Howard, head of Framestore's engineering team that focuses on commercials, has seen a sea change in industry practices over the past two years and knows the impact it has had on the company's business model.

"Everyone had been shooting 35mm film, and suddenly there was a huge dropoff," Howard says. "From the smallest commercials to the biggest feature films, people switched to electronic camera formats, so we ended up with tens of thousands of files per project, which required a new shared storage production workflow."

In the past, Framestore used Thomson's Bones to scan in film, convert it to data file format for editing, coloring, transcoding, and other production work, and then return the processed files back to film for cinema and television release. Now the former film footage arrives as digital video and audio files, and there is more content than ever before because camera crews are no longer constrained by the high cost of chemically processed film.

STORNEXT TAKES ON THE FILE SHARING AND TIERING CHALLENGE

Framestore uses a variety of editing software, including Apple Final Cut, Avid Media Composer, and Autodesk Flame and Smoke, including Autodesk's more recent Mac-based Smoke. This diversity meant that Framestore needed a solution that could cope with changing conditions and changing applications. Support for high-performance shared access to files running on a variety of platforms (Linux, Mac, and Windows OS) was a key requirement. Howard looked at other solutions including Lustre and IBM's GPFS, but StorNext® stood out as the only product capable of adapting to all platforms and programs. In addition, Howard was impressed with strong technical support from Quantum engineers who understand the industry and know what StorNext can do for a company like Framestore.

The StorNext File System provided immediate benefits, such as shared access to files and rapid processing for a smooth workflow. In addition, because collaborative work could now occur without moving huge files from one workstation to another, there was also less strain on the network and less time used in getting data where it needed to be. However, despite the improvements in the digital workflow, Framestore was still struggling with how to manage the growth of digital data files.

"When we had a 20-terabyte high-speed shared SAN, we could manage the files with few problems," Howard explains. "But when we had to expand the SAN to 130 terabytes, the data became unwieldy and expensive to store, so we really had to manage it differently."

FRAMESTORE

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Andy Howard
Head of Engineering,
Commercials

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

- Quantum StorNext File System
- Quantum StorNext Storage Manager
- Quantum Scalar® i500 tape library

KEY BENEFITS

- Manages thousands of data files in collaborative work environment
- Seamlessly handles heterogeneous platform and application environment
- Automates data protection across tiers
- Enables replication for work sharing and disaster recovery
- Frees up to 60 percent of time previously spent on data backup management

Howard knew that data tiering could offer an effective solution to this challenge. Rather than having a person decide if it was time to move a file to cost-effective storage, Framestore needed something that would automate moving the data through multiple tiers of storage. That made the decision to add StorNext Storage Manager an easy one, as it leverages robust, policy-based data mover technology that works seamlessly with the StorNext File System.

BENEFITS NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE

Adding StorNext Storage Manager and a Quantum Scalar i500 tape library to the StorNext digital workflow immediately addressed Framestore's need to manage the company's growing data. Storage Manager allows Howard to set up policies that automate the movement of data from Tier 1 to Tier 2 to Tier 3 storage, all without losing track of the tens of thousands of individual files that might be needed for a particular work project.

Storage Manager is also saving Framestore time when it comes to daily data protection, freeing up resources that can be used to accomplish a greater amount of work. By automating the protection function with little human intervention, Storage Manager is yielding a 30-60 percent savings in data management time, according to Howard.

"The way we look at it, we have to speed things up if we want to do more projects," Howard says. "We could throw more people at our work, but that's expensive. Or we could automate a lot of tasks. That's what Storage Manager allows us to do."

Howard sees more benefits coming from Storage Manager in the future. Framestore plans to make use of Storage Manager's robust replication capabilities. Currently, Framestore has a New York operation that focuses on doing business with American ad agencies and film producers. By building a StorNext SAN in the New York office in the coming months, Framestore will be able to replicate files between the two operations automatically.

Howard estimates that 70 percent of the benefit from replication will come from sharing workload seamlessly between the two sites. The remaining 30 percent is expected to result from strengthening the company's disaster recovery capability.

Additionally, by having the same storage management software in both locations, people will find familiar equipment and processes as they move between offices.

"We do quite a bit of collaborative work between the offices," Howard says. "The goal of the company in the next two years is to have all of the sites be as similar as possible so staff can go anywhere and be in a familiar environment."

In an industry that has changed quite rapidly in the last few years, Howard knows more change is likely to be on the way.

"Two or three years ago, people tended to work in isolation on projects, but now it is all about collaboration and huge numbers of files being shared by everyone," he says. "Having the StorNext File System really speeds up the workflow greatly, and with Storage Manager we are able to protect all of that data. It's very clever software that really makes a difference."

ABOUT FRAMESTORE

Framestore (website: www.framestore.com) is a content marketing partner with an Oscar-winning heritage. It has been working in digital film and video for more than 20 years. The company uses innovative talent and technology to create marketing content for every platform and partners with clients ranging from brands through to Hollywood studios, ad agencies, production companies, and video game developers. Traditionally recognized for its globally celebrated visual effects, Framestore has more recently made its name as an innovator in the digital and content marketing space by focusing on the immersive engagement potential of interactive visual effects.

Since 2004, Framestore's New York studio has deepened the company's connection with customers in the United States, building on the relationship in 2012 when it opened an LA office. Framestore's movie portfolio includes work on such films as Avatar, Children of Men, Clash of the Titans, The Dark Knight, The Golden Compass, Prince of Persia: the Sands of Time, Sherlock Holmes I and II, Skyfall, Where The Wild Things Are, and the entire Harry Potter series.

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