



BlueArc Storage Boosts Creativity and Growth For Sweden's Leading Visual Effects Studio

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Frederick Limsater
CTO, Fido

Summary

In just 10 years since it was founded, Fido has already become one of the largest providers of visual effects and animation in Scandinavia and has developed an outstanding international reputation and clientele. Its work on character and creature animation has set new standards in the industry, and the company would like to expand even further: To the point where it does a full Hollywood blockbuster movie. In order to get into position to take on this more challenging work, Fido first had to upgrade its storage infrastructure: It needed its technology solutions to be at the same level as the work of its artists and animators. Since moving to a BlueArc network storage solution, Fido has been seen significant improvement in the performance, scalability and stability of its technology infrastructure and has given its artists the foundation and tools to continue creating exciting and innovative work in commercials and feature films.

The Company

Fido is a visual effects and animation studio with a strong focus on character and creature animation as well as complex simulations of real-world elements. It is based in Stockholm and is one of the largest providers of visual effects in Scandinavia. It is also a major supplier to the international market with aspirations to expand into doing full feature films from start to finish. Fido’s objective is to combine proprietary technology and world-class creative talent to create the best possible solutions for clients all around the world. Its innovative work can be seen in scores of commercials and in such feature films as Attack the Block, Kick-Ass and Flying Monster 3D.

The Challenge

Fido was founded in 2001 and from the beginning built an outstanding reputation for doing excellent work, particularly in areas focused on creature and character development, such as hair, fur rendering and character animation. As the company’s reputation grew, so did its aspirations as well as its international clientele. Fido wanted to take on more challenging work, but found that its technology wasn’t up to the task. One of the first steps was to hire a CTO with world-class skills and international experience and that was Fredrik Limsater, who joined the company in 2008.

“When I joined they had 4-5 terabytes of storage and it was really slow,” Limsater recalls. “One of the first projects I took on was to change that. What we did first was to build our own system, buying used gear from eBay. It worked, but after time we realized it was impossible to support and it was just too unreliable.” One of the problems with the in-house system was performance: Visual effects, animation and rendering all require high levels of IOPS, with many machines accessing lots of data, often at the same time. “Our system just couldn’t keep pace to serve the data,” Limsater says.





The Solution

When Fido decided to go away from its homegrown solution, it tested products from three leading vendors. “We found BlueArc to be the best company,” Limsater says. “Many of our partners in London were already using it and they had only good things to say about it and that was a large part of what we based our decision on.” Fido now has a Mercury 100 network storage solution from BlueArc. The company started with 30 TB of usable space and within eight months added an additional 20 TB.

The demand for additional storage capacity will continue as the workload grows and as Fido expands into doing additional high-performance and high-capacity projects, such as 3D and post production. “The BlueArc is easy to scale up and that’s one of the reasons we went with it. We can easily add more nodes and cluster if we want to,” Limsater says. “We know we are going to outgrow what we have – we’ll be about 100 TB in the near future – and we know we can build on what we have. With BlueArc, we know it will work even in the future. We also have a need for speed. We have a large render farm, at least by Swedish standards, of about 500 cores and we know we can add 500 more cores and not have the server lock up.”

Fido is currently using two tiers of storage, with about 30 TB of type-one storage and 20 TB of near-line storage. The BlueArc solution also supports Fido’s R+D department, which does software development, asset management and pipeline development and has created a number of in-house systems to support the company’s efforts, including the FTrack Workflow and Asset Management System, which is integrated into all of Fido’s work, and other solutions such as SpeedFur, Speed SPH and Fido Ocean Toolkit.

The Results

The performance improvement at Fido has been both significant and noticeable. “It’s much quicker to open a Maya file when we are 40 people in the house. When we play back tapes from the server the overall speed of access is so much better,” Limsater says. “I know this is very important because I had to deal with so many complaints so many times a day with the earlier system and now we don’t hear any complaints, which means it just works. If it takes even a second longer to open a file, that’s irritating to the artists. Since we got the BlueArc, they’re very happy.”

In addition to the speed, performance, scalability and stability of the BlueArc solutions, Limsater is also impressed with the BlueArc support team. “I would like to mention their support, which is outstanding,” he says. “We have a technical guy and we can call him whenever. When he’s in Stockholm he always comes to check on us. We’ve had a couple of times where we’ve had bad luck with batteries and it was fixed quickly. When we were doing our tape library we also had to talk to BlueArc for technical support and now it works great. One of the reasons we went with BlueArc was their reputation for support was excellent.”

The Conclusion

Fido was recently acquired and the new owners have a plan: They want to seize the opportunity to be the Number One studio in Stockholm – which is probably already the case – and use that platform to expand Fido’s presence worldwide. “We want to take on bigger and bigger projects,” Limsater says. “We want to take on a whole movie. We’ve done great work on projects such as Kick-Ass and Attack the Block, but we haven’t done the whole show. We would like to do a Hollywood blockbuster.” Having the BlueArc solution in place is critical to that strategy: It not only gives Fido the ability to take on new challenges, it gives its customers and partners the security in knowing that Fido has the technology infrastructure to do whatever work they require. “The technology infrastructure is important,” Limsater says. “A lot of clients ask us: ‘Can you cope with data? Is it secure? Is it backed up?’ With BlueArc we don’t have to worry about it.”

More Information

Fido: <http://www.fido.se>



BlueArc Corporation
Corporate Headquarters
50 Rio Robles
San Jose, CA 95134
t 408 576 6600
f 408 576 6601
www.bluearc.com

BlueArc UK Ltd.
European Headquarters
Queensgate House
Cookham Road
Bracknell RG12 1RB, United Kingdom
t +44 (0) 1344 408 200
f +44 (0) 1344 408 202