



At Leading Film Production Company, BlueArc Storage Supports a “Passion” For Excellence and Innovation

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Jason Nicholas
Studio Director

Summary

Passion Pictures is an award-winning independent film production company that does groundbreaking work across a wide range of disciplines, starting from its roots as an animation production house and now doing innovative video, animation, special effects and story-telling in films, commercials, television, music videos, computer games and documentaries. As the company continued to grow both in size and in the scope of its work, it found that its existing storage solution was not up to the task. Passion Pictures not only needed more capacity, it also needed much higher levels of performance, scalability and stability. BlueArc quickly became the go-to supplier. Since choosing a network storage solution from BlueArc, Passion Pictures now has the confidence that its storage infrastructure can take on any challenge, which means its talented team of artists, directors and producers can focus on the work they do best and the company can continue to innovate and create bold, exciting and award-winning work.

The Company

Passion Pictures is one of Europe’s leading independent film production companies. From its early days in animation production, the company has now expanded to include film, television, commercials and documentary and has studios at its London headquarters as well as in Paris, New York and Melbourne. The company’s work has won many major awards, including Academy Awards in 2000 and 2011. Passion Pictures works with some of the most talented and experienced directors, animators, producers, visual effects supervisors and art directors in the world. The company is well known for its multi-award winning commercials, music videos and cinematics, including the stunning animation for the Harmonix game *The Beatles: Rock Band*, which was described by *Rolling Stone* as “insanely cool.” *The Lost Thing*, a short film directed by Passion Pictures founder Andrew Ruhemann and Australian author/illustrator Shaun Tan was winner of the 2011 Academy Award for Short Film Animation.

The Challenge

The biggest challenge for Passion Pictures was to keep up with astounding growth. With an expanding reputation for doing excellent work, the company was getting more commercials, more requests for live action, an increase in documentary work and additional demands. Not only was there a lot more work coming in, much of the work required high-performance and high-capacity storage. The company’s existing storage infrastructure was under siege. “We were having quite a rough experience with our storage,” recalls Jason Nicholas, Studio Director. “We needed more space and we were having performance issues as well. We had a lot of users and they would often be getting display write errors. This would stop us from working for a while and our team was not very happy about it. The IT manager and I were constantly being badgered.”



The Solution

With the previous storage solution clearly at the end of its lifecycle, Passion Pictures knew it needed a new solution with more capacity but also with improved performance and scalability. “We were looking around and we did look at quite a few vendors and BlueArc was not initially on the radar,” Nicholas says. “There was a perception that it was costly, but we spoke to a number of people at other companies in the field and they all recommended that we talk to BlueArc. Once we did, BlueArc quickly became one of the front-runners. We liked what BlueArc had to say about scalability and we felt we got very honest answers from all of the people at BlueArc, very straightforward, with very well justified answers.”

Prior to BlueArc, Passion Pictures had a storage solution with about 12 terabytes. Initially it purchased two Mercury M100 networked storage solutions from BlueArc with 32 TB of storage. The company subsequently added 50 more TB and expects to add more storage as well. “Demand is always increasing,” Nicholas says. “We can be 20-30 people one day and then have to scale up to 60 quite quickly if a new project comes in. Our storage solution has to take into account this ability to scale up.”

It’s not just the vagaries of the workflow that puts pressure on the storage, but the type of work as well. “We’re doing some longer form material and we’ve been doing some 3D stereoscopic work and that really increases the need for capacity and performance,” Nicholas says. “Our render farm has increased as well. The render farm currently has about 140 machines, or about 1,600 cores.” Passion Pictures has two tiers of storage, high performance and nearline, and is able to migrate data between the two so that data that is not being used for production can be on nearline storage. “That’s a bonus we didn’t have before,” Nicholas notes.

The Results

Going into the process, Passion Pictures had a lot of criteria and planned for a long period of vetting and testing the BlueArc solution. “Within a week we were able to tick off all of the criteria we had set,” Nicholas says. “The integration was seamless. While the performance increased, the biggest thing we noticed with the BlueArc was the stability. The IT team was very happy with the stability – before, we didn’t know what we had in storage and we didn’t know what was being used.”

In addition to the dramatic increase in stability, there were also the improvements in performance and scalability as well. “We’ve found that the storage has way more power than we need, so we’re getting more longevity out of our previous servers,” Nicholas says. “We’ve also found that the data throughput rate that the BlueArc can sustain is also beyond our current needs. This is fine because we know there will be plenty of headroom for growth as we keep adding disks. Right now, we’re using one of the heads for redundancy, so we have that available for future scalability. The other big thing is that our backup solution is more integrated now. We’re still archiving to tape, but the archiving now has a port on the BlueArc as a staging area.”

The Conclusion

One of the big benefits of having the BlueArc storage solution in place has been the confidence it engenders, both inside of Passion Pictures and with its customers as well. “Our customers don’t care about the technology,” Nicholas says, “but they want to be reassured that the technology is where it should be, that it’s ‘man enough’ to do the job. We also have a general confidence in our server that this will be a server that we will stay with and that we will actually get better performance as we add more disks. We’ve also had real confidence in the support team at BlueArc from the first meeting to today. They always respond right away and always follow up on things. It’s really good to know that we have that support. We are always looking to take on additional longer-form work and more feature work. Having that as an ambition, the BlueArc is important to have. We know that no matter what it will perform for us.”

More Information

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