

Cinesite Enjoys High Speeds at Low Costs



Cinesite, the award winning visual effects and animation facility, has transformed its workflow efficiency across two continents with Pixit Media's PixStor software-defined scale-out storage platform. The installation of PixStor at its sites in London and Montréal has significantly reduced the cost of hardware, support and system expansion, while increasing production render performance.



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Chris Perschky
Head Of Systems Technology-Cinesite

Affordable Performance

Cinesite, whose recent credit list includes Hollywood productions such as Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, Captain America: Civil War and Independence Day: Resurgence, had experienced several issues with its previous storage system that was based on proprietary hardware. Through the installation of PixStor's hardware agnostic architecture, Pixit Media was able to provide an affordable storage system and the investment protection that the facility needed.

Utilising Dell hardware, the London and Montreal sites each have three PixStor servers, with the London workspace also benefiting from two DR (disaster recovery) systems and a backup system server as well as a real-time 4K review and editing system utilising Mellanox networking technology.

Implementation

"Pixit Media shone through the competition as they offered top-tier performance at an affordable price," says Christian Perschky, Head of Systems Technology at Cinesite. "The complete PixStor server systems for general workflow installed in both studios supports uncompressed playback at over 4K to playback workstations and can easily scale up higher if required. Pixit Media also helped with the build, advised throughout and provided service assistance going above and beyond the levels of support we usually see."

Previously Cinesite faced significant overhead challenges due to the need to move data between storage 'islands'. PixStor's single namespace capabilities and the automated nature of the system provided clarity over which assets could be moved to nearline archive without any manual



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intervention, reducing administrative and data management operating expenses. Most notably however, the new storage, along with a new network infrastructure and new render nodes led to Cinesite CG supervisors reporting a 500% increase in render performance. gives total continuity to the customer.

“We no longer need to manually move data around various islands of storage in order to make the workflow actually flow” says Perschky. “The system provided a cost-effective performance guarantee that we’d never experienced before. In addition, we’re now able to cache data between London and Montreal, giving us the opportunity to access everything in one place, which saves even more on overheads as we no longer have to split up jobs. The ability to cache the data on our PixStor in the cloud with the Google Compute Engine provides us with affordable scaling opportunities that we didn’t have previously.”

Reduced overheads

These cost reductions enabled Cinesite to expand the system far more quickly than they expected to include an integrated low-cost DR solution. The overall total cost of ownership in upgrading to a new PixStor DR solution compared favourably to utilising their old system for DR.

“Not only did Pixit Media provide a fully clustered solution to conquer the commodity units we were stuck in previously, they also provided DR and archive solutions,” noted Perschky. “We also appreciate not being locked

into any one hardware manufacturer in the future. We can chop and change as needed to keep up with our workload without ever having to worry about forklift upgrades of significant migration overhead.”

Looking beyond the pure-storage related aspects of the solution, additional savings have been realised by leveraging Pixit Media’s overall post-production expertise. Pixit undertook extensive R&D to help determine the exact specification required for 4K playback on Cinesite’s workstations and associated applications, across both Linux and Windows operating systems. This provided an assured blueprint for scalability in the future. Cinesite’s user migration from LDAP to Active Directory was significantly streamlined by Pixit’s prior experience. Pixit also provide regular procurement assistance, utilising their extensive industry knowledge to help decipher the various hardware vendor options to ensure Cinesite received the most effective solution for their post-production needs. Combined, these activities have saved Cinesite 100’s of hours of engineering time.

“The Pixit Media team know the industry really well and understand how we work, so integrating the solution into our existing workflow came easily,” continued Perschky. “The whole experience has been outstanding.”