

Case study

DreamWorks Animation delivers amazing films with HP Networking



Animation innovator deploys networking solutions that provide continuous availability while being pushed to their limits

Industry

Entertainment

Objective

Regain control over network outages and boost LAN speeds between campuses to reliably drive 24/7 workloads

Approach

Move towards a simplified network architecture to support higher availability and enhance render farm productivity

IT matters

- Reduces LAN latency, significantly increasing transfer speeds
- Provides network redundancy for high availability and continuous access
- Consolidates visibility of all network components into a single, logical device
- Enables non-disruptive deployment by in-house IT staff

Business matters

- Provides continuous 24/7 availability for 500,000 digital rendering jobs daily
- Eliminates unplanned outages, reducing overtime and double-time work
- Decreases maintenance by centralizing network management
- Delivers reliable pipeline to support artists in meeting production deadlines and release targets



“Since moving to HP Networking, we’ve shaved off a millisecond of latency between our offices. That’s a very meaningful boost in speed for us. When you’re submitting half a million jobs every night for rendering, it really adds up. HP IRF technology has helped us reduce the complexity of our network and increase the efficiency of our pipeline.”

– Keith McKay, Networking Operations Supervisor, DreamWorks Animation



Challenging the status quo

The fearless pursuit of doing amazing things is part of the corporate culture at DreamWorks Animation. “One thing I quickly found out when I came here was that we take high-performance computing to a whole new level, and we push technology past the limits of what it can do,” said Keith McKay, networking operations supervisor at DreamWorks Animation. But when the company found their network was really beyond its limits, with outages causing serious consequences, they looked to HP for a solution that could reposition them as a leader in technology.

Customer solution at a glance

Hardware

- HP 12500 Switch Series
- HP 5800 Switch Series
- HP 5820 Switch Series
- HP 6125G/XG Ethernet Blade Switches
- HP Virtual Connect Flex-10 10Gb Ethernet Modules
- HP MSM760 Premium Mobility Controller
- HP MSM460 Access Point Series
- HP 6600 Router Series

Software

- HP Intelligent Management Center (IMC) Enterprise Software Platform
- HP Intelligent Resilient Framework (IRF) Technology

Operating Systems

- Red Hat Enterprise Linux
- HP Comware

Network Protocol

- 10 Gigabit Ethernet

High volume digital manufacturing

DreamWorks Animation produces billions of pixels and thousands of assets for each of the ten movies in its production pipeline at any given time. The studio is on a 24/7 production cycle and if data center performance suffers, it could have serious consequences for business. “You’ve got theaters around the world expecting to show your movie, you’ve got advertising campaigns and direct to consumer engagements planned,” relates Mike Cutler, senior director of digital operations.

Its previous network was pushed to the limits, making it unpredictable, and requiring a reboot to the system every few months. In the world of international blockbusters, missed deadlines are simply not an option. “Some of our more complex scenes take multiple days to render. If we have an outage 71 hours into a 72-hour render,” Cutler explains, “we don’t just lose the time the network wasn’t available, we have to start from scratch.”

Deploying an uneventful migration

After reviewing all their options, DreamWorks Animation decided on an HP Networking solution fulfilling the required stability while simplifying and speeding up the studio’s network. Due to a major failure in the studio’s current network, a decision was made to accelerate the transition to the HP solution. Equipment was installed over several months, one building floor at a time, and DreamWorks Animation IT staff successfully deployed the solution to their data center over one weekend. Production cycles were back on track with a backbone of HP 12518 Network Switches for unprecedented levels of performance and availability, and HP 5800 and 5820 Switch Series with flex-chassis capability.

Each time the HP gear was installed, the creative teams arrived not knowing that anything had changed. “The real test for such major changes is what happens on the following day when staff gets back to work,” notes Cutler. “In our case, it was what you plan and hope for: nothing. Everything worked at every layer.”

Avoiding downtime

To further simplify and speed up the network, as well as provide redundancy, DreamWorks Animation utilizes HP Intelligent Resilient Framework (IRF) technology which offers the capability to create and manage a virtual chassis across multiple active switches.

Since upgrading their network, DreamWorks Animation has noticed benefits that go beyond expectations.

“One of the biggest things we’ve noticed is that since we put in our HP network, we haven’t had a significant outage. The HP gear has been the most stable we’ve ever seen in terms of software and patches. HP has a very thoughtful approach to the network: it gives you the bells and whistles you need to scale with fantastic performance, while avoiding the complexity that other vendors have.”

– Keith McKay, networking operations supervisor, DreamWorks Animation

Enabling the creative process

Now that DreamWorks Animation does not need to reboot its network, realizing reliable, nimble data transfers over its LAN, and reclaiming engineering time for innovation, the company can spend more time doing what it does best: bringing unforgettable stories to life on the big screen.

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