

MAKING LEGENDS

The Los Angeles Film School improves processing performance by 250 percent and reduces downtime by at least 80 percent with a new Dell infrastructure



Created in 1999, The Los Angeles Film School has quickly become a leading academic center for aspiring filmmakers. To accelerate the learning process in its one-year program, the school puts filmmaking equipment into the hands of students right away. Students also benefit from working with experienced instructors and frequent guest lectures by well-known industry movers and shakers.

SOLUTIONS

- BACKUP/RECOVERY/ARCHIVING
- CONSOLIDATION

CUSTOMER PROFILE

COUNTRY: United States

INDUSTRY: Education

FOUNDED: 1999

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 150

WEB ADDRESS: www.lafilm.com

CHALLENGE

The school needed to refresh the IT infrastructure used for school administrators in order to accommodate rapid student and staff growth, enhance the performance and availability of the school's administrative applications, and simplify IT management

SOLUTION

Dell™ Infrastructure Consulting Services and Dell Deployment Services help the school's IT group design and implement an integrated IT solution, including Dell PowerEdge™ servers and a Dell PowerVault™ storage system, all within a tight deployment time frame

BENEFIT

- New IT infrastructure improves availability of administrative applications
- Increases performance by 250 percent
- Reduces downtime by at least 80 percent
- Decreases help desk calls by approximately 90 percent, allowing IT staff to concentrate on new initiatives



Technology has been vital to the school's success. Labs and classrooms are equipped with the latest production equipment so students have constant access to cutting-edge technology. "The film industry is highly dependent on computer technology today, and we are committed to exposing students to that technology from the first week of the program," says Jason Enzer, IT manager of The Los Angeles Film School. "From the camera gear to the editing tools, more than 90 percent of the curriculum here revolves around some sort of computer equipment."

The school's administration also relies on IT to help manage every aspect of its relationship with students. "We use software called CampusVue by Campus Management to help manage everything from admissions and payment to student services and career development," says Enzer. "We have a few hundred employees using that application at any given time. It is absolutely essential to the school's operations."

" WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY DOWNTIME IN THE NINE MONTHS WE'VE BEEN USING THE NEW DELL POWEREDGE SERVERS. NOW THE SCHOOL'S ADMINISTRATORS CAN DO THEIR WORK WITHOUT HAVING TO THINK ABOUT IT."

Jason Enzer, IT Manager, The Los Angeles Film School

STUDENT GROWTH OF 25 PERCENT DRIVES AN IT UPGRADE

The school's increasing popularity among aspiring filmmakers has led to rapid growth in enrollment and school administration. That growth has pushed the servers and storage used for the CampusVue system to the limit. "We have been very successful in recruiting new students," says Enzer. "Our enrollment has grown 25 percent in just the past year. To support those students, we're hiring more and more instructors and administrators. Growth is great for the school, but it was clearly time to refresh our IT infrastructure to accommodate it. We needed more processing power to handle more CampusVue users plus a larger, more scalable storage system."

Given the school's reliance on CampusVue for so many administrative functions, the IT group needed the new infrastructure to provide the redundancy to ensure high application availability. "If the CampusVue application goes down, the school's staff can't work—it's just that simple," says Enzer. "We stand to lose new students if our recruiters can't do their jobs, and we are unable to serve current students if administrators can't access the application. Our infrastructure must allow administrators to continue to work even if there are small hardware failures or if our systems require maintenance. We need highly reliable hardware configured for redundancy and backed with superior service."

The IT group also wanted to simplify the management of the overall infrastructure so it could concentrate on deploying new services for staff and students. "There are always new projects waiting for us that can improve the quality of the school," says Enzer. "We want to make sure we don't spend most of our time managing processes or fixing things."

Though deploying a new fleet of servers and a new storage system might seem like a tremendous undertaking, Enzer and his staff were under pressure to complete the project quickly. "The students and new hires just keep coming," says Enzer. "Our goal was to deploy the new infrastructure in four months."

DELL INFRASTRUCTURE CONSULTING SERVICES HELPS DESIGN A COMPLETE IT SOLUTION

The school's IT group had used Dell hardware for several years and saw clear advantages in selecting Dell products for its new infrastructure. "We have always been very pleased with the reliability of Dell hardware," says Enzer, "and we know we can count on Dell for superior service and support. It was a simple decision to go with Dell."

The school's IT group worked with Dell Infrastructure Consulting Services (Dell ICS) to design a complete, simplified IT solution that could help deliver the increased performance and storage capacity required for the growing school while also helping to enhance availability of the school's CampusVue application. "We

HOW IT WORKS

HARDWARE

- Dell™ PowerEdge™ 2950 servers and PowerEdge 1950 servers with dual-core Intel® Xeon® processors
- Dell PowerEdge 1950 servers with quad-core Intel Xeon processors
- Integrated Dell PowerVault™ NX1950 and PowerVault MD3000 storage array

SOFTWARE

- Campus Management CampusVue
- Microsoft® Windows® Unified Data Storage Server

SERVICES

- Dell Deployment Services
- Dell Infrastructure Consulting Services

“THE DELL POWEREDGE SERVERS WITH MULTI-CORE INTEL XEON PROCESSORS PROVIDE A DRAMATIC AND NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT IN APPLICATION PERFORMANCE... THESE ARE IMPROVEMENTS THAT OUR USERS EXPERIENCE EVERY DAY, ALL DAY LONG.”

Jason Enzer, IT Manager, The Los Angeles Film School

talked to a Dell engineer who asked us about our organizational requirements and helped us put together the right solution,” says Enzer. “The result is a highly scalable solution that can help us address our current needs and lay the foundation for future growth.”

DELL POWEREDGE SERVERS DELIVER A 250 PERCENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Enzer’s team selected Dell PowerEdge 1950 and PowerEdge 2950 servers in part for the impressive performance of their multi-core Intel® Xeon® processors. “The Dell PowerEdge servers with multi-core Intel Xeon processors provide a dramatic and noticeable improvement in application performance,” says Enzer. “The school’s staff members can launch databases, execute queries, and run reports much faster than before. The average query time has dropped from more than 5 seconds to just over 2 seconds. Overall, that’s a 250 percent improvement in performance compared with the previous single-core servers. This is not just a megahertz update: it’s a complete overhaul. These are improvements that our users experience every day, all day long.”

By using multi-core processors, the Dell servers also help to keep ongoing costs under control as the IT group continues to expand its services. “In addition to delivering more horsepower, the new processors run cooler and use power more efficiently,” says Enzer. “As our organization continues to grow, the ability to reduce power, cooling, and real estate costs will be increasingly important to us. Our goal is to expand IT services to match the school’s needs without substantially increasing costs.”

The Dell servers also provide the reliability that the IT group requires to keep the CampusVue application available. “The redundant power supplies and fans are extremely important for

keeping our systems up and running,” says Enzer. “We’ve examined products from other vendors, but these Dell systems are just built better. With the Dell servers, small hardware problems do not keep the school’s staff from their work.”

DELL POWERVault NX1950 HELPS REDUCE DOWNTIME BY AT LEAST 80 PERCENT

The IT group selected the Dell PowerVault NX1950 network storage system to help enhance application availability by moving application and file data off of server-attached drives to a shared resource. “We had previously used a server-attached storage model, but it was too costly to build a fully redundant infrastructure,” says Enzer. “If a server or its attached hard drive failed, it would take us anywhere from two hours to a full day to rebuild a database and restore operations. And during that time, more than 100 people might be unable to work.”

“With the PowerVault NX1950, it is simple to keep a redundant copy of a database on a separate drive,” says Enzer. “If one hard drive goes down, users can still access information on the backup drive while we replace the failed disk. If a server fails, we can reinstall the application on a new server, and users can continue to access the database with minimal interruptions. It used to take at least 2 hours to restore a database; now it takes only 15 minutes.”

Because the PowerVault NX1950 uses the iSCSI protocol with standard Ethernet technology, it offers a cost-effective alternative to Fibre Channel storage area networks (SANs).

“Compared with the Fibre Channel storage we evaluated, the PowerVault NX1950 is much more cost-effective,” says Enzer. “Fibre Channel adapters and switches can be expensive, and because our end clients are far from the data center, the cost of extending a Fibre Channel

network is beyond our budget. The NX1950 made much more financial sense.”

The scalable design of the PowerVault NX1950 will give The Los Angeles Film School plenty of room to grow as the school continues to accept more students and hire more workers. The NX1950 system’s PowerVault MD3000 storage array holds 15 hard drives. Two additional PowerVault MD1000 expansion units can be added for a total of 45 drives. “We currently have 2.4 TB in our PowerVault MD3000 storage array. Since we run a RAID 10, we have about 1 TB available. But we still have six hard drive slots free, so we can easily add capacity when we need to,” says Enzer. “Because we can use SAS drives rather than Fibre Channel drives, it will be less expensive to expand our capacity than with a Fibre Channel SAN.”

The NX1950 also helps the IT group to simplify storage management by using the Microsoft® Windows® Unified Data Storage Server Operating System. “The standard Windows operating environment makes the PowerVault NX1950 much simpler to manage,” says Enzer. “Partitioning hard drives and accomplishing all of our other storage tasks is easier because we can work in an environment that is familiar to us.”

DELL DEPLOYMENT SERVICES HELPS CUT DEPLOYMENT TIME BY 75 PERCENT

Dell Deployment Services were instrumental in helping the IT group deploy the new infrastructure within its tight time frame. “We didn’t have time for a long trial and error process,” says Enzer. “We just wanted to get the infrastructure up and running as quickly as possible, and that’s what the Dell team helped us do.”

Using Dell Remote Setup Assistance—an offering of Dell Deployment Services—the PowerVault NX1950 setup went particularly fast.

"We used the WebEx online conferencing system to do a remote desktop session with a Dell engineer from the Dell Enterprise Expert Center," says Enzer. "He asked us how we wanted to use the system and gave us some configuration alternatives. He also showed us how to make changes easily later. He then spent a few hours with us going through all the management functions. Without that help from Dell, it might have taken twice as long to set up the system. We had the NX1950 ready to go in two days."

The entire Dell infrastructure was up and running far ahead of schedule. "We wanted to have our new infrastructure ready in four months. With help from Dell, it took only 30 days," says Enzer. "That faster deployment meant that our workers could begin to experience the productivity gains right away."

THE NEW INFRASTRUCTURE DRASTICALLY DECREASES HELP DESK REQUESTS

In the nine months since deploying the new infrastructure, the IT group has logged very few performance-related help desk requests for the CampusVue application. "Our group manages the CampusVue application for a music recording program that operates independently from The Los Angeles Film School. That infrastructure has not yet been refreshed. For the other program, we have logged 87 support calls in the last nine months," says Enzer. "By comparison, we have had just one at The Los Angeles Film School. Fewer help desk requests means that we have more time for new projects."

THE FILM SCHOOL ANTICIPATES A 120 PERCENT RETURN ON INVESTMENT

By choosing cost-effective hardware that can help reduce the time and costs of IT support, The Los Angeles Film School IT group stands to realize a significant return on its investment.

"We anticipate that the new Dell infrastructure will generate a return on investment of nearly 120 percent over five years," says Enzer. "We can reinvest the money we save on new, cutting-edge technologies and new initiatives that will help support the school's growth."

THE NEW DELL INFRASTRUCTURE ENABLES ADMINISTRATORS TO STAY FOCUSED ON STUDENTS

By helping to improve application performance and simplify management, the new infrastructure that Dell ICS helped design gives the IT group time to pursue new initiatives.

"Now we're planning ways to improve processes and deliver new services instead of just fixing things that should already work," says Enzer. "For example, we plan to work with Dell again in the near future to virtualize our server environment so that we can optimize our hardware investment. With the Dell infrastructure in place, we're ready for the next big implementation."

The improved performance and availability of the CampusVue application helps the school's administrators stay focused on recruiting new students and delivering services to those already in the program. "The CampusVue application runs much more reliably on the new Dell hardware," says Enzer. "We haven't had any downtime in the nine months we've been using the new Dell PowerEdge servers. Now the school's administrators can do their work without having to think about IT. For students, that means administrators are better equipped to support their aspirations in the film industry."

For more information on this case study or to read additional case studies, go to www.dell.com/casestudies.



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