



Creative agency raises its game

Sparksight breaks free of platform constraints to improve productivity, cut costs, and take quality and creativity to the next level



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Kelly Shores, Chief Executive Officer, Sparksight

Customer profile



Company	Sparksight
Industry	Media and Communications
Country	United States
Website	www.sparksight.com

Business need

To stay at the forefront of innovative video production, Sparksight needed to equip its team with better professional software tools and more efficient processing power.

Solution

The agency replaced Apple-based hardware and software with a mix of Dell tower and mobile workstations equipped with NVIDIA Quadro professional graphics, and software in Adobe® Creative Cloud®, including Adobe Premiere® Pro and After Effects® CC.

Benefits

- Reduced video rendering times by more than 90 percent
- Streamlined workflows and boosted productivity
- Enabled onsite editing and more efficient use of time in the field
- Achieved significant savings on hardware costs and cost of ownership
- Reduced constraints on creativity and growth

Solutions at a glance

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With the help of technological advances, the graphics and video production industry is creating higher quality and more innovative work than ever before. While video professionals today can take advantage of sophisticated software tools, these applications require a vast and ever-increasing amount of processing power that can strain the limits of legacy hardware.

For Austin, Texas-based creative agency Sparksight, the time had come to rethink old assumptions about the best hardware to get the job done not just faster, but also better.

Moving beyond Mac

Like many other top agencies, Sparksight had relied on Apple Mac® laptop and desktop computers for years. Yet as the work became more complex and the demands on the hardware increased, production bottlenecks grew longer and more frequent. “The type of work we were doing — high-resolution photography, 4K video and very intense video compositions with hundreds or even thousands of layers — was outpacing the hardware we had,” says Kelly Shores, chief executive officer at Sparksight. “Each time our animators would make a small change to an After Effects composition, they’d have to wait 30 seconds or even two minutes for it to process. It was frustrating because it’s very hard to get a good workflow going with that much lag time.” Rendering times were even more disruptive, sometimes taking longer than overnight to complete and causing project delays if the renders failed.

Sparksight also decided to replace Apple’s Final Cut Pro video editing application with Adobe Premiere Pro — part of the Adobe Creative Cloud® along with After Effects, Photoshop® and other integrated software applications. Many video-industry professionals have been making the same decision in reaction to changes in the Final Cut Pro software that favored consumers over professionals. Moving away from the Mac-dependent software gave Sparksight the freedom to consider a wider range

of hardware options — both PC and Mac — to meet its processing demands. The video production team assessed what its loyalty to the Mac platform might be costing it and decided the time was right to replace its Mac hardware with PCs. “Changing OS from Mac to Windows was initially a concern from my team because many were unfamiliar with Windows 8,” says Shores. “At the end of the day, the functionality is very similar and the change has not slowed us down at all.”

Reduced rendering time by 9+ hours and more than 90%

Sparksight selected Dell Precision M3800 and M6800 mobile workstations, and T7610 tower workstations outfitted with NVIDIA® Quadro® professional graphics, and the team quickly put the hardware to the test. A complex After Effects

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Kelly Shores, Chief Executive Officer, Sparksight

Products & Services

Hardware

Dell Precision M3800 mobile workstation with NVIDIA® Quadro® K1100M graphic card

Dell Precision T7610 tower workstation with NVIDIA Quadro K5000 graphic card

Dell Precision M6800 mobile workstation with NVIDIA Quadro K5100M graphic card

Software

Adobe Creative Cloud®

Dell Precision Optimizer



composition that had taken more than 10 hours to render on a Mac Pro® tower took less than 45 minutes to render on one of the Dell T7610 workstations. Shores says, “the combination of Dell’s processing power and NVIDIA graphics cards is unbeatable. We believe that this is a case of one plus one equaling way more than two.”

The biggest game-changer came when Sparksight ran the exclusive Dell Precision Optimizer software which automatically configures the CPU cores, NVIDIA graphics and other settings to achieve the best performance for specific applications. “The first rendering test we tried on the Dell Precision workstation took about four hours. We thought that was pretty good, but it was not quite what we were hoping for. Then we ran the Dell Precision Optimizer software, and it dropped to under 45 minutes,” Shores says.

He notes that Dell’s close collaboration with Adobe on the optimizer tool gives Sparksight an advantage it can’t get from any other hardware platform. Shores explains, “As creative professionals who have different needs from a scientific person or a business person, we see it as a big differentiator that we can optimize the Dell Precision workstations specifically for Adobe Creative Cloud.”

Dramatic workflow and productivity gains

The combination of Creative Cloud and Dell Precision workstations has helped the agency dramatically simplify some of its workflows. “We no longer have to convert our footage to edit it,” says

Drew Wolber, Sparksight director of commercial production. “Now we just throw our footage right from the camera into Premiere Pro, which saves us hours of conversion time and terabytes of hard drive space.” Wolber adds that integration among the various Creative Cloud applications means that graphic designers, animators and other team members can work on different parts of a project simultaneously and then bring it all back together seamlessly. Shores adds, “the seamless integration of NVIDIA graphics cards in Dell Precision workstations is like adding a turbo boost to an already fast sports car!”

The software’s excellent performance on the workstations has enabled Sparksight to streamline workflows in other ways as well. “We’re noticing a lot of things that we used to do are no longer necessary,” Shores says. “For example, to preview footage in the past, we had to cut the resolution in half and wait 20 seconds for something to render. Now we can put it on full resolution and see the high-quality footage in real time.”

Workhorses in the field

Sparksight has also seen tremendous productivity gains while working in the field. During an intensive, one-day photo and video shoot on location for a large financial firm, two Sparksight crews used the Dell Precision M3800 mobile workstation to “data wrangle” more than 100 high-resolution photos and 10 HD videos, synchronize sound on the videos, and touch up 25 percent of the photos while the shoot was still ongoing. In the past, they would have had to wait until they were back in the office to begin this

work. Once the team returned from the shoot, they were able to turn around final results to the customer within two days — a project they estimate would have previously taken a week. Shores reports that the customer “was thrilled” and is now seeking to establish Sparksight as the firm’s preferred photo and video vendor for its hundreds of offices nationwide.

A launch pad for creativity and growth

The efficiencies that Sparksight has gained are enabling the team to explore creative new directions and take on more-complex projects. “We are trying to up our game all the time, and to do that we need to try new things. That was becoming less practical because of the time it took,” Shores says. “With Dell Precision workstations and NVIDIA graphics, now we can turn around projects a lot faster and take on more clients, and that means we can grow and earn more revenue.”

More processing power per dollar

Shores recognizes that the loyalty creative professionals have for the Apple and Mac brands can be difficult to overcome, but he sees the benefits his team has gained as irrefutable evidence that they made right decision in moving to PC workstations from Macs. “The processing power you get per dollar with Dell is twice what you’d get from a Mac,” he says. “For some people, their heart might be with Mac, but we have to run our business with our head. As we budget for more hardware, it will be Dell.”



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