

Sheridan College

Canada's largest art school streamlines video production workflows with EMC Isilon and MXFserver



ESSENTIALS

Industry

Higher education

Company size

18,000 full-time students

Business challenges

- New degree offerings demanding increased availability
- Distributed storage inhibited student and faculty project collaboration

Solutions

- EMC Isilon X-Series
- EMC Isilon SmartQuotas
- FilmPartners MXFserver
- Avid Media Composer, Avid iNEWS, Avid NewsCutter, Avid Media Composer, Adobe Premiere Pro, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe After Effects, Apple Final Cut Pro

OVERVIEW

Sheridan College is one of Ontario, Canada's leading postsecondary institutions, offering degrees in the arts, business, community service, health, technology, and skilled trades. Sheridan's Faculty of Animation, Arts and Design (FAAD)—Canada's largest art school and home to the country's number one-ranked animation school—educates performers, animators, filmmakers, designers, and artists.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Sheridan has evolved from an institution offering two- and three-year degrees to one also granting four-year degrees. As a result, FAAD has attracted a growing student population, while stepping up its investment in the latest content creation and editing application software.

This expansion was straining FAAD's previous storage infrastructure, which comprised dozens of back-end servers with direct-attached storage. With students' creative content and instructor materials stored across individual servers, it was difficult for students and faculty to collaborate, and time-consuming for faculty to review student projects. The storage environment also was offline during server updates or maintenance, further inhibiting collaboration.

After being presented EMC® storage solutions by EMC partner, Island Digital, the FAAD school decided to standardize on EMC Isilon® storage and FilmPartners MXFserver, a solution that manages editorial metadata and project information across leading video production applications.

Pierre Derouin, lead technologist for Sheridan's bachelor of film and television program, explains, "The Isilon and MXFserver solution enables a streamlined, centralized workflow across multiple design and production applications and lets users simultaneously access and edit projects without dealing with file locking or permissions. Because Isilon handles large image and movie files very efficiently, it was the best option for providing users with the performance and reliability they need while allowing us to grow more cost-effectively."

SOLUTIONS

Sheridan has deployed seven Isilon X-Series nodes integrated with MXFserver, providing approximately a quarter of a petabyte of shared storage for 1,500 users across multiple FAAD programs. The Isilon-MXFserver solution enables students and faculty to edit their art, animation, film, and design projects simultaneously, using applications such as Avid Media Composer, Adobe Premiere Pro, and Apple Final Cut Pro.

islanddigital.ca

CUSTOMER PROFILE

EMC²

Results

- Enabled greater collaboration among students and faculty
- Increased application performance by 30–40 percent
- Facilitated transition to four-year degree programs
- Improved content security and availability

Isilon also supports Sheridan’s journalism and broadcast news programs for applications that include Avid iNEWS and NewsCutter, as well as workflows to other media applications such as Adobe Photoshop and After Effects.

In addition, Sheridan uses Isilon infrastructure software, including SmartConnect™ resource optimization, SmartQuotas™ data management, and SnapshotIQ™ data protection.

Island Digital, a division of Island Corporation and an EMC partner, along with FilmPartners, provided complete planning, design, implementation, training, and support services for the solution.

STREAMLINED WORKFLOWS AND COLLABORATION

With Isilon, the FAAD no longer needs to duplicate files across different servers, allowing faculty to post one set of assignments for students using Apple Final Cut Pro, Avid Media Composer, Adobe Premiere, and other applications to create their projects. A key enabler is MXFserver, which manages workflows across these applications and Isilon to facilitate greater collaboration and flexibility for users.

“Students now edit their projects directly on Isilon through the MXFserver, which helps them work more efficiently and lets instructors review and comment without having to move large files around,” notes Derouin. “It’s a much more collaborative working environment and instructors can now work from home and get feedback on assignments to students more quickly.”

MXFserver allows Sheridan to share virtual copies of project files with hundreds of students, while protecting the revisions to the original copies of the files. Students access their media over standard NAS protocols directly from the Isilon X-Series nodes, while the MXFserver application manages permissions, bin locking, and version control for project metadata.

Martin de Bernardo, FAAD’s technical manager, adds, “We’re breaking new ground in how an educational institution uses technology to enhance learning. The students gain much more by sharing resources and collaborating compared to working in isolation. And they get exposure to the latest technologies like MXFserver, which helps them secure jobs and advance in their careers.”

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Martin de Bernardo
Technical Manager, FAAD, Sheridan College

ADDING DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH EASE

Isilon is enabling Sheridan to handle a surge in storage demand since introducing four-year degrees, and easily scales to support ongoing growth. Because MXFserver transparently manages project metadata across Avid Media Composer, Adobe Premiere Pro, Apple Final Cut Pro, and other media applications, Sheridan can simply add Isilon nodes as it offers new courses and degrees using any post-production tool.

“Isilon makes it easy to add new users, faculty projects, or whole new classes without worrying about running out of capacity,” says de Bernardo. “Instead of buying whole new systems every three or four years like before, Isilon expands and adapts with us. And when we add more nodes everyone benefits instead of just a single group.”

Derouin also notes that Isilon SmartQuotas helps FAAD manage storage allocation as the user population increases. "We use SmartQuotas to thin provision storage for each user and control how much capacity they use based on their actual needs. We'd never be able to survive without it."

BETTER HANDLING OF LARGE WORKLOADS

One of the important ways students and faculty benefit from Isilon is increased application performance. With large data files generated by technologies such as RED 4K digital cinema cameras, students are editing at very high frame rates. Isilon handles these workloads with ease.

"We may have 100 students at a time creating four to six megabyte files and sending hundreds of frames per second out to Isilon," explains Derouin. "Everyone is very happy with the performance." He continued, "Since moving to Isilon, overall performance has increased by 30 to 40 percent. So students and faculty get their work done faster and are more productive."

IMPROVED SECURITY AND AVAILABILITY

Isilon has also improved security and availability. For example, student projects are date stamped and filed in a secure area within Isilon, so only an authorized user can access and edit the content.

In addition, Derouin notes that downtime has virtually disappeared. "We used to reboot our old servers at least one a month. We've had no need to reboot the Isilon cluster. We can even add nodes while keeping the rest of the cluster running. In the past, that usually meant being down for a day or two."

In conclusion, de Bernardo added, "Isilon provides FAAD with a more stable and dynamic infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of our students and faculty. We're constantly discovering new ways to share data while providing users with confidence that content is safe and secure."

CONTACT US

To learn more about how EMC products, services, and solutions can help solve your business and IT challenges, [contact](#) your local representative or authorized reseller—or visit us at www.EMC.com/Isilon.

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