films@59

Image: BBC Blue Planet II

Films at 59 increases 4K episodic workload, powered by PixStor storage

Natural history trailblazer, Films at 59, has deployed PixStor NAS as its central storage platform to drive 4K workflows & deliver award-winning episodic programming.

Bristol-based pre and post-production house Films at 59 is renowned for its achievements in high-end broadcast, particularly in factual entertainment and natural history and serves a growing international client list including Netflix, the BBC and National Geographic with stunning 4K content.

Preparing to strengthen its 4K offering, a huge investment programme was undertaken to upgrade its entire infrastructure. This included a replacement for its legacy SAN, which could no longer keep up with increased workloads.

Proven guaranteed performance and stability were the critical requirements for the new storage platform. It had to provide artists with rapid no-fail access to all media, particularly for colorists working on long-form episodic content. To cope with increased volumes of work, it also had to scale easily and support a future shift to 8K finishing.

"PixStor really ticks our boxes for speed and throughput... it over-delivers what we need."

Stuart Dyer
Operations Director

pixitmedia

Following an in-depth exploration of storage systems on the market and a visit to the Pixit Media Lab in High Wycombe, PixStor emerged as the ideal solution for Films at 59's needs - now and as the business continues to grow.

"We were impressed by both the PixStor solution and the team's technical expertise and approach," comments Stuart Dyer, Films at 59's Operations Director. "We visited the Pixit Lab and they were able to clearly demonstrate guaranteed performance at every possible angle. In the Lab, they have alot of the post equipment we use so we could see how PixStor works and what it truly delivers. That gave us all the confidence we need to invest."

Simplicity & maximum efficiency

PixStor was first deployed as the Production Media Services central storage system in December 2018, integrated with best-of-breed Dell hardware and Mellanox networking to meet Films at 59's specific requirements. It brings together their Avid network, Storage DNA archive system and Object Matrix nearline storage in a single global namespace – for maximum efficiency, visibility and usability.

"With an expansion in high-end broadcast, we are seeing an increasing volume of files from production companies and PixStor helps us to manage them in a really simple way," Andy Farmer, Films at 59's Senior Engineer, explains.

Films at 59 now enjoys a robust scalable 1PB multi-tiered storage environment, with lightning-fast playback

for high-end 4K playback. There are 20 clients currently connected to the storage to support Baselight and Flame Finishing workflows. Copying and playback are much faster than real-time, and the team is able to rapidly move terabytes of media and playback in realtime.

Commenting on PixStor's performance, Dyer said "The PixStor filesystem really ticks our boxes for speed and throughput. We don't have to worry about fragmentation and it over-delivers what we need."

Rich tools deliver insight & value

The PixStor feature-set has proved to be a real game-changer for Films at 59. Using PixStor's policy engine, the team is able to automate tiering of media. This lets it efficiently manage the costs of fast bandwidth storage, allocate super-fast storage to the most demanding projects and set policies for sequential 4K, and in the future 8K.

PixStor analytics tools provide access to a heat-map that visualises file usage, giving Films at 59 real insight to help develop storage strategies and manage project costs. "It has enabled us for the first time to truly understand our media. We can really look deeply at what media we have and how we use it," said Dyer.

A successful partnership

Collaborating closely with Pixit Media, Films at 59 has gone beyond storage with a workflow-focused infrastructure that lets it take on demanding projects, intelligently manage files and evolve their business. With plans to expand the PixStor system further, Dyer concludes:

"We love companies who stay with you on the journey and, once the sale is made, remain with you – that's really important to us. Pixit's Pre-Sales and After-Sales support have been amazing. We continue to work closely with the team as we grow the system, developing workflows and exploring new features together. Supported by Pixit every step of the way, we're excited about our business' future."