A Better Result for Input

Working with Altered Images, Input Media have upgraded their post production offer with Avid Media Composer 8.6, Avid Interplay 3.6 and Avid NEXIS storage delivering significantly better performance and workflow efficiencies.

Input Media is one of Europe's leading sports production companies. Based in London and Manchester it produces top-quality programming and uses cutting-edge technology to deliver flexible and robust broadcast solutions for some of the biggest sports federations, broadcasters and football clubs in the world.

A long term customer of Avid broadcast solutions, Input Media implemented file based workflows in 2006, deploying Unity ISIS shared storage, AirSpeed and Interplay. Now the company has invested in Avid NEXIS Enterprise storage for its London and Manchester offices, supplied and installed in conjunction with technology reseller and workflow system design specialist, Altered Images.

"We have continually invested in the Avid platform to ensure that we remain current and capable to the demands of the market," says Nick Symes, Input Media's Director of Technology. "The main business driver in this case was the increased requirements from our main post production customer, who has a significant amount of new programming being produced within the next 18 months, as well as ensuring that our facility still delivers for our other key customers providing fast turnaround workflows for sport and broadcast. Altered Images is a long term supplier to Input Media; the team are flexible, very thorough, technically capable and a pleasure to work with."

Power for Post

An Avid NEXIS E4 system, composed of three 120TB NEXIS E4 Engines and one NEXIS System Director Appliance, was installed in the London facility, while Manchester gained an Avid NEXIS | E2. The latter includes an Avid NEXIS | FS Foundation, E2 Engine with one 60TB Media Pack. All engines at both locations are configured for high-availability, with each engine having two controllers for redundancy, and each controller having two 10Gb/s network connections for network fault tolerance. Both locations are also covered by Avid's fast response ExpertPlus hardware support with 24/7 coverage.

Altered Images also supplied ten HP Z840 Avid qualified workstations to upgrade the edit clients, with Input Media's technology team building systems to run Windows 10. As with the choice of storage, the upgrade both replaced ageing equipment and expanded the potential of the facility. In this case, having the new workstations in place enabled Altered Images to upgrade Input Media to the latest versions of Avid Media Composer and Interplay software. Also included were Avid Artist | DNxIO interfaces, offering powerful video I/O.

"We don't get the opportunity to upgrade often, due to our work commitments," explains Symes. "However moving to Media Composer 8.6, Interplay 3.6 and NEXIS provided significant performance and workflow efficiency benefits, which have certainly helped make post production operations more efficient."

"Input Media is a busy facility," continues Symes. "We always have to plan to install new systems swiftly to minimise the impact to our operations, and keep things 'business as usual.'"

Downtime Minimised

It was essential that the work was carried out swiftly. Altered Images deployed the new system in tandem with the existing system and workflows, with key upgrades to core components happening over a nominated weekend. Existing third-party workflows with EVS and Telestream Vantage components were also upgraded and tested.

"One of the biggest challenges of the project was to ensure our proposed network design would deliver the necessary capacity," says Symes. "[For this] we chose to engage with Avid Professional Services with the help of Altered Images' technical director, Darren Dunbar. Our in-house design proved to be more than capable, whilst also being robust and resilient. Once that was finalised, the installation of the additional storage components was very swift — the core of the work happening over a week, but after significant planning. However we chose to phase the production migration to NEXIS storage over a longer period to ensure additional testing whilst refining the configuration and allowing the product to mature. Several of our key projects are now using the system, with more to follow."

The system upgrade also enabled Input Media to add Avid MediaCentral to the environment, enabling sports producers to access and review media assets at their corporate desktops, improving workflows and facility utilisation and adding another tool to the suite of post production tools clients are offered at Input Media.

"It is still early days, as all new technology has a learning curve for users, but the long term plan is to be able to extend enterprise edit facilities to the desktop and remote users to increase our capacity and improve efficiencies across the business," says Symes. "Input Media has been an early adopter of virtualising Broadcast IT services as it affords better scalability, flexibility and resilience.

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>
> Nick Symes, Director of Technology, Input Media

Our aim is to run a full virtualised Avid Enterprise setup, which will allow us to be better prepared for future upgrades and technology advances in new releases of the software, whilst taking advantage of the COTS backup solutions ensuring that our post production plant is adequately protected and backed up."

Accordingly, Input Media's post production network was upgraded to run off two Cisco Nexus 5000 series switches and Fabric Extenders connected on a multiple 40Gb/s fibre network backbone employing enhanced VPC for resiliency. The existing Avid Interplay environment was migrated to a new virtual server infrastructure, providing greater flexibility and hardware redundancy. As well as an increase in performance, this has resulted in a reduction of physical servers, cutting running costs and environmental impact.

Full Spectrum Service

Altered Images is both a technology supplier, expert in pre-sales consultancy and post-sales service and support – skills that Input Media took full advantage of.

"Altered Images was incredibly helpful in ensuring we chose the right software versions for the upgrade," says Symes. "This wasn't without issue, but with our technology team working with Altered Images' technology team in tandem, all these issues were swiftly resolved."

For Symes one of the key benefits of the new systems is increased capacity, but it's also a future-proofed choice; "Buying into Avid NEXIS ensures that the technology choice is up to date, as well as taking advantage of the additional capacity and throughput. It enables migration to a multiple 40-Gigabit Ethernet media backbone, in readiness for more advanced file based workflows and UHD capability."

"We hope the new systems will enable us to offer more tailored services that better suit the different workflows we provide for our clients' and our own projects," concludes Symes.