

A Leading Visual Effects Company Saves Substantial Time and Money with New Storage System from Tandberg Data.

The Mill is one of the world's leading visual effects companies with offices in the main advertising centres of the world: London, New York and Los Angeles (LA). The company specialises in providing dramatic, award-winning and innovative visual production effects. The company offers clients a variety of services that span from BEAM TV—an internationally acclaimed high bandwidth, digital asset management system for content sharing of all advertising and production materials to digital film and archiving services.

Operations within the UK run from the heart of the broadcasting district in London's Soho where client facilities include data grading suites; datacines; a modern CGI department, a large render farm serving 140 licenses; and 14 Flame/Smoke visual effects suites.

Such facilities require constant attention and upgrades to maintain data integrity and ensure the latest graphics software is running at optimal capacity on reliable hardware. Paul Crisp, the Systems Software Manager at The Mill, spends time daily commissioning and writing software internally and ensuring that the correct hardware is in place to allow the creative teams to produce the most effective, dynamic footage. Paul works within a group of eight who support the UK's 300-member staff. He is based within the Soho office that houses the data centre, with an offsite Disaster Recovery site located in the Docklands. Although the New York and Los Angeles offices work autonomously, they are connected via a VPN.

The Challenge

The Soho office specialises in the provision of ambient media supply such as content for in-store advertising at Heathrow Airport Terminal 5. This office also houses 20 editing suites that ad agencies use to create commercials for delivery by BEAM TV to the TV stations. At the end of each day, the production footage is archived from local storage onto PAL/NTSC or HD video. Over recent years, more and more material has been shot in non-standard definition formats which cannot be archived to videotape, so The Mill needed an alternative archiving solution. They also needed to address the burgeoning data growth caused by the quality and quantity of film captured and a steady increase of images from external sources (e.g., clients' own digital stills).

Real time video editing dictated that each of the 14 editing suites required large amounts of expensive local disk storage, totalling more than 40TB, all of which needed to be archived to tape. The challenge was magnified by the fact that each suite's Intel-based server hardware was already full of video input/output cards, so any storage system could only use the pre-installed Fibre Channel expansion cards.



SOLUTION OVERVIEW



Tandberg Data LTO-4 FH Tape Drive
with Fibre Channel

Symantec Backup Exec
backup software

Archive solution for 20 servers

To address this problem, Cognitive Network Solutions, the trusted storage advisor to The Mill, advised them to install direct-attached storage onto very fast tape drives. By deploying the latest generation of LTO-4 tape drives attached to each editing suite, they suggested that The Mill could realize near realtime speed to facilitate the archiving process and, as an added bonus, achieve the best value for the money.

The Solution

The search was on to identify standalone LTO-4 direct-attached tape drives that could operate in a Fibre Channel infrastructure and provide the lightning fast access and retrieval speeds that The Mill required. Cognitive consulted Tandberg Data, a global supplier of backup/archive/restore solutions that caters to the SMB and SME as well as to specialist needs—such as standalone Fibre Channel drives. They confirmed that Tandberg Data's LTO-4 full height drives could address the organisation's issues whilst providing Fibre Channel connectivity. Under guidance from Cognitive, The Mill began the evaluation process with a one-month onsite trial in one of the suites.

The evaluation went well. Under test conditions in the suite, the Tandberg Data LTO-4 drive was able to dynamically adopt variable tape speed to match and continuously adapt to the speed of the server. Not only did this provide near instant access, but, long-term, it also increased performance and reduced mechanical wear on the drive while extending tape life. Rollout across 20 servers commenced over the next twelve months

Positioned for Growth

As with any industry that deals with high-definition digital images, the quality and quantity of image data that needs to be captured has increased exponentially—at least six fold over the past two years. The Mill now is positioned for data growth on this scale as each LTO-4 tape drive has a native capacity of 800GB.

Each system is backed up every night and archived daily by the operator with a final archive being stored offsite on tape. Each of the Tandberg Data LTO-4 tapes is capable of 256-bit encryption and LTO WORM (write once, read many) for regulatory compliance. Training required for each operator was minimal and wizard driven as each drive features Symantec's Backup Exec QuickStart software.

Use of the Tandberg Data LTO-4 drives within each suite has produced significant time savings over capturing standard definition video—2 or 3 times faster, and the real time access has also improved significantly; cutting down costs for clients within the editing suites. Each drive is essential to the running of the suite; failure of a drive negates the use of the suite. The Tandberg Data LTO-4 drives boast one of the best reliability and data integrity records in the industry with mean time between failures of 250,000 hours—and that's if the suites are running at 100% capacity 24x7. This is backed up by Tandberg Data's inclusive 3-year factory warranty, plus 3-year advanced replacement service on LTO drives.

Speed, Reliability, and Affordability

Speed and reliability to one side, Paul recognises there is also a significant cost savings to be utilised from installing the Tandberg Data drives. He notes, "One of the compelling benefits of the total system has to be that of cost. Each system carries a price tag of around £2000 (\$3,000). Compare that with the initial disk-based quotes which came above £200,000 (\$300,000) for similar functionality."

The installations in the UK have been so successful that the LA office now plans to adopt the same infrastructure. And with LTO technology as the defined industry standard in tape, the team knows that their investment is protected globally, whatever growth they face.

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Tape backup and archiving carries a stigma of being old technology. For us, working in the latest state-of-the-art technology industry with some of the most intensive data growth rates anywhere, it couldn't be further from the truth. Tandberg Data's tape storage has provided us with the most cost-effective, fast access method of archiving our production work to date.”

Paul Crisp, Systems Software Manager, The Mill

www.the-mill.com
www.tandbergdata.com

The Mill logo consisting of a stylized bar chart icon followed by the text "the mill".

About Tandberg Data

Tandberg Data is a leading global supplier of data protection solutions. Tandberg Data offers a wide selection of secondary storage solutions, ranging from disk-based solutions, such as the RDX® QuikStor™ and the Tandberg Data DPS Series, to automated tape solutions like the StorageLoader and StorageLibrary Series. Tandberg Data also offers tape drives, based on the DAT, LTO™, SLR™ and VXA® tape technology platforms, and media. Tandberg Data solutions are supported by robust, easy-to-use software. All solutions are supported through a worldwide service and support network, recognised globally for its outstanding levels of service. Tandberg Data solutions are designed to meet the growing storage requirements of small and medium-sized organisations with scalability, reliability, and backward compatibility features that ensure cost-effective operation and long-term investment protection.

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