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NLE Post Production Case Study

Warren Miller Entertainment Leverages Dot Hill Storage to Whip Up a “Wintervention”

Warren Miller Entertainment has been wowing audiences for more than 60 years, allowing viewers to vicariously experience the thrills of sheer, snowy slopes from anywhere and everywhere around the globe. Every year this icon of action sports entertainment literally takes film goers to new heights, where they can witness unbelievable feats accomplished by the world’s most daring winter sports athletes.

This year is no exception as Warren Miller Entertainment rolls out its 61st annual film, *Wintervention*. Narrated by freestyle mogul skiing gold medalist Jonny Mosely, *Wintervention* features skiers who sail from Argentina to Antarctica searching for some of the last untouched descents on Earth and the snowboarders and skiers who venture deep into the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia. Other thrill-seekers tour far into the northern reaches of the Arctic Circle – where the peaks they climb take them to the top of the planet.

Just as it’s important for the camera crew and extreme athletes to have all the right equipment to conquer Mother Nature’s most majestic terrain, it’s equally critical to have the right gear in the post-production room to create the next Warren Miller masterpiece. That’s where Dot Hill’s 3730 storage solution comes in.

In the era of high definition (HD) video, the folks at Warren Miller Entertainment had simply outgrown their previous storage system. Maxing out at 6 terabytes, the company’s 2Gb/second Fibre Channel RAID system with IDE drives had reached the end of the road. Installed by partner GW Hannaway and Associates, Dot Hill’s next generation storage platform addresses Warren Miller’s needs today and well into the future. With 24 terabytes of fast SAS-drive capacity in its RAID chassis running on a lightning-quick 8Gb/second Fibre Channel storage network, the Dot Hill 3730 has things humming in the Warren Miller post-production room.

John Barcklay, post production supervisor, Warren Miller Entertainment, tells a familiar tale about video data requirements outgrowing storage investments. “In 2004, six terabytes seemed like plenty of storage space. Now it’s not nearly



Overview

Entertainment and media company managing to tight deadlines.

Several editing suites working on HD projects, requiring video access and streaming simultaneously

Requirements:

- Very high performance storage
- Reliability
- Better workflow management

Warren Miller Case Study

enough. Our old system had trouble keeping up with our new work flow,” says Barcklay. “Luckily GW Hannaway introduced us to Dot Hill and the 3730 storage platform.”

With four edit suites simultaneously accessing uncompressed, 1080-resolution video on the company’s storage network, capacity is important, but bandwidth is equally critical. “On our old system we were getting a lot of dropped frames,” says Barcklay. “We could be laying back HDCam tape for an hour and a half and have to start over again because of dropped frames. That would cost us a half day of work trying to troubleshoot the problem, which could usually be traced back to our outdated storage system.”

“We just can’t have something like that happen when we’re on a tight deadline,” emphasizes Barcklay. In addition to the deadlines they will face getting Wintervention out for the big October film tour debut, the post-production crew at Warren Miller Entertainment also works on numerous projects through out the year, including TV programs and series, short and long form programs for broadcast and broadband. It’s an area of business the company sees great upside for and one of the main reasons for the upgrade.

Using the same storage network at the same time, the company’s four edit suites need access to the dramatic HD video, sound effects and music that place Warren Miller films in a field of their own when it comes to unforgettable and awe-inspiring entertainment. Their previous system just couldn’t take the strain of multiple editors pulling from the same video footage, resulting in “Warning – dropping frame” messages.

“The timing of the Dot Hill 3730 and our 8Gb storage network was truly key,” says Barcklay. “We needed the right throughput to roll out frames. Since we implemented the new Dot Hill system, we haven’t had a single problem. We love it. It has been rock solid for us.”

Not only has the new Dot Hill 3730 storage platform increased productivity by eliminating down time, the difference in performance and efficiency is like night and day. “With our new Dot Hill system, the render times are a lot faster since the write speeds to the new RAID are more than double that of our old system,” says Barcklay. “This is key for speeding up the editing process, as faster renders mean more time editing and less time rendering.”

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post production supervisor,
Warren Miller Entertainment

The new storage network, consisting of a QLogic 5800 Series 8Gb/second Fibre Channel stackable switch with 20 ports, two Apple Xserve systems running the Xsan file system and the Dot Hill 3730 storage system, goes beyond addressing today's requirements. It is designed to take on their future needs as well. The QLogic switch is stackable, which allows for easy scalability, and the 24 terabyte Dot Hill 3730, with its compact, 2U chassis, can be easily and affordably expanded via Dot Hill JBODs to accommodate a total of 96 disk drives. Barcklay is already planning an expansion to 48 terabytes.

"My goal is to have our entire library, including every feature film, online for faster access to all our footage," says Barcklay. "We couldn't really do it in the past, not without telling everybody to take a week off and stay out of the editing room. But we expect to make it a reality with this new platform."

From October through December 2010, Warren Miller's Wintervention will make its way across the United States in 85 cities and will eventually reach an expected half million viewers worldwide. As audiences gasp at the exploits of some of the biggest names in winter sports – athletes such as Lindsey Vonn, Chris Davenport, J.J. Thomas, and Hugo Harrison – and innovative, young talent such as Andy Mahre, Jossi Wells, and Zach Black, they won't be thinking about the storage network behind it all.

But that's okay; John Barcklay doesn't want to think about his storage network either. He just wants it to work so he and his crew can focus on what they do best – capturing the excitement of the world's greatest athletes – doing what they do best – in the world's most breathtaking settings.



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