

The CharacterShop

Character-based animation and digital effects company gets animated about backup with EMC NetWorker Fast Start.



The CharacterShop is an award-winning U.K. animation studio and production company providing high-quality CGI for character animation and digital effects projects. With a track record of working with the U.K.'s major producers, including BBC, ITV, Discovery, and Disney, The CharacterShop has a strong reputation for originality and reliability.

The company operates a highly specified creative studio where 3D workstations are used to run the resource-intensive applications needed for the animation process. Once animation is complete, the process of rendering brings the character to life by adding detail and depth to each image. The CharacterShop uses a large render farm hosted on blade servers to complete this stage of production before the editing and compositing suites deliver the final project for broadcast.

Animation and digital effects files are central to the production process and the success of this business. Completed projects of varying file size are stored indefinitely for re-use on long-term contracts and repeat customer projects.

Up and running in a few clicks with EMC NetWorker Fast Start

The company chose EMC® NetWorker® Fast Start to meet two very specific challenges: the prospect of 200-percent data growth and a requirement for flexible project capacity as the business grows.

Mark Vale, Production Director at The CharacterShop explains, "The impact of high-definition broadcasting technology presents one of the biggest challenges to our business over the next few years. Along with a greater level of detail in each frame, HD means we'll end up storing more than three times the data for every second of film produced."

This is likely to be a common challenge for the media industry as a whole. Today, animation at standard-definition broadcast produces approximately 35 MB of stored data every second. With the growing acceptance of high-definition broadcasting, the number of pixels required per frame increases and therefore pushes the overall file size of each second to 125 MB. With a total environment of 3.5 TB today, The CharacterShop is forecasting the prospect of retaining over 10 TB of data in the near term.

The CharacterShop's first experience with EMC NetWorker Fast Start was positive and utilized the wizard-based install functionality to get up and running with a few clicks of the mouse.

Backup policies and devices were automatically defined during the install process, and after a few minutes, the many creations and characters that form the basis of The CharacterShop's business were ready to be protected.

"We were pleased with the speed of the install and quite happy with the results. NetWorker FastStart's built-in web-based reporting gives us a good measurement of backup success and, for the first time, allows us to monitor performance and data growth," says Vale.

Living up to expectations

Despite having a small number of servers, The CharacterShop holds a growing amount of media and project-based file data on a specialized file server. Protection of this project data is deemed critical during the animation production process, but retention is short-term and much of this data can be deleted upon project completion. Once edited, the projects are transferred to broadcast tape and an archive is used to retrieve work for future editing.

Having identified the critical elements to be protected, The CharacterShop team successfully began backing up data with NetWorker Fast Start.

They found EMC NetWorker Fast Start was not only easy to install, but also had an immediate return on performance and scalability. This became clear when The CharacterShop was able to add significantly more data to be protected within the backup window than the previous solution was able to accommodate.

“Our business is based on the creation of digital assets, and so protecting our environment is essential. The EMC NetWorker Fast Start solution gives us a high degree of confidence that our value to customers will be protected as the business evolves.”

Mark Vale
Production Director, The CharacterShop

One eye on the future

Based on well-established EMC NetWorker technology, NetWorker Fast Start provides an excellent base for the company to evolve a clear strategy for backup, recovery, and archiving (BURA) in the future.

The CharacterShop has moved from a backup solution which provided limited performance and reporting to one where effective protection is enhanced by built-in features, such as disk-based backup and de-duplication, as they are required over time.

Mark Vale summarizes the value of NetWorker Fast Start to The CharacterShop. “Our business is based on the creation of digital assets, and so protecting our environment is essential. The EMC NetWorker Fast Start solution gives us a high degree of confidence that our value to customers will be protected as the business evolves.”



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