

Crawford Media Services

CASE STUDY



The Challenge

When Crawford Media Services, a leading integrated post-production house, moved to a state-of-the-art 80,000-square-foot facility in Atlanta, the company used this as an opportunity to develop a multiuser post-production workflow in which editors and graphic artists — working privately or collaboratively on different platforms and operating systems — share content within a single storage pool.

“The challenges of how we were working before were that we’d have to wait for data to go from one system to another because we were always copying data, and we were constantly having duplicate copies of media, and we didn’t know which was the final version,” says Ron Heidt, technical director at Crawford Media Services.

Editors at Crawford work with Avid® Media Composer™, DS™ and ProTools™ systems, as well as Apple® Final Cut Pro™ and Adobe® After Effects™ systems. To build a more collaborative edit workflow and realize greater agility in delivering finished media, the company needed to implement a centralized and secure media storage solution that could support all of these edit systems and related media formats, and thereby simplify project management while facilitating more efficient media access by multiple editors and graphic artists, regardless of platform.

“We work on Macs®, we work on Windows™; we work on Linux® machines,” says Heidt. “It was a challenge for us to find a system that would allow us to integrate all of those systems together on one large shared storage environment.”

“What the MediaGrid allowed us to do was to ensure that the bandwidth was there so that nobody was seeing a slowdown and nobody was dropping frames.”

Ron Heidt

Technical director, Crawford Media Services

SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGE:

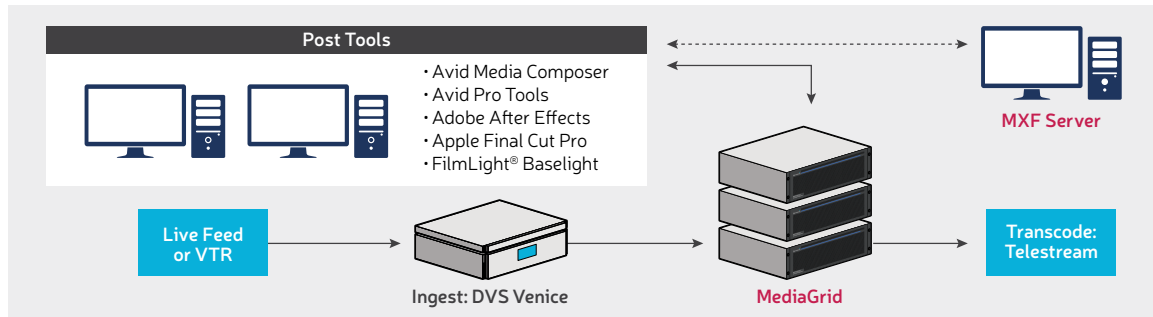
Crawford Media Services, a leading integrated post-production house and media migration, archive, and media management company, wanted to develop a more collaborative, flexible and efficient multiuser post-production workflow. The company faced the challenge of implementing a centralized and secure media storage solution that could support all of the facility’s edit systems and related media formats, simplify project management, and facilitate more efficient media access by multiple editors and graphic artists.

SOLUTION:

Harmonic provided Crawford Media Services with a centralized and secure media storage solution that supports all of the company’s edit systems and related media formats. Editors and graphic artists working on multiple platforms today enjoy fast access to stored content — available simultaneously to multiple users — and work more collaboratively and with greater agility in delivering finished media and meeting client needs.

APPLICATIONS:

- Central shared storage
- Editing with Final Cut Pro, Avid Media Composer, DS and ProTools systems
- Video effects work with Adobe After Effects systems
- Color correction with Baselight



The Solution and Workflow

To support a highly efficient file-based post-production workflow, Crawford has connected more than 20 systems directly to a 144-TB Harmonic MediaGrid shared storage system, which allows the company to accept client content in virtually any format. In addition to supporting Avid and Apple edit systems, the MediaGrid supports Adobe After Effects, Baselight color correction, and ProTools systems.

These media applications connect directly to the single storage pool, and users work on content in-place rather than transfer media or make local copies. The MediaGrid also offers the redundancy and high availability capabilities that are critical when all assets are stored centrally.

“What the MediaGrid allowed us to do was to ensure that the bandwidth was there so that nobody was seeing a slowdown and nobody was dropping frames,” says Heidt. “All our artists could always get what they needed, when they needed to see it.”

MXFserver[®] software from FilmPartners[®] takes advantage of the MediaGrid architecture to provide a reliable high-performance edit workgroup environment that also serves as the central active management layer for media assets, users, physical resources and processes within the workflow. The MediaGrid solution offers the performance of a SAN, though it runs on a more cost-effective Ethernet network.

Integration of the MediaGrid and MXFserver systems allows editors to work on different platforms, share content within a single storage pool, and work privately or collaboratively on projects. Operating smoothly with Mac, Windows, and Linux clients, the MediaGrid storage system has enabled integration of these various operating systems into one shared storage environment. The MXFserver software provides independent virtual views of available material to each editor and presents the appropriate project file structure for each supported platform. Inline content presentation as virtual AMA volumes gives Avid editors access to all file-based material without the need for preprocessing or conversion.

Because Crawford has implemented a massive KVM matrix across its facility, any computer in any room can access both the edit application and the media needed to work on a project. Seven rooms have been designed specifically as edit suites that support Avid DS or MediaComposer, Apple Final Cut Pro, or Adobe After Effects at any given time. Two additional suites are geared toward color correction, and five workstation areas within a Digital Online Creation (DOC) center allow users to access additional graphics and call up different editing applications as needed.

The MXFserver system provides users with a project-based view of content and related assets and metadata. If a user starts a project on a Mac with Media Composer and needs to work on it with a PC using Avid DS, he or she can easily launch the application as if it is on a new local drive. The managed environment created by the MXFserver system ensures orderly media storage while taking the burden of organization off the shoulders of editors, graphic artists and other creative talent at Crawford.

The Result

With a new post-production workflow built on the MediaGrid storage system and MXFserver system, Crawford has greater flexibility and efficiency in meeting clients' needs. Because editors can move from room to room and still maintain easy access to the applications and media they need, the company has been able to improve its agility and productivity.

Whereas editors once copied media over the network or from drive to drive, they now rely on the MediaGrid storage system for fast access to media, without limits with respect to format and frame rate, platform or location. In this model, there is no waiting for material, no needless duplication of media and no misplacing of the most recent or final version of content. Finding media and related content now is as easy as searching by job number or client name. The project management capabilities of MXFserver make collaborating on, completing and archiving full projects a much cleaner and more streamlined process.

“With the MediaGrid and MXFserver, we were able to manage by project,” says Heidt. “We basically are able to load a project, and it is presented to the editor as everything needed to work on this project, and it’s all managed together and all living in one place. When the project is over, it’s easier to archive. We can easily find everything that’s associated with this project. We’re much more efficient in working with our clients because of MediaGrid and MXFserver.”

Crawford has realized its overall goal: the ability to work collaboratively and concurrently on the same material. Media is continually updated, and editors can work without the hassle of negotiating permissions or the need to make time-consuming manual transfers of media among systems. Creative staff can work together effectively in parallel and deliver a high-quality product more quickly.