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Video Game Developer Eidos Interactive Centralizes Global Storage With BlueArc

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“If we were in an earthquake, I would stand under the BlueArc. It never goes down. It’s a solid piece of kit. It’s solid and that’s what we need.”

**- Haitham Rowley,
VP of Global IT Operations,
Eidos Interactive**

Summary

Eidos leverages the performance and scalability of BlueArc Titan networked storage systems to drive the company’s video game development and publishing business. With a global WAN as the backbone of its creative operations, the company called on BlueArc to deliver the required networked storage reliability and scalability to ensure next generations of its high-powered gaming titles get out of the creative process and into stores around the world.

The Background

Based in Wimbledon, South London, Eidos Interactive Ltd, part of SCi Entertainment Group Plc (SEG), is one of the world’s leading developers of entertainment software. The company’s strategy is to create, own and exploit valuable game franchises through investment in high quality licenses and products, all the time maintaining a strong reputation as a publisher of successful games.

Eidos consists of publishing operations across Europe and the US and several development studios including Crystal Dynamics, IO Interactive and Pivotal Games. Eidos develops, promotes and markets several well known games, including Tomb Raider, Hit Man, and Championship Manager.

The Challenge

Eidos is both the developer and publisher of its games. These intertwined businesses require the company to continuously move iterations of software code across multiple sites globally to ensure its games are mastered, tested and delivered to stores in all its key markets. Eidos’ IT team faces a two-fold challenge: first, they must support a highly distributed environment where data is constantly being created, modified, moved and stored in 14 different locations, and second, they must provide a storage infrastructure that can handle the massive growth in data that is being driven by the need to deliver ever more high-quality games on multiple platforms, including PCs and game consoles. Local storage for game code and game assets, including scenes, concept art, video and audio at individual sites can be tens of terabytes.

The Solution

As today’s cutting edge video games increase in complexity and resolution, the artistic effects needed to produce Eidos’ top-selling titles scale to several terabytes apiece, requiring anytime access from any of the company’s multiple locations. To meet these increasing demands, Eidos deployed a “hub and spoke” topology to connect remote offices to the company’s central data repository.

This WAN design encompasses multiple BlueArc Titan NAS systems, aggregating more than 50 terabytes deployed at branch offices, including Wimbledon in the UK and at co-locations in Sacramento and Dockland, CA. The Titans provide the massive scale required by the rapidly growing size of Eidos' game assets and contents, as well as the global reliability and accessibility demanded by the company's geographically distributed structure.

The Results

For Eidos, centralizing the company's storage on BlueArc has directly benefited the company's ability to combat its two key challenges - accessibility of data and scalable storage capacity, accelerating productivity in both the publishing and development sides of its business.

The company's Titans enable global access to the company's data at all times, and since initial install in 2004, have shown impressive reliability. As Haitham Rowley, Eidos' Vice President of Global IT Operations explains, "If we were in an earthquake, I would stand under the BlueArc. It never goes down. It's a solid piece of kit. It's solid and that's what we need."

As Eidos creates and stores data for increasingly innovative games demanding higher, movie quality effects, the massive scalability of BlueArc's Titans enables the company with the security that it won't run out of space or find its employees bound by storage bottlenecks. While applications can require gigabytes and even terabytes of storage at a time, the Titans have yet to flinch. Being able to offer both business and development-focused departments this echelon of scalable high performance storage has been a savior for Eidos, according to Rowley.

In the fast-paced world of video game development, optimizing every facet of the company's technology infrastructure is critical. Delays in development or data transfer, limitations in access to data or reduction in quality are unacceptable, both to the creative artists, and the game developer's rabid fans - who have snapped up millions of copies apiece of the company's headline titles. With video game consoles, including the Sony Playstation and Microsoft Xbox increasing in capabilities, and with wide adoption of Blu-Ray and HD-DVD on the horizon, the onus is being put on the company's creative talent and the underlying hardware, to deliver content that takes advantage.

In parallel, Eidos is taking on an ambitious Digital Asset Management (DAM) project, aimed at reigning in stray files and features, which would enable game assets to be utilized across game platforms and generations - as successful titles are migrated from one platform to another, or sequels are produced. Rowley

anticipates this project to range above several dozen terabytes to start, but the aggregation will be made well worth it in data synchronization and improved utilization of the creative talent's time. Without a scalable storage solution like Titan supporting the project, the company's aggressive targets simply could not be met.

In addition to Titan's uncompromising technology advantages, BlueArc's ability to work with Eidos on a global basis, delivering a single solution for the company's wide-ranging needs, has similarly delivered real business benefits. While Eidos evaluated several other companies as part of its network storage search, other players were simply incapable of aligning their sales and technical teams to Eidos global approach. Rowley explains: "What we couldn't get our other vendors to understand was that we wanted a global deal. We wanted a deal that made sense for all of our sites."

In contrast to the roadblocks presented by alternative vendors, the BlueArc experience was seamless. Eidos was immediately impressed with BlueArc's ability to back up their aggressive claims and knowledgeably offer solutions to the company's unique needs - from BlueArc's engineering staff to the company's sales and support personnel. Eidos was pleased with BlueArc's ability to both talk the talk and walk the walk.

"I visited BlueArc's headquarters and was impressed from day one talking with the technical team and talking globally," Rowley said. "We worked out the logistics, we gave you the addresses and you sent the equipment. We plugged it in, it works and we use it. Life is good."

The bottom line, in Rowley's words, "Titan does what it says it can."

The Conclusion

Eidos' innovative technology infrastructure, including a globally accessible WAN and centralized BlueArc Titan storage is fueling the company's creativity, efficiency and growth. The nature of today's highly competitive gaming market demands publishers and developers evolve their IT systems to meet the challenges of tomorrow. For Eidos, rapid access to scalable storage isn't a request, but a requirement. The company's aggressive Digital Asset Management project, coupled with advancements in computing power with 64-bit PCs and new disc formats like Blu-Ray HD-DVD will up the stakes even further, as consumers will demand more life-like and powerful games. Eidos knows that they are going to have to continue innovating to keep pace, and they know that BlueArc has what it takes to take them to the next level.



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