

The
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WHAT
Issue

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mean long-term changes for how
M&E gets business done.
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Remote Collaboration and Workflows in the Time of COVID-19



By OWNZONES Staff

Photo by Gabriel Benois on Unsplash

The cloud can enable remote collaboration and facilitate the completion of masters and distribution to platforms globally

Abstract: Unprecedented demand for remote collaboration requires ‘geo-distributed workflow’ solutions for post-production that enable content to be made and delivered directly to consumers. M&E tech companies were focused on remote collaboration long before the pandemic, and the resulting advantages of a cloud-based platform approach have never been more clear.

These are difficult times for the M&E industry. While on one hand the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is leading to record consumption patterns and viewing figures, on the other generating fresh content to satisfy demand is proving increasingly challenging.

Production first slowed — and then halted — at content production centers around the world, and one of the most urgent tasks facing the industry has become completing the work that has already been shot. The problem is that increasingly stringent restrictions on movement make finishing programs in traditional brick-and-mortar facilities nearly impossible.

Yet, in response to the obstacles facing content production and distribution, studios and post houses are experiencing an innovation boom in the technology they use to keep the supply chain moving. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, and we’re now seeing a huge wave of interest in remote collaborative working as a response to the need for social distancing and working from home. What is probably surprising to many people in the industry is the maturity of the systems already in place to make it happen.

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If the **novel coronavirus outbreak** had happened even **a couple of years ago** the **industry** would have been far **less prepared**. However, recent times have seen the **rapid establishment of cloud-based workflows** for a number of **economic reasons**.

of economic reasons. These workflows can help preserve business continuity in situations like the one we're facing today.

While the movement to the cloud is likely not going to enable the industry to kick-start filming at any time soon, for productions already in progress, the cloud can enable remote collaboration along the chain, and facilitate the completion of masters and distribution to platforms around the world. The migration from hero suites to browser-based compliance editing, localization and QC solutions on commoditized workstations, for instance, means that a tentpole production can be worked on in almost any home with space for a desk, a computer, and an internet connection.

What's more, users can get the full processing power of a data center from a browser in their living room. At OWNZONES, for instance, we can now scale up to 1,000 nodes in the cloud with 7,000 processors. To achieve that level of processing power from home with an on-prem infrastructure, a user would need to have half their house full of data racks.

A platform-based approach to post-production

Another advantage of the evolutionary move toward remote working has been the development of a more platform-centric approach to post-production tasks. Within facilities over the years, specializations have evolved: Conform is looked after by person A, using software B on workstation C; loudness is taken care of on workstation X, using software Y by employee Z. This is not a workflow that maps easily onto remote methods of working.

What the platform model brings you is

a "one logo" approach and an end to such silos; you leverage one vendor platform and everything else is available to you from within that application as an integration. The upshot is that everything involved with the post-production process can be done from a single program, potentially even from a single machine and by a single user if they are a post-production Jedi. But the beauty of the cloud is that it makes it easy for these tasks to be shared amongst a distributed network of users who specialize in different parts of the production process.

There's further innovation that can be applied here too, with more in the pipeline as the wider industry turns its attention to enabling remote workflows at scale in all manner of fields. At OWNZONES, we have resilient technology in our media player that lets users preview large files remotely. Rather than taking in a video file and generating a proxy, our player shows you a real-time representation of that content. It's built on scalable technology that is exceedingly responsive and allows collaborative workers to upload a multi-terabyte file into their cloud bucket, see what they just uploaded, scrub forward and backwards with a sub-one-second response time to see a real-time preview, and make any necessary changes. Our real-time cloud-based preview player affords users the same high-quality experience via a browser window at home that they would traditionally get from their facility's on-prem system.

The future of cloud is all-encompassing

Using technology such as this to enable remote workflows, producing professional content and great stories to entertain people throughout the duration of the coronavirus crisis is entirely possible, whatever the distance that separates people. But this is not only a way to cope with obstacles presented by the crisis today; the future of content production will consist of content, applications and workflows that reside in the cloud and streamline the entire content supply chain. Especially when it comes to high resolution content like 4K HDR, moving content between on-prem and the cloud takes a lot of time and resources. The future of content production is one that starts and ends in the cloud, abstracting the entire process from physical location so that workflow collaboration can happen from anywhere in the world on the exact same files, both shortening timelines and simplifying asset management.

Cutting-edge technology companies were focused on remote collaboration before the novel coronavirus outbreak. Over the years, the cloud had been gaining in popularity among companies looking at achieving greater flexibility, efficiency and scalability. Add in the business advantages of OpEx over CapEx pricing models, shorter time-to-market and more, and it was an implementation that made sense then.

It makes even more sense now. ■