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Innovative artistry shines at visual effects studio

Important Looking Pirates creates stunning, breakthrough visual effects and locks in workflow and productivity gains with fire-powered, scalable IT solution

ilp VFX

Media and Entertainment | Sweden

Business needs

Important Looking Pirates, one of Scandinavia's biggest visual effects and digital animation studios, was seeing skyrocketing storage capacity driven by growing demand for increasingly complex visual effects and higher-resolution video formats. The firm wanted to ensure that the infrastructure could seamlessly scale to handle growing requirements while enabling the visual effects artists to be as innovative and productive as possible.

Solutions at a glance

- Dell EMC Isilon scale-out storage
- Dell EMC PowerEdge servers
- Dell EMC Precision workstations
- Dell EMC display monitors
- Dell EMC Networking switches

Business results

- Achieves artistic and technical breakthroughs
- Handles thousands of rendering jobs a night—a 4x increase over 18 months
- Improves work/life balance for artists with remote access
- End-to-end solution tailored for business impact

Scales from 300 terabytes to

3.6

petabytes in 1 year
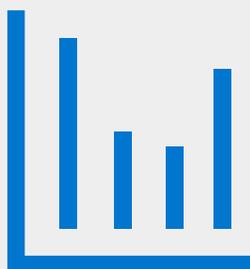
4x

Increase in rendering jobs over 18 months

> **"We can't tolerate systems that break and impede creativity. With Dell EMC, our artists can be as innovative as they want."**
>
> Angelo Rivano
> Chief Technology Officer,
> Important Looking Pirates

Imagine an enormous water simulation spanning kilometers and comprising billions of water particles. Important Looking Pirates (ILP), a world-class, award-winning visual effects and digital animation studio in Stockholm, created this fantasy environment and other artistic innovations.

The sequence, which generated in excess of 500 terabytes of data, illustrates the transformation of the entertainment industry as demand for ever more impressive visual effects at higher resolutions and larger video formats spikes to unprecedented levels. A smaller-scale water simulation two years ago for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* only required 30 terabytes per iteration.

Angelo Rivano, Chief Technology Officer at Important Looking Pirates, reflects, "When we standardized on Dell EMC Isilon for our storage platform, we expected to double or triple our performance and capacity over two years. Instead, we grew 5x from 300 terabytes to 3.6 petabytes in a year and increased performance to a similar degree. Dell EMC clearly was the right choice since it scaled so simply and to such a high ceiling."

The high-performance computing infrastructure and technology for artists at ILP includes Dell EMC Isilon scale-out storage, Dell EMC PowerEdge servers, Dell Precision Rack workstations, Dell HD display monitors and Dell EMC Networking switches. It runs a variety of visual rendering, editing and animation software such as Arnold, Autodesk Maya, SideFX Houdini 3D and Nuke. ILP uses a combination of Teradici Cloud Access Software, Dell Precision Rack workstations, and Dell Wyse zero clients to deliver high-performance environments for the artists.

End-to-end product portfolio

ILP places high value on Dell EMC's ability to provide end-to-end solutions that include workstations, servers, storage and networking. "The breadth of the Dell EMC portfolio and being able to talk to a single vendor about solutions from top to bottom are huge advantages," says Rivano. "Dell EMC has decades of experience in the media and entertainment industry, so we talk to them mostly about business requirements instead of speeds and feeds. As one our most trusted advisers, Dell EMC gives us valuable feedback on our ideas and how to move our business forward."

Massive growth without disruption

Rivano forecasts that ILP's storage capacity will jump from 3.6 to 5 petabytes in the next 10 months. "We've expanded Isilon five times and each time it was seamless and there was no interruption to our services," recalls Rivano. "That's fantastic for the productivity of our artists and infrastructure team. We're confident Isilon can scale to whatever capacity or performance we need for the future."

Breaking through barriers

Because ILP works more with high-end video formats and deep layer compositing, demand for top, scalable performance and capacity continues to grow. Not only has the Dell EMC infrastructure increased ILP's throughput by 2.5 times, but it now handles thousands of rendering jobs a night—a fourfold increase compared to only 18 months ago.

"Our business is artistry and growing demands from our clients require us to push technical and creative boundaries," Rivano says. "Two years ago, we wouldn't even attempt what we're doing now. The quicker artists get their content back, the quicker they can iterate and create even more stunning images."

Before, back-end jobs would slow down or freeze because storage would get so overloaded. There has not been a single outage since standardizing on Dell EMC. Rivano explains, "Our systems never stop running. Dell EMC Isilon is a rock-solid platform that is at the absolute top of its game. We sleep much better now."

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Increased capacity without complexity

With simplified management, the Dell EMC infrastructure has given ILP's IT team more time to support the artists and the business. "One of the beautiful things about Isilon is it doesn't get more complex as it scales," says Rivano. "On the Dell EMC PowerEdge side, the management is so simple that we can unpack, rack and add nodes to the render farm in well under an hour."

Freedom to create

At ILP, work/life balance and fun on the job are important to the company culture. IT helps keep it that way. "Our artists need total freedom to create and have fun doing it," comments Rivano. "We can't tolerate systems that break and impede creativity. With Dell EMC, our artists can be as innovative as they want."

Another user experience benefit stemmed from moving workstations to the data center and providing user access desktops via Teradici Cloud Access Software and Wyse zero clients. Rivano explains, "Our concept artists, lighters, animators and composers work together to create creatures, spaceships and other wonders. With zero clients, rather than clunky workstation towers, they can move around our open floor plan and collaborate better."

In addition, says Rivano, "Secure remote access means our artists are not stuck in the office at night waiting for a render or simulation to finish before they can leave. Instead they go home and enjoy dinner. Later they can log in, check their outputs and tweak the render/simulation if they need to and kick it off again. Giving back 3–4 hours to the artists every evening is a huge benefit for everyone."

2.5x
Increase in
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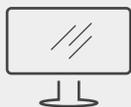
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