

Beyond the Cloud: Accelerated, Secure, and Managed Movement of High-Value Content

Examining file-sharing options via multi-platform delivery.

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Abstract: In this game-changing era of multiplatform content delivery, media and entertainment professionals need convenient ways to exchange digital assets with people inside and outside of their organizations. In this article, we'll describe a new breed of cloud systems that offer all of the ease, convenience and flexibility of the most popular file-sharing services, with the enterprise-level security and administration required to protect and manage high-value digital assets.

In today's digital production environments, media enterprises of all types have one thing in common: the requirement to move large content files rapidly, securely and in a carefully controlled and managed fashion. With the explosive growth in multiplatform content delivery requirements, files have gotten bigger, formats more varied and production cycles shorter than ever before. Often, production professionals take it on themselves to find fast and efficient ways to exchange digital media with remote colleagues and business partners, including post-houses and outsourced vendors. And more often than not, that quest leads them to the ever-growing array of unmanaged, public cloud-based file transfer services.

Without question, public cloud services occupy an important place in the broader realm of digital file movement and are a boon to consumers and small businesses alike – with easy-to-use, reliable and convenient tools for exchanging smaller documents such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint files. However, these services are not appropriate for media enterprises in a few key areas. First, most cloud services are not optimized for accelerated movement of large media files; in fact, most have gigabyte file size restrictions that rule out many transfers (by the standards of these services, a 2GB file might be considered huge – but of course it's entirely small for a media operation). Also, these cloud services offer little or no capabilities for safeguarding valuable media assets, a serious concern in this age of global piracy and well-documented media security breaches.

In this article, we'll take a closer look at the file movement requirements of today's busiest media enterprises. We will also describe a model cloud system that offers all of the ease, convenience and flexibility of the most popular cloud file-sharing services, with the enterprise-level security and administration required to protect and manage high-value digital assets.

A Tale of Three Stakeholders

To understand the complexities of file movement in a media operation, it's useful to consider the vantage point of three user groups: IT managers, operations managers and end users.



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IT managers, the folks that stay up at night worrying about security breaches and protection of digital assets, would like nothing better than to eliminate the ad hoc use of the unmanaged public cloud services. They are concerned about maintaining control of transfers and having visibility into who sends what, and to whom – information that is not provided by the public services. IT managers want to empower the operations teams with the tools they need, but at the same time, they're not interested in burdening the network with a bandwidth-gobbling new application. And they would rather not saddle their overworked IT teams with yet another system requiring user and group administration at a very micro, individual level; for instance, adding a temporary team member for two weeks for a certain project, removing another team member that has left to go to another job, or adding a new contractor.

Operations managers are also concerned at some level about security, but their main objective is to ensure that a project – such as the delivery of the next five episodes of a popular TV series – is completed on time and on budget. These professionals are responsible for assembling and managing workgroups and making sure all of the players, both employees and contractors, are motivated and have the tools they need to get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible. Operations managers place a high value on global collaboration and partnerships, which by definition require the seamless exchange of content with outsourced vendors and other external business partners such as post-production companies and distributors.

The third group consists of *end users*, the media professionals on the front lines of content creation, processing, editing and distribution. These users have established relationships with their business partners, and they are happy to access public cloud file transfer services – that is, until the service can't handle the file size or complete the transfer in an acceptable timeframe. Then, users have to fall back on other means such as FTP, which has

its own issues regarding inefficiency, security and general unwieldiness.

Use of the public cloud services tends to be project-based; for instance, a new season of a TV series that has a finite schedule and requires the assembly of a dedicated, collaborative workgroup. Production of promotional videos is one project for which public cloud services are often pressed into use, because promotions often need to be developed and sent to air as quickly as possible. News and sports coverage, by virtue of its often unpredictable nature, is another area that often requires mobile news crews to transfer content as quickly as possible to editors and news bureaus.

Access In the Cloud; Storage In the Network

Out of these requirements has emerged a type of file movement software that combines the best features of two vastly different worlds: the public cloud and private corporate networks. In this hybrid architecture, users access their information through a simple and intuitive user interface delivered from the cloud, with the content itself maintained under the secure control of the internal network. Within media companies of all sizes, content stakeholders are able to enjoy the ease and convenience of the cloud file sharing services without file size limits, and without the security concerns that might arise from storing high-value media assets in the cloud.

A critical aspect of a hybrid solution, like Signiant's Media Shuttle, is file acceleration. Considering that the file size for a single one-hour TV show can reach 40GB, no fast-paced production schedule has room for the hours that might be required to move such a file via FTP – and no public consumer cloud service is up to the task. File acceleration ensures high-speed file transfers that are often 200 times faster than FTP with up to 95 percent network efficiency.

Although there are some instances in which longer-term archiving of content is appropriate for the cloud, a hybrid solution

lets users keep work-in-progress content close at hand. Think of the kitchen drawer that holds tools you use every day, vs. attic storage for items you might only need once a year or less. Also, since public cloud storage does offer some degree of security, it can be useful for archiving previously-aired content (such as video work for past seasons of a TV series), thereby freeing space on the local network for highly classified works in progress – such as the new season that resolve's last year's nail-biting cliffhanger.

Security cannot be overemphasized when managing and transferring high-value media assets, and a hybrid solution should be iron-clad. Consider the risk factor of a public cloud service, which allows anyone to create an account and offers no safeguards to prevent a member from sharing the login info with friends or others; the piracy potential is mind-boggling. With the model hybrid solution, however, all content remains under the secure protection of the internal network. Features such as encrypted browser sessions, file transfers based on 256-bit AES encryption and built-in certificate authority for managing a public key infrastructure all help to ensure that the content ends up where it's supposed to, and stays in the right hands.

Across-the-Board User Satisfaction

It's easy to see how a hybrid file transfer solution that embraces the cloud would be useful for the accelerated movement of media assets such as television series content, theatrical productions or news/sports footage. The best hybrid solutions are architected by vendors who intimately understand the varied requirements and priorities of all media types and productions. Workgroups access the system in much the same manner as the public cloud services, for ad hoc file sharing on a wide range of projects. Distribution of proxies, scripts, schedules and images or routing of media for approvals on ad and marketing campaigns are just a few examples. The system

Continued on pg 100

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FILE TRANSFER / *continued from pg 69*

is invaluable for file movement related to any type of creative media collaboration, such as editing or localization of content for distribution to foreign markets.

Such a solution has instant appeal for IT managers, who now have a way to empower their users while at the same time cutting down (or eliminating) the use of unsecured public cloud services. With the actual content stored locally, security concerns are eased. Tracking and reporting tools offer a centralized view of the system's usage and user activity including numbers of users, status of currently running transfers, file size metrics, bandwidth usage and storage capacity. And, by delegating the lion's share of user administration to project and operations managers, IT managers are freed to perform other tasks.

For operations managers, a hybrid file transfer solution offers an excellent platform with which to create a collaborative, motivating environment for workgroups and project team members. With easy customization tools, project managers can add logos and graphics to create a branded portal with its own URL

(or multiple portals in different languages, for collaboration on short- or long-term projects). Since managers can handle their own day-to-day administration of the portal, including managing authorized users and administrators, they are more in control and less reliant on IT for assistance.

With the hybrid file transfer model, end users are presented with a very simple interface that closely resembles those of the public cloud systems – but with complete sanction from corporate and IT management. Even better, they have the ability to share files freely and rapidly with colleagues, partners, and vendors, with no restrictions on file size.

Powerfully Simple File Movement

If there's one truism in the media and entertainment industry, it's that files will continue to get bigger and delivery schedules shorter. Consumers' appetites for the latest and greatest high-definition and 3D programming will continue to grow, and one consequence is the sheer size of the files that now need to traverse the network – with “super HD” formats such

as 1080p 50/60 and even 3D gobbling up huge amounts of bandwidth. Media organizations are pressured like never before to get content to market as quickly as possible and distribute the latest versions to multiple territories within a select and finite period. It's a process that's highly dependent on global collaboration and partnerships that enable the seamless and secure exchange of content between content owners and post production companies, distributors and other business partners.

A hybrid system for accelerated and secure file transfer that provides an easy-to-use user interface in the cloud, but keeps the actual content within the secure confines of the corporate network, addresses the key file movement challenges facing IT, media operations staff, and end users. IT is freed from day-to-day system management, operations managers have complete control, and end users are empowered with the same type of access and file movement tools they expect from public cloud services – but without file size limitations. With such “powerfully simple” capabilities, such a system is specifically tailored to the demanding requirements of today's media enterprises. ■

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