

Transformed TV Production Processes with Fully-Aligned IT Platform

Customer Case Study



Sky Studios accelerates move to digital media workflows and sets standards for broadcasting efficiency and sustainability

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Sky Studios

Industry: Media

Location: United Kingdom

Number of Employees: 22,800

Challenge

- Create tapeless collaborative media environment equipped with latest acquisition, studio production, post-production and transmission technologies
- Boost staff productivity while positioning company as Europe's most sustainable broadcaster

Solution

- Cisco Media Workflow Platform, providing end-to-end 10Gbps network fabric and matching IT resources with digital media production processes

Results

- TV production facility that can transmit 7.5 million hours of TV per year to satellite and online platforms, underpinned by a high performance and scalable IP network
- Eliminating thousands of daily tape movements with Media Asset Management orchestrated movements and workflows
- New capabilities, such as rough cut editing, enabling much better utilisation of editing facilities
- Video content can be rapidly processed through make, shape and share processes working on the spot with minimal transcoding

Challenge

Sky is a valued part of everyday life in over 11 million homes. With a potent mix of exclusive sports rights, movies, and entertainment, it excites and inspires its customers with a great choice of high-quality, high-definition (HD) television, along with broadband and telephony services.

Based at Osterley in West London, Sky Studios underpins this success by providing a vast quantity of programming across all genres, offered within different packages and price points, involving significant in-house production. In addition to Sky Sports and Sky News, the company repackages and repurposes third-party content, helping ensure a constant, highly-demanding workload for editors and production teams.

As the Sky organisation grew quickly, it brought new buildings in the Osterley campus into service in a relatively short timeframe. Traditional production processes relied on tapes stored at multiple locations across the Osterley campus. Runners were frequently dispatched to fetch them, a time-consuming manual procedure unsuited to blossoming video content volumes. This practice also added considerable delay and expense, because edit suites fitted with top-of-the-range equipment were often occupied far longer than necessary by programme makers awaiting deliveries.

The management team concluded that this way of working was too inefficient. A fresh approach was required, one that would set a new standard for operational and environmental excellence within the broadcast industry. That vision was realised with the construction of Sky Studios, a flagship building equipped with advanced energy-saving technologies and an IT infrastructure dimensioned to allow a smooth transition to digital, tapeless editing.

Solution

Sky Studios brings together people and technology involved at every stage of the digital media workflow inside a single building, in a concept called make, shape and share. It also features clever green innovations: giant fresh-air ventilation chimneys; rainwater collection for bathroom usage; a combined cooling and heating plant; and renewable energy provided by a dedicated wind turbine.



“We partnered with Cisco for three reasons. The technical capabilities of Cisco equipment; its future-proof nature, with a definitive technology roadmap; and proactive support ranging from easy troubleshooting to four-hour spares replacement. That combination gives us complete service assurance.”

Jim White
Network Architect
Sky

When it came to IT infrastructure, one company stood out. “Cisco showed a real hunger to work with us from day one,” says Sky network architect, Jim White. “They were very keen to get involved and fully understand how our broadcast systems worked before pitching any products.” With concepts such as the Media Workflow Platform, Sky could see that Cisco was serious about developing solutions catering specifically for the unique culture and technology needs of the TV and media industry.

“We partnered with Cisco for three reasons,” says White. “The technical capabilities of Cisco equipment; its future-proof nature, with a definitive technology roadmap; and proactive support, ranging from easy troubleshooting to four-hour spares replacement. That combination gives us complete service assurance.”

Specially designed by Cisco Services to continuously handle high levels of video traffic, the [Cisco® Media Workflow Platform](#) installed at Sky is an all-IP next-generation network. It creates a scalable IP architecture, extending from the point of content ingest through every aspect of editing and production, across video contribution and distribution networks, and all the way to the customer’s screen. Comprising over 200 Cisco Nexus® 7000 and Catalyst® 4500 and 6500 Series Switches, the Media Workflow Platform forms a 10Gbps fabric that protects against potential video degradation caused by factors such as latency and jitter. This network helps ensure video packets always arrive in time and in sequence.

“Cisco Services worked closely with us to help us deliver the project on time and within budget,” says White. “Cisco equipment supports almost every part of the content supply chain at Sky, from file-based acquisition through to delivery over satellite and our MPLS network to PCs and iPads. Every time you see an operator in a studio or platform control using a touch panel, or an editor editing in 3D that’s all going over the IP network.”

Sky Studios was also attracted by new features, such as Cisco In-Service Software Upgrades, which allow routine maintenance and software re-versioning to be completed without interrupting TV and video production workflows. Productivity was boosted further still with the introduction of Cisco Aironet® Wireless Access Points, enabling staff on the move to access corporate applications, browse editing tools and use unified communications features.

Results

With eight studios and 45 digital edit suites, Sky Studios is on track to deliver 7.5 million hours of programming a year. The new Cisco infrastructure offers a powerful platform for fast-moving video content, which can be rapidly loaded and edited on the spot with minimal transcoding.

As well as helping to make Sky Studios a more attractive proposition for tomorrow’s generation of editors and producers, the new Cisco infrastructure has provided a platform for growth. Sky has taken the lead in UK triple-play provision (television, telephony and broadband). As of September 2012, Sky had 11.3 million customers, four million of whom also take Sky Broadband.

The company is now well placed to meet its obligations to provide feeds to Fox Sports stations in Los Angeles and Sydney, while supplying commentary for Champions League football matches worldwide. It broadcasts more HD channels than any other media company in Europe, and is also estimated to have Europe’s busiest master control room.



For Sky Studios, the switch means more effective use of costly video edit facilities, and greater responsiveness to the shifting needs of live broadcasting, especially for its in-house production streams of sport and news, along with the efficiency gains of enhanced staff mobility. For the Sky IT department, results include easy management and improved system visibility. For customers, it simply means a more enjoyable viewing experience.

The success of the project goes wider than the technology transformation. Sky Studios has reinforced its position as Europe's most sustainable broadcast facility. Sky Studios has won several awards for its environmental performance, starting with the Sustainable Project of the Year Award at the Sustainability Awards 2010.

White sums up: "Our network has to support growth, and be secure and solid. But most importantly, it needs to allow the people who make, edit and transmit Sky content to do new things they could not do before, or to do things faster. That's what Cisco gives us."

For More Information

To learn how Cisco can help advance your Media, Satellite and Broadcast strategy, please go to:

www.cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns988/networking_solutions_solution_category.html

Product List

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Nexus 7000 and Catalyst 4500 and 6500 Series Switches

Firewalls

- Cisco Firewall Services Module

Wireless

- Cisco Aironet 1200 Series Access Points



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at www.cisco.com/go/offices.

Cisco and the Cisco logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Cisco and/or its affiliates in the U.S. and other countries. To view a list of Cisco trademarks, go to this URL: www.cisco.com/go/trademarks. Third party trademarks mentioned are the property of their respective owners. The use of the word partner does not imply a partnership relationship between Cisco and any other company. (1110R)