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Preymaker VFX Studio-in-the-Cloud

CHALLENGES

Ability to share data between Mac and Windows users

Performance throughput to keep up with high frame rates and high bit-depth workflows

Ability to share data across different applications

Better predictability and control over storage costs

BENEFITS

Huge improvement in artist productivity

Compelling economics and complete cost visibility and control

Greatly reduced day-to-day systems administration

Infrastructure instantly scales to respond to new projects

Automatic, namespace expansion to S3 lowers storage costs.

Founded in 2020, Preymaker is a groundbreaking creative and technology studio with an expertise across all areas of content creation, media and I.P. Preymaker made the conscious decision to be 100% cloud-based, which served it well when the COVID pandemic made it difficult to work in an environment with on-premises infrastructure. Preymaker crafts content for leading brands and studios, engaging artists all over the world, from Los Angeles to New York, London, France, Sweden, and South Africa. With a distributed team like this, the cloud is an ideal platform, as artist workstations can be spun up and down depending on capabilities and project demands.

THE CHALLENGE:

FIND A HIGH-PERFORMANCE STORAGE SOLUTION IN AWS THAT COULD SERVE BOTH LINUX AND WINDOWS FROM THE SAME FILE SYSTEM AND NAMESPACE, ALL WITH PREDICTABLE ECONOMICS AND SEAMLESS TIERING TO S3

The Preymaker team produces a wide variety of content with many different tools and timelines. Projects can include episodic television, which can have a one-year turnaround, to TV commercials, which can have a three-month turnaround, to online or digital assets, which can have as little as a one-week turnaround. With this variety of projects and sizes, it is near impossible to predict IT demands.

Preymaker employs a large portfolio of applications, including Houdini, Unreal, Nuke, open-source Blender, Maya and Flame, Adobe Creative Cloud , and Da Vinci Resolve by Blackmagic Design. Preymaker artists from all over the world use virtual workstations that run on Linux or Windows operating systems, connected to the cloud using Teradici remote access solutions.

Preymaker's mission was to establish an agile, global- artist- focused studio, and they required a highly performant cloud-based solution that allowed both Windows and Linux users to share the same data set. WekaFS™ Limitless Data Platform on AWS was the clear choice because it allows Preymaker artists to collaborate within the same namespace from their many locations without the need to copy data among different services, while also supporting the high resolutions and high bit-depth throughput if needed.

THE SOLUTION:

PREYMAKER FOUND IT ALL WITH WekaFS™

Preymaker was impressed with WekaFS and its ability to share data across Linux and Windows applications in a workflow within AWS, allowing Preymaker artists to collaborate withing the same namespace–from anywhere in the world. To ensure that WekaFS could keep up with Preymaker's demanding workloads, Preymaker benchmarked Weka's performance against a wide variety of cloud offerings, both native and third party. Preymaker ran an assortment of tests to verify that Weka could support their high frame rate and high bit-depth throughput requirements, which couldn't be met economically with any other solutions they tested.

"Through testing, WekaIO turned out to be the perfect solution," said Alan McSeveney, Head of Technology at Preymaker. "WekaIO's ability to just hit 'play' for example, in front of a customer and display uncompressed content from the cloud without a hiccup has been a pipe dream within the industry for a long time—and being able to do that from centralized data on WekaFS is a huge win for us."

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"The ability to just hit 'play' in front of a customer and display uncompressed rendered content from shared file storage without a hiccup has been a pipe dream within the industry for a long time—and being able to do that from centralized data on Weka is a is a huge win for us.

WekaIO's automated S3 tiering just made large amounts of my day—having to manage and shuffle data—just completely evaporate, so that was an absolute game changer for me. From a management and technical labor standpoint, Weka is a single-person vehicle."

Alan McSeveney, Head of Technology, Preymaker

BENEFITS AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Simplicity

While performance was a major criterion for selection, and WekaFS was the clear leader, Preymaker also chose Weka because of its simplicity of managing a single data set with multi-protocol support for Windows and Linux. Additionally, the simplicity of scaling the namespace transparently to Amazon S3 greatly reduced the day-to-day administration of the environment.

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Compelling Economics and Predictable Costs

With Weka, Preymaker now has predictable economics with their storage. "We know exactly where we stand with the software and infrastructure costs for Weka, and we can easily see in the future that the specifications of cloud resources we're using are going to suffice for some time," said McSeveney.

In addition, the ability to snapshot the file system to the Amazon S3 object store allows Preymaker to spin down the flash performance tier when not in use. The entire file system and all its data structures can be saved to Amazon S3 and rehydrated later without the need to rebuild the environment. Finally, the ability to scale up the flash tier using auto scaling allows them to deliver the extra performance when needed, with no downtime.

Auto Scaling on Demand

Leveraging Weka's auto scaling feature, Preymaker is also using Weka's ability in AWS to quickly scale up performance and/or capacity and scale back down again after a short period of time, with no downtime. This gives Preymaker the flexibility to take on larger projects as they become available. "The size of projects that we get can vary wildly," said McSeveney. "You might have projects that are on a three-day turnaround, and some of them may be on a three-month turnaround or longer when you start looking at things like episodic content. To be able to scale this solution to meet those needs, at any point in time, is letting me sleep at night."

Huge Improvement in Artist Productivity by Sharing Data Across Different Operating Systems

Preymaker employs dozens of tools in its visual effects pipeline. Most applications run on Linux, but there are several applications that run on Windows. Prior to Weka, artists were unable to collaborate within the same namespace when they were using applications on different operating systems. The cross-platform support in Weka was essential to improve artists' productivity and reduce costs. Artist productivity improved significantly, which allowed Preymaker to hit aggressive deadlines and attain quicker time to revenue. Weka made the work of the IT administration team a lot simpler too.

Automatic, Seamless Namespace Expansion to S3 Storage, Lowered Storage Costs Significantly

One of the big selling points for Preymaker was Weka's ability to seamlessly expand the namespace into Amazon S3 object storage in AWS, substantially lowering their storage costs. McSeveney noted: "Other systems that Preymaker tried had the ability to tier into Amazon S3, but the management and movement of data between those tiers was cumbersome and required a lot of development work. It was very difficult to identify exactly which files Preymaker wanted to move to fast storage, but with Weka, I've never had to think about that once. It's just something that is no longer part of my job. The Weka file system just takes care of it for me."

For more information about Weka, go to www.weka.io.
For more information about Preymaker, go to www.preymaker.com

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910 E Hamilton Avenue, Suite 430, Campbell, CA 95008 T: 408.335.0085 E: info@weka.io www.weka.io

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