



SAFEGWAY[™]

SOLUTION AT A GLANCE

Safeway Inc., a Fortune 500 food and drug retailer headquartered in California, implemented a file-based workflow to streamline production operations.

Producing over 100 video productions and running about 1,500 broadcasts annually, Safeway needed an efficient infrastructure to store this large quantity of content and support production and distribution.

Safeway centered its new workflow around the Omneon MediaGrid active storage system because it offers consolidated cross-platform storage for a mixed edit environment including both Avid and Final Cut Pro editing systems. MediaGrid also integrates easily with Safeway's distribution systems, such as IPTV satellite delivery and video Webcasting. With MediaGrid, Safeway realized enormous efficiencies by consolidating four production islands into a single shared storage system.

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Implementing File-Based Workflow to Simplify Production Operations

Safeway

Background

Safeway Inc. is a Fortune 50 company and one of the largest food and drug retailers in North America. The company was founded in 1915, and as of June 2009, operated 1,735 stores in the Western, Southwestern, Rocky Mountain, Midwestern, and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States and in Western Canada. In support of these stores, Safeway has an extensive network of distribution, manufacturing and food processing facilities.

In an effort to provide superior customer service, Safeway provides employees with training and developmental opportunities, including a variety of multimedia programs.

Critical to Safeway's leadership as a retailer is the network that supports employee communications, training and education. In building the file-based production system that supplies media for this network, the company turned to Omneon and its media storage and processing platform. Safeway today uses the Omneon MediaGrid™ active storage system to support a cross-platform shared edit environment incorporating Avid® Media Composer® and Apple® Final Cut Pro® editing systems. By providing consolidated storage for production and supporting a variety of workflow applications, the Omneon MediaGrid system simplifies the growth of Safeway's production operations, enables automation of key tasks, and reduces the cost of accessing and managing content across the facility.

Maintaining Quality Through Communications

Today's large grocery chains maintain elaborate communications systems, and Safeway relies on a 24/7 satellite network, as well as terrestrial systems, and a substantial and sophisticated post-production facility to meet the challenge of reaching more than 200,000 employees at stores, administrative offices, manufacturing plants, distribution centers and data centers across the United States and Canada with quality video content.

The company's broadcast and post-production facilities are located at Safeway corporate headquarters in Pleasanton, Calif. Safeway produces about 125 video productions each year, from script to screen, and runs about 1,500 live broadcasts annually. Communications range from in-store pieces for shoppers to live and recorded corporate and human resources messages to training and safety presentations. Delivering video via two full-time broadcast channels, two streaming channels and VOD services, Safeway is able to establish both real-time and on-demand connections with managers and department managers at each store.



■ CASE STUDY

Establishing a Cost-Saving Mixed Edit Environment

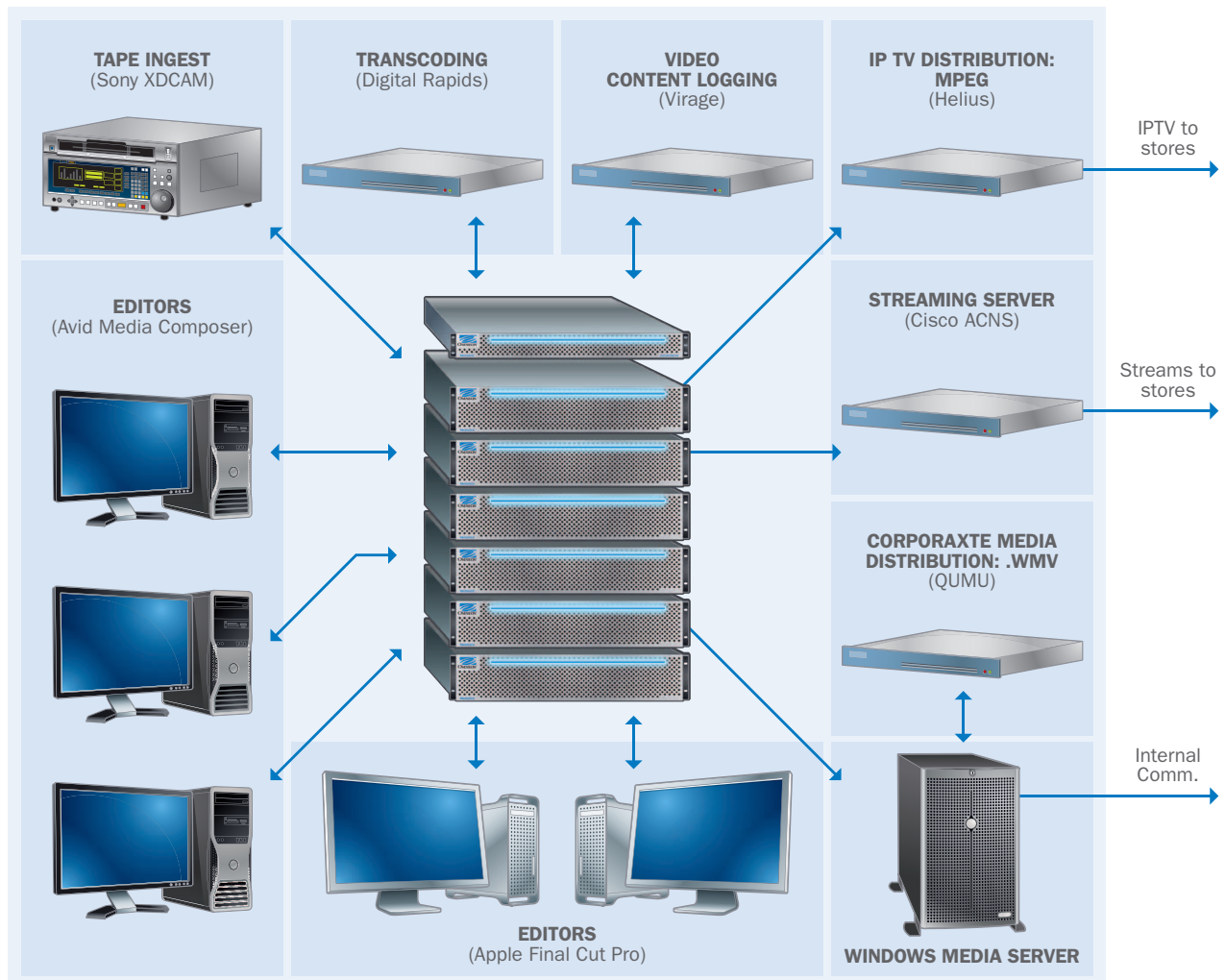
In editing and finishing video productions, Safeway relies on three Avid Adrenaline edit systems and one Avid Express edit system. The company also has enhanced its editing capabilities with the recent addition of Final Cut Pro systems, which provide a cost-effective alternative for those projects that do not require high-end finishing. An Omneon MediaGrid active storage system provides consolidated cross-platform storage for this mixed edit environment including both Avid and Apple edit systems.

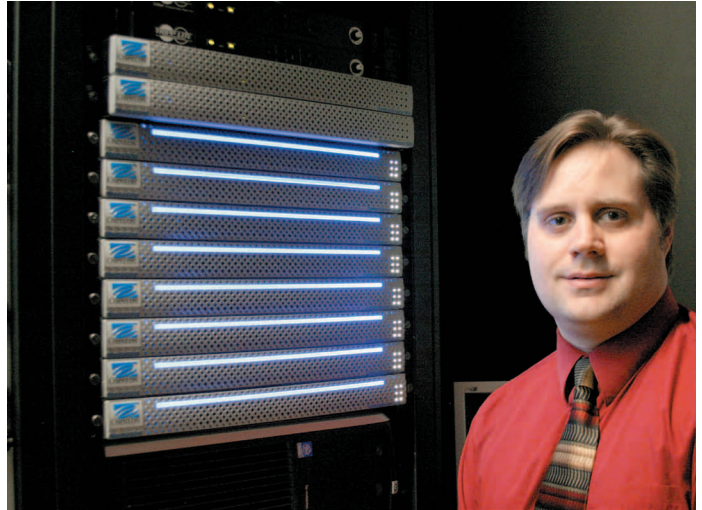
Editors working on Avid systems view files on the Omneon storage system using the Omneon ConformTool browser menu and then simply drag and drop files from Omneon MediaGrid into their workstation and into an open bin within the Avid project. Clips are converted to Avid-compatible files and transferred at much faster than real-time in the background. Because media is transferred over a data network, multiple editing stations are able to work together. ConformTool is fully integrated with individual Avid edit systems to enable smooth access to stored media and enable conform and conversion processes to be performed in the background as the final edit is prepared for transmission.

To enable Final Cut Pro “edit-in-place” capability, each Final Cut Pro edit system is connected to the Omneon MediaGrid system as a network-mounted drive. This approach allows editors to edit during ingest, with material immediately available to all Final Cut Pro seats simultaneously. Sequence editing on Final Cut Pro is performed as usual, with finished content saved to the Omneon MediaGrid file system through standard Final Cut Pro controls.

The Omneon MediaGrid active storage system provides Safeway with a highly scalable content storage system that plays an active part in the production and distribution workflow. Acting as more than high performance shared storage for all users within the facility, the Omneon MediaGrid system not only adapts to the changing resiliency and bandwidth requirements of the broadcast workflow, but also actively processes stored media to support downstream systems and operations.

In addition to facilitating implementation of a cost-effective hybrid edit environment, the Omneon platform directly supports Safeway’s existing transcoding, IPTV and streaming applications, in turn allowing Safeway to institute a true end-to-end workflow with content conveniently remaining on the Omneon system from ingest through post-production to distribution.





Streamlining the End-to-End Workflow

The workflow at Safeway begins with the ingest of video, shot on XDCAM, to the Omneon MediaGrid active storage system, where content becomes available for editing on Avid and Final Cut Pro systems. Editors working on either platform thus have access to a shared pool of content. Finished pieces are put into watch folders – which the Safeway broadcast group accesses on the Omneon MediaGrid system – and digitized through Digital Rapids hardware encoders, which output different media streams in the appropriate format and store them to a new folder on the Omneon MediaGrid system. Safeway encodes to as many as four different formats: MPEG-4 AVC for delivery of VOD and live video via a Helius IPTV satellite-delivery system; Windows Media for streaming via Qumu video Webcasting; Flash for embedding into Web pages; and video and audio-only for podcasts.

An Autonomy Virage system performs speech-to-text translation, identifies any slides or graphics used within a program, and provides indexing of stored video to enable fast searches and easy location of specific video within the centralized storage system. In the case of video streaming, content enhanced with this metadata is given a program name and title, added to a manifest list configured within Qumu (though the content itself remains on the Omneon MediaGrid system), and is automatically distributed throughout the Safeway network by Cisco's CDN system.

Prior to taking the Omneon system online, Safeway had to rely on four separate storage systems: one for storage of projects being edited on its Avid systems, another for video clips digitized by the Digital Rapids encoders, and the last two holding content for the company's Helius and Qumu systems. There was no connectivity among key devices and applications. The Omneon MediaGrid system, however, allowed Safeway to consolidate all of the media efficiently on a single system that is accessible throughout the production workflow.

Getting Results With the Right Solution

By moving from four discrete systems to a single repository, Safeway lowered its hardware and software support and maintenance costs, reduced the replication of data, and eliminated the need to transfer or lay off to disk to transfer media so that it's available where needed. Because content remains on the Omneon MediaGrid system, there is no need to move high-resolution content across the network from device to device, or to manage the transfer of content in relation to other work being performed on the network. Data is immediately accessible on Omneon MediaGrid, and this was among the main reasons Safeway chose the system.

The company had evaluated other solutions, but Omneon MediaGrid stood out in providing complete redundancy and continuous accessibility. Furthermore, no other system could keep up with the Omneon MediaGrid system's data transfer speed. The high speed at which data can be uploaded also enables fast networked access to media, in turn supporting Safeway's HD editing and streaming needs. The company tested the Omneon system thoroughly, running multiple HD edit sessions simultaneously with no performance issues.

The video network now established across the Safeway chain has improved sales and reduced costs, as well as enhanced service throughout the company. With its support for multiple edit platforms and high interoperability with other applications across the workflow, the Omneon MediaGrid system plays a key role in streamlining production and delivery of a variety of video communications and employee training tools.

Because the Omneon platform is easy to expand through the simple addition of server nodes, Safeway can grow the system capacity to meet its evolving needs. In fact, as the company scales up the storage system's capacity, it also effectively increases the bandwidth available to support other applications and clients. As Safeway completes its migration toward full HD production, both in its studios and in field production, the Omneon media storage and processing platform's flexibility in supporting a mix of SD and HD signals enables smart, incremental growth.



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