



TV and Film Production Firm Uses Cloud Environment for Content Collaboration

Overview

Country or Region: Germany
Industry: Media and entertainment

Customer Profile

Arvato is the service division within the Bertelsmann Media Group, and a leading service provider of digital media worldwide.

Business Situation

Arvato wanted to replace largely manual processes for content collaboration in TV and film production with a cloud-based automated solution accessible over the internet.

Solution

Microsoft and Arvato developed a multisite collaboration platform called ScreenerONE based on Windows Azure, with a Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in.

Benefits

- Faster production cycles for TV content
- Cloud-based collaboration replaces physical delivery of DVDs
- Scalable and resilient platform integrates with in-house systems
- Scope for targeting new accounts

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Christian Horz, Vice President, Business Development and Media Technology, Arvato

Arvato, part of the Bertelsmann Media Group in Germany, had been tasked with building a cost-effective web-based content collaboration system for one of its major customers, a leading German TV and film production company. To provide decision makers involved in the production with access to a day’s shots, the production company had been burning DVDs and distributing them physically by couriers overnight. This process was expensive, time-consuming, and error-prone. The service provider worked with the production company to build the ScreenerONE content collaboration environment, using the Windows Azure cloud computing platform and the Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in. The resulting cloud-based service not only ensures effective collaboration with remote users, it also supports future re-use of content and multichannel distribution.

“A key reason why we chose the Microsoft platform is that our developers were familiar with...the environment. It allowed us to create a cloud-based solution with existing development skills and familiar tools.”

Christian Horz, Vice President, Business Development and Media Technology, Arvato

Situation

Arvato is one of the leading digital distribution and media service providers worldwide. It is part of the Bertelsmann media group headquartered in Germany, which generated €18.7 billion (U.S.\$26.5 billion) of revenue in 2010. Arvato wanted to provide its customers with a web-based service for multisite collaboration on video content, replacing the physical distribution of DVDs to share TV and film recordings with decision makers—such as directors, producers, and other stakeholders—in remote locations.

Christian Horz, Vice President, Business Development and Media Technology, Arvato, says: “The camera recordings of a day’s TV or film shots need to be reviewed—or screened—daily. At present, these assets are distributed physically, on optical media. We wanted to reduce costs and speed up TV and film production through a web-based solution.”

TV and film production typically requires collaboration across different sites. With multiple stakeholders in remote locations involved, the service provider found that physical distribution for TV and film

production was increasingly expensive, time consuming, and error-prone. Horz says: “With DVDs, feedback can only be provided through email messages or over the phone, which is inefficient and can lead to mistakes. And delays in the screening process can mean hold-ups in the production process.”

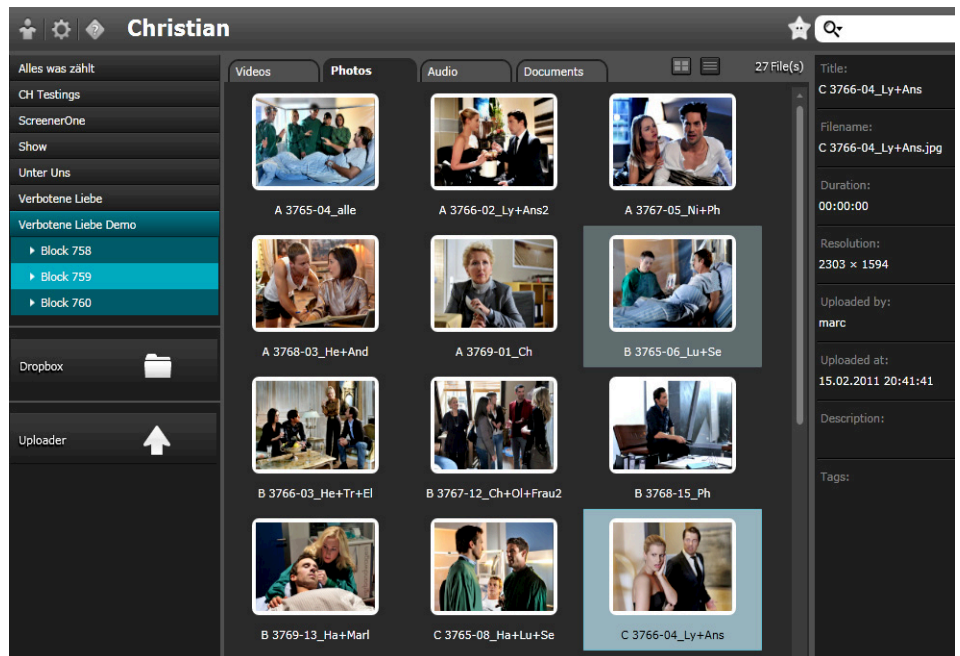
The service provider wanted to offer a better content collaboration service to TV and film production companies. The first customer was Grundy-UFA, a TV production company and subsidiary of Fremantle Media—which is a market leader in daytime TV drama in Germany—producing more than 100 hours of TV content a week.

Solution

Arvato worked with Microsoft to develop the ScreenerONE content collaboration service for TV and film production, which Horz describes as, “an enterprise YouTube for video production.”

Figure 1: The Silverlight-based ScreenerONE client provides remote access to audio and video content

Horz adds: “A key reason why we chose the Microsoft platform is that our developers



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Marc Schwellenbach, Post-Production Supervisor, Grundy-UFA

were familiar with the Microsoft .NET Framework and Microsoft Visual Studio development environment. It allowed us to create a cloud-based solution with existing development skills and familiar tools. We also needed a robust, scalable cloud computing platform that could connect with the on-premises components of the solution, and an easy-to-use interface. Microsoft provided us with the right technology and service features.”

Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Sternico handled parts of the programming, and based the application on Windows Azure, the Microsoft operating system for the cloud, for file storage and database services. Sico Algermissen, Managing Director, Sternico, says: “Our programmers are highly skilled in the .NET Framework and Microsoft Silverlight. We used standard Windows Azure features for content storage and database services, and built a custom Silverlight client to help remote users access content for playback, navigation, search, metadata viewing, and annotation.”

Video content is encoded locally and uploaded to Windows Azure, together with selected screen and advertising photos, music scores, language versions, and production documents. Content can be protected with Microsoft PlayReady content access technology, making sure no-one can make illegal copies of unreleased production material.

Horz adds: “The key technical requirements included secure internet access and data storage, together with scalability and round-the-clock availability. The Microsoft software and services platform met all these needs. As a next step, Arvato and Grundy-UFA plan to add cataloguing and archiving services.” This means that once content has been uploaded to the environment, the content will be indexed, and descriptive metadata added, so

the content can be retrieved for future use. In addition, further integration with on-premises components such as editing environments is under evaluation.

Benefits

TV and film production companies today need to work with geographically dispersed teams. This requirement is addressed by the ScreenerONE content collaboration platform. All kinds of production-related digital content and material are accessible with one clear solution immediately. Marc Schwellenbach, Post-Production Supervisor at Grundy-UFA, says: “With ScreenerONE, we don’t feel that our creative team is spread over the country or even the world. Our team works as one, and this makes working in a creative environment much easier.”

Faster Production Cycles for TV and Video Content

Because content is accessible immediately after upload and from anywhere, remote users such as directors, producers, and composers can access it more quickly and submit reviews in shorter timeframes. Grundy-UFA found that the solution is already making collaboration easier and faster between geographically dispersed users.

Marc Schwellenbach, Post-Production Supervisor at Grundy-UFA, says: “There is a faster turnaround for screenings, reviews, and approvals with ScreenerONE and Windows Azure. It’s as easy as using YouTube, and requires no infrastructure investment because it’s cloud based.”

Schwellenbach adds: “ScreenerONE really speeds up communication between our staff on set and our post-production department. In a very short time after the shots are made, we’re able to proof them and give feedback to the set, especially when it’s a long way from our production facilities. By this

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method, we can work more rapidly and cost effectively and have short feedback cycles.”

Automated Collaboration Replaces Expensive Manual Processes

As overnight postal and package couriers are replaced by file-based content access over the internet, the cost of making content accessible to remote users will be significantly reduced. The solution will be integrated with on-site production and encoding tools to cut the need for manual work.

Schwellenbach says: “Uploading clips to ScreenerONE fits perfectly into our post-production workflow. Because the solution supports widely used video formats, we don’t even need to encode special clips for the cloud—we use the compressed clips we already produce during our normal workflow. This way, sharing content through ScreenerONE causes no extra work.”

Horz adds: “Because Windows Azure is available through a pay-per-use subscription model, upfront investment is minimised. It’s a cloud solution, so costs scale with demand, making it ideal in a competitive market.”

Scalable and Resilient Platform Integrates with In-House Systems

Windows Azure is a highly stable solution available round-the-clock for TV and video production, running on secure Microsoft data centres. Horz says: “Windows Azure provides the scalability and resilience required by TV production companies, such as Grundy-UFA, which rely on this service to meet tight deadlines for content delivery.”

Scope for Targeting New Accounts

The service provider is now generating revenue from the ScreenerONE service—starting with Grundy-UFA—but expects to add more services such as archiving, multichannel distribution, and digital asset logistics.

Horz says: “The pricing model for ScreenerONE is simple: a monthly fee per production, based on storage capacity. Clients like this simple, pay-per-use pricing model. It’s as easy to understand and use as the application itself.” The service provider sees considerable opportunity for expanding the footprint of potential clients for ScreenerONE beyond the TV and video production industry.

Horz adds: “There’s no need for hardware, database licences, or systems maintenance. And there is scope to offer the solution to other parties, including advertisement agencies and digital media production firms. The Windows Azure platform has opened many new opportunities for us.”

Windows Azure Platform

The Windows Azure platform provides an excellent foundation for expanding online product and service offerings. The main components include:

Software and Services

- Windows Azure
- Technologies
 - Microsoft .NET Framework
 - Microsoft Silverlight
 - Microsoft PlayReady

- **Windows Azure.** Windows Azure is the development, service hosting, and service management environment for the Windows Azure platform. Windows Azure provides developers with on-demand compute and storage to host, scale, and manage Web applications on the Internet through Microsoft data centers. In addition, Windows Azure serves developers' connectivity needs through the following services.
 - › The **Service Bus** connects services and applications across network boundaries to help developers build distributed applications.
 - › The **Access Control Service** provides federated, claims-based access control for REST Web services.
- **Microsoft SQL Azure.** Microsoft SQL Azure offers the first cloud-based relational and self-managed database service built on Microsoft SQL Server 2008 technologies.

To learn more about the Windows Azure platform, visit:

www.windowsazure.com