

AETN Case Study

A&E Television Networks

A&E Television Networks, LLC (AETN) is a joint venture of the Hearst Corporation, Disney-ABC Television Group, and NBC Universal that offers its audience diverse information and entertainment from a variety of platforms including television, DVD, music CD, and the Web. AETN also supports many educational projects.

AETN began in 1981 as an arts-dedicated network. Today AETN's reach in the U.S. and Canada extends to more than 97 million homes. AETN's brands are in more than 140 countries around the world, and include A&E Network, History, Lifetime Television, Lifetime Movie Network, Bio, History International, Lifetime Real Women, History en Español, Military History and Crime & Investigation Network, AETN International™, and A&E IndieFilms™. The company also includes AETN Consumer Products, which extends the History, A&E, and Bio brands through services and goods, including DVDs. A division of A&E Television Networks, AETN International markets the quality programming and proven success of The History Channel™, A&E®, The Biography Channel®, Crime & Investigation Network™ and The History Channel HD™ overseas.



AETN employs more than 1,000 people, most of them in the headquarters office on 45th Street in Manhattan. The company also has offices in Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, and London. AETN's main technical operation is at the Ascent Media network origination facility overlooking the harbor in Stamford, Conn., with live backup at the Ascent transmission site five miles away in Glenbrook, Conn.

The Challenge

AETN commissions production of some of its own programming including, most recently, reality programming. Much of the company's content, however, is acquired from other producers. For example, one of the A&E network's current popular shows is "The Sopranos," which was originally shown on HBO. In many cases, content broadcast on one of AETN's networks arrives in the form of videotape.

AETN has seen fast growth in recent years, and in 2005, the company began working with Ascent Media to improve the efficiency of its operation with an eye to supporting growth, as well as ensuring content security, broadcast

reliability, and broadcast consistency. All these have been accomplished with the institution of a totally file-based workflow designed with inherent resilience.

Previously, AETN had relied entirely on videotape-based post-production and a videotape archive, with only early caching of digitized content. The nature of videotape storage presents problems because the tapes themselves are vulnerable to tape-eating VTRs, fire, deterioration, and misplacement. The videotape-based system was also inefficient because it required any content being rebroadcast or reused in any way to undergo repeated ingest and QC. So much handling of so many thousands of hours of content represented a tremendous expenditure of staff and equipment time, and increased the risk that content could become lost or damaged.

The Solution

At AETN today, content is ingested to Omneon media servers under control of TMD (TransMedia Dynamics) digital asset management. The content is QCed and appropriate metadata is captured, and a proxy is then created that can be accessed from AETN desktops.

At this point, the content is pushed by TMD to dual Front Porch Digital DIVArchive content storage management systems managing two Sun StorageTek data tape libraries. One DIVArchive system is local in Harbor Plaza and the second DIVArchive installation is in place doing the same job in Glenbrook. By enabling digital media storage devices such as servers, editing systems, and other workflow applications to work together smoothly, DIVArchive is a key support for preservation, management, and retrieval of media content.

AETN's choice of DIVArchive was based in part on Ascent Media's long track record of successful DIVArchive installations at its sites in London, Singapore, and Burbank, Calif., which work 24 hours a day delivering more than 100 channels of programming and an independent proof of concept asset management and file-based workflow system by AETN.

AETN's DIVArchive system gives post-production editors working in the familiar AVID Interplay environment at their desktops access to the content for browsing, reversioning, or other manipulation. Episodes of "The Sopranos," for example, are reversioned to align characters' way of speaking with the preferences of the A&E audience as opposed to the HBO audience. AETN may also reversion content in compliance with standards and practices, or in the process of repackaging multiple episodes of a popular show to be shown back-to-back. Because DIVArchive enables frame-accurate, partial restore of clips from either disk or LTO tape, the system optimizes the use of time and bandwidth and makes individual users more efficient, particularly helpful when repeated reversioning is required.

Once AETN content has completed its stay in the post-production environment, it is pushed back to TMD for verification and QC, and then delivered by DIVArchive to the LTO tape archive for long-term storage. Content that is ready for playout is retrieved from the data tape library by DIVArchive under the direction of the OmniBus playout automation.

Corporate Headquarters

2011 Cherry St., Suite 202
Louisville, CO 80027
+1 303 440 7930

International Headquarters

4bis, avenue du Pré de Challes
74940 – Annecy-Le-Vieux, France
+33(0) 4 50 88 37 70

New York Field Office

450 West 31st Street, Fourth Floor
New York, NY 10590
+1 646 240 4045

International Field Offices

France +33 (0) 1 34 89 15 99
India +91 981 899 6603
Singapore +65 3110 3311

In devising a best-of-breed workflow solution, the AETN and Ascent technical team opted to use three different systems to move content in and out of the archive – TMD, AVID Interplay, and OmniBus. The ability of Front Porch Digital's DIVArchive to work cleanly and seamlessly with all of these systems has been critical to the success of the workflow.

"It's the reliability and flexibility of Front Porch Digital's DIVArchive that makes it invaluable in the close-knit infrastructure we have created," said David Bellingham, AETN engineering vice president. "In contrast to the way we used to do things, the new workflow allows us to ingest content once, and re-use that same content numerous times. While the combination robotic tape and spinning disk archive contains our valuable and extensive content library, it's DIVArchive that knows where everything is at all times. DIVArchive is a crucial link in the system."

AETN's file-based system has been ingesting media content since September 2006. All content played to air on an AETN network since this date is now stored as a file in the archive.

The Future

AETN's transition to a file-based workflow began as the proof of concept system in 2004, and then a full design concept with AMNS in 2005. The new workflow was instituted in 2006 and has been continually refined and improved since. Having achieved the goals of increasing efficiency, easy accessible content, and broadcast consistency and reliability, the workflow supported by DIVArchive will also continue to facilitate AETN's ability to add channels cost-effectively and take advantage of emerging business opportunities.

For growth and future needs, the proven and scalable DIVArchive application will continue to ensure seamless integration of AETN's valuable programming into a variety of production, editing, playout, and television systems for years to come.

Corporate Headquarters

2011 Cherry St., Suite 202
Louisville, CO 80027
+1 303 440 7930

International Headquarters

4bis, avenue du Pré de Challes
74940 – Annecy-Le-Vieux, France
+33(0) 4 50 88 37 70

New York Field Office

450 West 31st Street, Fourth Floor
New York, NY 10590
+1 646 240 4045

International Field Offices

France +33 (0) 1 34 89 15 99
India +91 981 899 6603
Singapore +65 3110 3311