

Audio Post-Production House Adopts Global File Services for the Hybrid Workplace

By Ben Conlon, Chief Tech at Sonic Union



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Deployed Solutions
Global File Services

Sonic Union is a creative audio company with two main studio locations in NYC. We provide recording, sound design, mixing, and original music for the commercial TV, radio, podcast, and internet markets. This includes using specialized hardware and software, as well as manipulating and organizing client-provided materials. Besides the two main locations, we also have dozens of remote employees in the NYC metropolitan area and beyond.

The Pandemic Forces A Technology Change

Previous to March 2020, all work was done on premises. All production files were on local workstations, and copied daily to a central on-prem storage. Users were operating off a central NAS server unit that was replicated as a backup in our

second location. Both studios function as if on the same private and secure LAN, and called to the central server for data storage, element transfer, and many other functions related to data management and archiving. The data was also archived offsite once no longer seen as “hot”, using cloud storage and physical drives. As all of the systems and workflows were centered on the physical studios, we needed to pivot to support remote workers when the pandemic hit.

The main challenge was to support multiple disparate geographic locations that required consistent and reliable access to the central data storage. Our mixers and assistants need to constantly and securely pass session folders of large size with many smaller internal files or large video files back and forth, and these transfers needed to be timely so as not to affect session workflow.

Morro Data Global File Services Meets the Challenge

Initially, we tried to bridge the gap by utilizing a mixture of existing systems, cloud buckets, and VPN/FTP but found it to be inefficient and difficult to manage. Also any discernible latency makes manipulating large audio and video files impractical using remote desktop through VPN.

Sonic Union's MSP Macktez introduced Morro Data to us as a solution. Morro Data was attractive as the CloudNAS solution provided centralized management for the company's technology group and helped us bring 'the server' right to each person's location, virtually. The hybrid nature and fetching functions mean that sessions completed the day before are waiting locally and don't need to be downloaded to access the data and begin working.

File integrity and efficiency were the most critical criteria for Sonic Union. We needed to make sure that our client and session data was secure and not at risk of corruption, but also stored in a way that made the best use of the resources available. We needed staff members to be able to pass media materials with the consistency of a file system, not relying on human communication or memory. For storage efficiency, our workflows create numerous redundant files, as well as constant access calls, that can make traditional storage without additional de-duplication and compression expensive.

Morro Data CloudNAS met all of the above requirements. The idea of a fully-enclosed hybrid system offered as a service was something new. It gave us an existing supported platform to work from. The hybrid nature of CloudNAS, namely the fetching and syncing, has proven key in keeping the various elements of our production in sync and working. Often it will take too long on home network speeds to download a 20 GB session file. Having the G80 devices pre-fetching files and updates means that the data is sitting locally and can be loaded in much quicker.

We were very impressed with the ease of deployment and management. All of the initial process of deploying and configuring the system was finished within days. Sending the G80 CacheDrives to individual's homes actually constituted the bulk of the work.

The central management of storage pools and shares has made it incredibly easy to set up secure storage with limited access for our more private clients. Their data can be kept in a separate bucket and managed remotely as to which staff members and staff devices can access them.



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***- Ben Conlon
Chief Tech
Sonic Union***

An 18-Month Review

Sonic Union now has a system that allows for almost-synchronous work among staff across a variety of locations. It allows production staff the ability to work remotely and still be in constant connection with support staff and data processing. The company has been able to add staff in a number of new locations, even thousands of miles away, that all operate cohesively.

Morro Data supports several cloud storage providers. Now that our master data is automatically stored in the cloud, much time and energy that used to be spent on backup and archiving has been saved.

Our next steps are to work on improving our implementation. We are planning to upgrade our main studio from a G80 Pro to a virtualized CacheDrive on a server. This will allow us to better support for the live demand of the entire studio as that gradually returns. We will continue to optimize access for both on and off premises work as our business expands and Morro Data's solution will be key to that.

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