

Vancouver Animation Studio Competes in the Global Marketplace with Scalar's StudioCloud

Rainmaker Entertainment

Industry:	Animation
Location:	Vancouver, British Columbia
Employees:	over 200 artists, directors and technical staff
Website:	www.rainmaker.com



**Based in Vancouver,
British Columbia,
Rainmaker
Entertainment Inc.
is a multifaceted
animation studio
and one of Canada's
largest producers of
CG animation.**

Background

Rainmaker Entertainment is an animation studio based in Vancouver, British Columbia. With over 200 artists, directors and technical staff, Rainmaker's team creates compelling characters and stories for television and feature films. The technical complexity of producing content for modern animated blockbusters means studios like Rainmaker have huge rendering needs. A single project can require thousands of servers. With already overlapping schedules and frequent tests for potential future projects, the studio started to explore ways to offset the rendering overload and the significant hardware costs required to run a CG studio.

With its vibrant television and film industry, Vancouver has established a foothold in the animation and FX space. As Rainmaker began to investigate cloud computing as a way to compete on a global scale, they realized their local counterparts were most likely experiencing the same cost and scalability issues they were facing. As a way to tackle the problem, they decided to create the Vancouver Studio Group (VSG), which was made up of representatives from the leading gaming, animation, and visual effects studios in the local area. This group of industry experts worked together to map out a plan that would enable them to move away from their traditional onsite infrastructures to a managed service model, where for a fixed cost, they could access an agreed-upon number of servers.

Challenge: Finding the right partners

The VSG understood that they needed to get the right partners committed to the project if they wanted to be successful. "We were looking for a solution that would be equal to or less than the cost to run a server in our data centre," said Ron Stinson, director of IT Operations at Rainmaker Entertainment. Spearheading the group, Stinson worked with members of the VSG, gathering studio requirements, building the request for proposal and taking responsibility for meeting with potential government agency partners, universities and service provider organizations. The group successfully formed a strategic alliance with Great Northern Way Campus, which provided 3,500 square feet for the data centre at its Centre for Digital Media. With the physical space secured, the VSG began looking for a provider that could build the community cloud and was introduced to technology partner, Scalar Decisions.



Challenges

Overlapping project schedules put a significant strain on existing infrastructure

Faced increased competition from overseas players

Increased complexity of content in the movie industry demanded cutting-edge technology

Objective

Create a community cloud solution that was equal or less expensive than the cost of each studio building and maintaining individual data centres.

Solution: Managed infrastructure as a service (IaaS) model

The managed infrastructure service, called StudioCloud, launched with 700 high performance servers and has grown to over 1300 today with 7 gaming, animation and FX studios now taking part. In addition to cost, security was understandably a primary concern for the founding studios. Ultra high-speed private networks were installed between the companies and the data centre, maintaining strict security protocols. Due to the rigorous industry audits Rainmaker and their counterparts must comply with, they cannot afford to take any chances with their data. Scalar StudioCloud was designed to meet the guidelines set out by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). “Security is of utmost importance to all of us. We had to find a partner who could provide us with a network that was completely air gapped from every other network,” said Stinson.

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Lower costs, improved efficiency

Scalar made an initial investment of \$4 million to build the data centre and each founding member committed to a 3-year lease of a pre-agreed upon number of servers. The studios can sublease excess capacity, or take on more servers as needed. “The model works perfectly - we lease servers from Scalar that are under our complete control during the contract and at our option we can rent them out to other companies taking part in StudioCloud, providing us with cost recovery and revenue generation,” said Stinson. “We have recovered about 50% of our lease costs during the last 12 months, and still had the server resources available when necessary to complete our CG projects,” he continued.



Solution

Scalar StudioCloud, servers-on-demand lets studios access thousands of servers in the data centre, connected via a secure, dedicated switch

Ultra-high speed, air gapped network

Designed to meet guidelines set out by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)

24/7/365 monitoring and management

The participating studios are now able to rapidly ramp up to support large-scale projects, giving them the ability to take on additional assignments without purchasing extra capacity that will sit idle when the crunch is over. With increased competition from overseas, this reduction in operating costs allows the studios to reduce the cost of their bids and win rewarding projects.

The “pay-on-demand” model allows the studios to charge out resource costs to individual production and operations budgets, eliminating capital expenditures, which is a huge financial benefit. They have also freed up valuable workspace that can be used for artists.

“We have taken in-house solutions that required an immense amount of space, cooling, power, and management, and we’ve replaced them with centralized, high-performance, modular data centres that are highly efficient,” said Paul Kerr, president and CEO of Scalar.

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Access to leading edge technology

As CG projects continue to increase in complexity and quality, Rainmaker must access cutting edge technology to keep up with production demands and remain competitive. “The servers in StudioCloud are twice as fast as my old servers,” said Stinson. “This solution allows us to access the best technology on an ongoing basis by reinvesting money generated from rentals.”

Looking back on the project Stinson says, “It takes a committed partnership to make any new business venture a success. In this case, the VSG, Great Northern Way Campus and Scalar joined resources to build a solution that works and now has a proven track record. From the start, the Scalar team had open minds to consider our project and took on the VSG’s vision of making a business solution that works for every partner involved.”

For more information, please visit
<http://www.scalar.ca>

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