



AP preserves history for generations with Bulk Digitization



Client profile

The Associated Press (AP) is one of the largest and most trusted sources of independent news gathering, supplying a steady stream of news to its members, international subscribers and commercial customers. AP is neither privately owned nor government-funded; instead, as a not-for-profit news cooperative owned by its American newspaper and broadcast members, it can maintain its single-minded focus on news gathering and its commitment to the highest standards of objective, accurate journalism. In 2011, AP engaged Prime Focus Technologies (PFT) to bulk digitize its archives of over 32,000 hours.

Business context

As part of AP's transition to digital file-based operations, the most valuable legacy content in the AP archive required conversion from film and video to digital file formats, opening this unique archive to a new audience across a new set of platforms and enabling the delivery of high resolution content through a range of IP and other distribution networks.

It was vital for AP to identify a partner they could trust with their priceless content. AP needed an organization with the resources to handle the high volume of assets arriving from its various locations and the ability to deliver the digitized content quickly, to meet the ever-growing demand from customers and to realize subsequent monetization opportunities.

It was also important that the partner was adept at handling precious film materials and had the expertise to clean and restore anything that was damaged. PFT had worked extensively with companies such as the British Movietone Library, British Film Institute, Imperial War Museum, BBC, IMG, Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and Eros International and had a proven track record in this area.

Lastly, the project had to be economically viable. PFT was able to leverage its global footprint and the skill sets of its international staff, and automate elements of the workflow to provide a solution for AP that was not only technically innovative, but also financially viable.

PFT solution

PFT utilized the unique skill sets of its global organization to digitize the film and tape archive, then catalogue, manage, transcode and deliver AP's priceless content for a digital audience. In total, 420,000 new assets were created from 32,000 hours of AP archive material over an 18 month period.

Held on 16mm film, Betacam SP, Digital Betacam video and DVCam video and with the assets stored across various locations in London and North America, the content was first transported to PFT's secure facility in Central London where the project was overseen.

The film assets totalled 3,000 hours with an average of 60 clips per hour. An HD mezzanine file was created for each clip and delivered to AP with four separate transcode files. In total, 900,000 files were created from film assets.

The video assets totalled 29,000 hours with an average of 20 clips per hour. An SD mezzanine file was created for each clip and delivered to AP with four separate transcode files. In total, 2,900,000 files were created from video assets.

Revolutionary in many ways, the project was driven by CLEAR®, PFT's hybrid cloud-enabled Media ERP platform. A team of in-house developers were tasked with writing bespoke scripts to support the innovative workflows.

Digitizing the archive followed a bespoke and highly efficient workflow. The content was delivered to PFT throughout the 18 month project timeframe, and upon arrival, each piece of material was logged for tracking purposes. The film was assembled into reels, synchronized with audio and physically checked before being ultrasonically or hand cleaned, then transferred in a dedicated Spirit Telecine suite where a Baselight grade was applied and a HD digital file was created. Video tapes were also checked and cleaned prior to the digitization process.

AP digitized archives to transform business and better serve customers worldwide who are moving to file-based workflows

The new files were made available to the PFT teams in the UK and India via CLEAR® and dedicated teams of cataloguers were automatically assigned files as they became available. The teams have extensive experience in this field, thanks to highly detailed meta-tagging work completed for the BCCI's online cricket archive, amongst many other projects.

Once the cataloguing and versioning were complete, a high-res mezzanine file was created and four separate transcode files were produced and QC'd automatically. The completed files were then pushed to AP's London headquarters in Camden Town for upload to AP's video platform. Dedicated connectivity between PFT and AP allowed instant access to the enormous volume of content generated daily.

Throughout the project, daily and weekly progress reports were generated by CLEAR® to notify AP of all encoded assets, the technical characteristics of the assets and any anomalies found such as inconsistencies within the metadata, as well as any serious video or audio faults. These reports were also used to measure actual performance against pre-agreed SLAs.

Client outcome

PFT delivered this ambitious project in an unprecedented timescale, creating over 420,000 new assets in just 18 months. Its global reach, infrastructure, international skill sets and pioneering use of cloud-based Media ERP technology combined with smart automated and physical content operations made PFT the ideal partner for AP.

This project was part of a major investment in the film and video archives of The Associated Press. The digitized content is now hosted on a brand new web platform leveraging HTML5 for accessibility on a variety of devices. AP customers will be able to purchase and download video content in a variety of formats including DV25 for standard definition and XDCam HD 4:2:2 for high definition content. The web platform also contains a number of innovative features, streamlining users' workflows and allowing them to access more content, faster and in higher quality.

By working with PFT to digitize its archive, AP is making its valuable content available online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, accessible by anyone, anywhere in the world. It is now easier for AP's customers to not only view its content quickly but also cost effectively.

“Work we are doing with PFT will preserve history for generations to come.”

Alwyn Lindsey
Director, International Archives, AP

FOCAL International Awards 2014 Winner
Best Archive Restoration / Preservation Project



About Prime Focus Technologies

Prime Focus Technologies (PFT) is the creator of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, CLEAR®, for the Media & Entertainment (M&E) industry. It offers streaming platforms, studios, and broadcasters transformational AI-led technology and media services powered by the Cloud that help them lower their Total Cost of Operations (TCOP) by automating their content supply chain. PFT works with major companies like Walt Disney-owned Star TV, Channel 4, ITV, Sinclair Broadcast Group, A&E Networks, Hearst Television, Warner Media, PBS, CBS Television Studios, 20th Century Fox Television Studios, Lionsgate, Showtime, HBO, NBCU, TERN International, Disney+ Hotstar, BCCI, Indian Premier League, and more.

PFT is the technology subsidiary of Prime Focus, a global leader in M&E industry services.

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