



Media & Entertainment

Blind Design Studio Chooses Qumulo's Modern Scale-Out Storage to Intelligently Manage Data and Users

Blind, a strategic design agency specializing in video-based branded advertising, lacked visibility into its data storage. This created challenges with storage capacity management as it prevented the systematic movement of inactive project files to archive storage to make space on the primary storage for files created by new active projects.

Bracing for the 4K Data Crunch

Blind specializes in video-based branded advertising that combines animation, live-action and visual effects. Top-tier brands such as Xbox, Audi and McDonalds and recording artists from Cold Play to Justin Timberlake have sought out Blind's expertise to create cutting-edge video campaigns.

Of course, these campaigns are often extremely data intensive, with projects typically consuming over a TB of storage apiece. And unfortunately this large size, combined with the studio's fast project-based business, frequently presented capacity management issues with its pre-existing Isilon storage solution. Specifically, Blind had no way to understand in real-time what files and projects were rapidly growing and consuming more storage, so Blind IT was frequently surprised to find that its Isilon cluster was at or near maximum capacity. This scarcity of free space required hyper-vigilance on the part of staff to manually move completed or inactive project files off of the Isilon cluster and onto separate Super Digital Linear Tapes (SDLT) or external Serial ATA (SATA) hard disk drives. This was a cumbersome and time-consuming process, and one that Blind's employees often overlooked in favor of important project work. IT was put in the unenviable position of spending time policing artist's usage of storage rather than enabling them to do more project work, faster.

"People don't understand that in data-intensive environments, archiving is part of any active creative project. For users, once they're done it's out of sight and out of mind, and the rest should just magically resolve itself," says Thai Do, Director of Technology at Blind.

Unfortunately, this dynamic can easily result in a storage capacity squeeze and data workflow bottleneck. For Blind, it's one that threatens to become more severe as HD video gives way to the data hungry 4K resolution, ballooning digital assets and project file sizes. "If some projects are now 1TB in size, it wouldn't surprise me if our 4K project files end up pushing into 4TB+ range," said Do.

As an added complication, the company was relying on legacy Isilon NAS hardware that was nearing the end of its life-cycle, making support expensive and future expandability a challenge. In fact, certain critical proprietary components, such as the NVRAM (non-volatile random access memory), would be utterly irreplaceable if and when they gave out—which was only a matter of time.

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— **Thai Do**
Director of Technology
Blind Visual Propaganda

In short, Blind needed its storage system to work efficiently and invisibly – without requiring ongoing time and intervention from the IT department. But its existing first-generation scale-out NAS, for a variety of reasons, was conspicuously limiting the company's productivity.



Solution Overview

- 5 Qumulo QC24 hybrid storage appliances
- 2 Arista 10GbE switches
- NFS, SMB, and REST protocols
- Qumulo Care enterprise support

Key Benefits for Blind Studios

- Increases storage efficiency by rapidly pinpointing unused video project files for archiving
- Frees IT resources by enabling the users of the storage to take an active role in file and capacity management
- Improves scalability to ensure readiness for the upcoming growth in 4K video
- Eliminates vendor lock-in and expensive proprietary hardware
- Adapts quickly to customer requirements through two-week releases of Qumulo Core
- Provides proactive Qumulo Care support for smooth operation

Qumulo Delivers Data Footprint Visibility and Storage Scalability

Not one to turn a “Blind” eye to its data problems, the design studio began its search for a modern scale-out storage solution. Blind first considered the latest Isilon products, but was reluctant to again get locked into a single vendor proprietary hardware platform. “We can’t afford to become overly reliant on a particular vendor, especially if the support isn’t top notch. I needed something self-contained and self-managed, but based on commodity hardware, and that’s not Isilon,” said Do.

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Blind instead selected Qumulo’s QC24 hybrid storage appliance as its modern scale-out storage solution. The QC24 is powered by Qumulo Core, a modern scale-out storage software, that delivers real-time visibility into data and provides storage analytics across flexible, fast and highly scalable commodity hardware.

The Qumulo appliance is built to take advantage of commodity components, ensuring affordability and eliminating vendor-lock in. And its scale-out design means that Blind is able to facilitate expansion of its storage capacity, as business grows, simply by adding additional nodes.

Since 1995, Blind™ has produced projects from conception to reality with award-winning design that engenders surprise and far exceeds client expectations. Cutting-edge campaigns for brands such as Xbox, Audi, Showtime, Sony, DirecTV, OppenheimerFunds, McDonald’s, Scion, and recording artists including Gnarl’s Barkley, The Raveonettes, Cinematic Orchestra and Justin Timberlake have made Blind the go-to company for award winning creative. We are open, collaborative and use our collective experience, design and technical knowledge to create meaningful and compelling content for all mediums. Our goal is to continue to be the company that clients rely on to deliver creative excellence and service so outstanding in its responsiveness that they become enthusiastic fans.

Gaining Immediate and Actionable Insights into its Data

More importantly for Blind, the unique real-time visibility capabilities of Qumulo Core solve the capacity management problems in a large shared storage environment. “In this business, you can turn your back for a second and all of a sudden you’re at 95 percent storage capacity used,” explains Do. “With our old system, we were always scrambling to clear space and not having a clear way to identify which files were the right ones to target in a timely manner created a production bottleneck.”

Legacy storage systems require what Do refers to as “a game of command lines” in order to execute a file search. In contrast, Qumulo gives Blind the ability to view real-time analytics via a single integrated analytics dashboard, quickly pinpointing the files or directories that need attention. Even better, Qumulo’s intuitive user interface empowers any staff with basic computer skills to understand file status or migrate obsolete data. This ability to educate individual producers on how much capacity and IOPS they are consuming – and thus take ownership of their own file and volume usage – is extremely powerful for Blind.

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The studio intends to leverage Qumulo’s powerful analytic capabilities to expose performance issues and eliminate potential bottlenecks. The studio plans to further streamline Qumulo’s data analysis using the REST-API to create a customized user dashboard that provides easy access to the most relevant and common data queries.

The other benefit paying immediate dividends is Qumulo Care, Qumulo’s enterprise-support customer service. “I feel like I’m getting direct-access treatment with Qumulo Care,” says Do. “Their customer support team has been readily available to me. It’s been almost proactive on their part, instead of me tracking them down for help.”

Blind has also already taken advantage of Qumulo’s “two-week sprint” software development and release cycles, exchanging email directly with Qumulo to suggest timely fixes and enhancements to its product. In contrast to twelve to eighteen month release cycles from traditional storage vendors, Qumulo’s bi-weekly software releases ensure that Blind rapidly gets its needs met going forward.

“From the first presentation, I immediately sensed that Qumulo puts the customer first,” concludes Do. “There is a deep understanding of our needs as a small IT shop, pricing was right in line, deployment couldn’t have gone any smoother and I never once felt like I was being sold something that I didn’t need. The treatment I get from Qumulo is of a higher value than what I feel like I paid for, and I have honestly never experienced anything like that.”

