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SGI and Xinet Deliver the Power and Speed for Digital Prepress

David Ewers, of Stars Digital in London, was facing a challenge. He had four small, uncon-nected, servers performing different functions throughout the company. Design and output processes were fragmented and moving far too slow. The solution he chose was an SGI® Origin® 200 high-performance server running Xinet® networking, prepress, and asset manage-ment software. The system, implemented by Turning Point Technologies, considerably improved Ewers' prepress workflow and turned out to be even more cost-effective and efficient than he had thought possible.

The Challenge
- Prepress workflow was fragmented and slow
- Working with geographically dispersed customers was cumbersome

The Solution
- SGI® Origin® 200 server and Xinet® networking, prepress and asset management software

The Result
- A stable and efficient workflow with the ability to provide asset management services to customers.

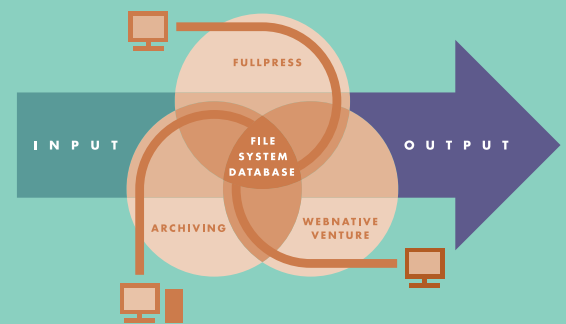### Stars Digital: Centralizing Prepress Operations

Ewers is systems director at Stars Digital, a subsidiary of Leo Burnett Advertising. Their clients in the U.K. (and other European markets) include Heinz, Nintendo, Marlboro, and Walt Disney. Their global accounts include Kellogg's and Max Factor. Another international account, as Ewers points out with customary British wit, "is a little company named McDonald's." Stars Digital creates the mechanicals for all the ongoing and ever-changing marketing campaigns for McDonald's Happy Meal™ boxes, in 46 markets.

Star Digital's transition to the SGI Origin 200 server and Xinet software began with a simple, much-needed concept. "We wanted to work centrally, but before the SGI Origin 200, we hadn't found a server that was powerful enough," says Ewers. "The SGI and Xinet solution let us work with a central storage area, and the users now all point to one area. That's been a fantastic process for us and has completely changed the way that we work."

Intense Workflow

At Stars Digital, an average of 25 Mac® users at a time are connected to the 32-user Xinet system and two SGI Origin 200 servers. The company originally installed Xinet's FullPress and

WebNative and recently upgraded to WebNative Venture to host existing asset management clients and expand their services.

As an example of just how intense the workflow is, Ewers cites the never-ending production cycle of McDonald's Happy Meal boxes. "At any one time there are four different marketing campaigns for Happy Meal in constant produc-tion, and we're designing and outputting in 46 markets— excluding North America—for each one of those four campaigns," he explains. "Each one of those 46 boxes has up to nine variants—that's 46 multiplied by 9 for each campaign. A phenomenal amount of pages are going through. Some of the files that we're working on, the actual box artwork and such, are absolutely enormous— up to 2GB in file size—which obviously pushes the average Mac to the limit but doesn't bother the Origin server at all."

Asset Management

Stars Digital designed, produced, and currently maintains a secure, password-protected extranet site providing round-the-clock access to artwork for usage around the world; the largest client is Marlboro Motorsports.

Seeking to expand its Web-based services using the cost-effective SGI and Xinet solution, Stars Digital discovered a unique paradox. As Ewers explains, "Our clients can't believe our quote. They've been approached by high-concept design firms, and they think that we're not charging them enough. Well, it does not cost £100,000 to design and post an asset management Web site. Using the Xinet solution, I can have something up in about two or three hours, and it costs us nothing but the time to do it. We don't have to write any Web coding and the like; it's all done for us in the software. We tell them it'll cost them about £1,000 a month for us to handle the files and host the Web site. It will be nice when more clients come round to that way of thinking, but it's going to take some time, I think."

"Staggering Reliability"

Ewers has been tracking the SGI and Xinet system since it was originally installed in September 1999 and shares some facts and figures:

"From the installation date, the SGI Origin 200 server has been running 100% of the time—that's three years and six months of continuous, 24/7 use—and we have had no crashes, no freezes, or any hardware faults of any kind. During the entire time, we've had about 20 to 25 users connected throughout our 24- hour day, five days a week. The average file size we access from the servers with 25 users is over 100MB, and at some points you might have 20 users each working on files at 200MB to 300MB each. We get an average network transfer rate of about 5MB per second and that's been constant. We're running about 20 different print queues from the server as well, and on top of that we host around 10 Web sites for various

clients as well. That shows how powerful the system is. I expected it to freeze and crash off and on, like our Mac systems do. I wish the Mac systems were quite as reliable as the SGI hardware. The server's doing an enormous amount of work, and it's doing it with incredible, absolutely staggering reliability. We are very, very pleased with the whole system."

The scalable, high-performance SGI Origin 200 server is an entry-level server that delivers optimized performance for media distribution, file serving, database management, production intensive computing, and Internet applications. Even with the advantages of UNIX® tools and performance and scalability, the entry price is comparable to PC-based servers.

Xinet is headquartered in Berkeley, California, with a subsidiary office in Munich, Germany. Xinet products include FullPress®, the leading prepress server software package, WebNative™, an Internet-based asset management and collaboration system, and WebNative™ Venture, a completely integrated SQL database.

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