

Ascent Media UK secures its key customers' video assets on tape storage with StorSentry™

StorSentry™ fulfils three main operational objectives for the Ascent Media Network Services Engineering team:

- *Pre-emptive risk management*
- *Optimization of tape storage operations costs*
- *High quality service through global visibility on the tape infrastructure.*

Ascent Media Group, LLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ascent Media Corporation (Nasdaq : ASCMA), which provides creative and technical services to the media and entertainment industries.

We met with David Roulson, Head of Engineering and Darrin S. Mackie, Support Specialist. They are responsible for managing and operating the complex broadcast hardware and software infrastructure, which supports the broadcasting activity of their key customers in London.

One key component of the facility is the tape storage infrastructure used for long term information archiving. It currently manages close to 9000 video cartridges (currently LTO-2 ultimately moving to LTO-4 to better cope with volume growth) through a Sun STK SL8500 tape automation library with 12 drives. Storage needs grow rapidly with about 150 new tapes per month. So far, this means about 1 Petabyte of vital customer information. Indeed, the tapes contain long form programming and short form programming & commercials broadcast since 2005; with 2 copies for each program, one for reuse and re-editing and one for transmission.

This is a very active tape archiving environment due to the high reuse rate of media for broadcasting (some cartridges may be mounted up to 1000 times) and also the reediting of programs for new broadcasting (for example language, cultural or broadcasting time adaptations).

Consequently, due to the importance of content for customers and the need for high reusability, it is critical for the broadcast engineering team at Ascent Media to ensure the highest quality of the tape storage infrastructure.

David Roulson explained to us the business drivers for selecting the StorSentry™ solution:

“When searching for a solution for the quality and performance management of our tape infrastructure we wanted to solve three main operational issues:

- Avoid the risk of losing data through proactively controlling the quality of media and drives,

- Optimize operational costs by replacing only the defective media and drives at the right time. In fact rebuilding the content of a tape (whose support cost is only about 100 Euros) may be very expensive and reach several 1000s of Euros of labour costs.

- Improved discrimination of problems in the broadcast operation by the ability to run pre-emptive maintenance actions on drives or media (replacement or data migration) before they fail. For example, we have been able to produce reports with StorSentry™ that were accepted by the supplier. This enables us to have earlier replacement of hardware components prior to a failure, thus avoiding last minute reaction and panic mode for all.”

The StorSentry™ solution and the Hi-Stor (now Quotium) teams were introduced to Ascent Media by Imation at the end of 2006. The software was installed in Q1 2007 and was carefully tested by the engineering team who confirmed their choice and purchased the solution in the fall 2007. StorSentry™ has been up and running for more about two years and monitors the day-to-day operational quality of the tape storage infrastructure.

Darrin S. Mackie confirmed the operational benefit of using StorSentry™ for broadcast tape storage operations: *“StorSentry™ is a very good product which met our expectations and definitely brings high quality to our tape storage management processes. The Hi-Stor (now Quotium) technical and support team are available to help us take full advantage of the product features. We are looking to take advantage of the SNMP feature (integration with hypervisor) and of the emailing alert capability to the engineering team. We may also extend the use of the ad hoc reporting feature (Reporter) to produce specific analysis reports for our customers. The product training will be extended to the full engineering team”*

David Roulson added: *“We would recommend StorSentry™ for its pre-emptive control information on tape media and drive quality, thus minimizing the risks of losing key information stored on tapes; but also for its rich and powerful statistics and reporting features which enable us to perform in-depth quality analysis. The reports that StorSentry™ provides give us detailed information that can be shared amongst other Ascent sites.”*