



CASE STUDY

National Gallery

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National Gallery safeguards the future of Australia's art with EMC Centera and Infront Systems

The National Gallery of Australia's ambitious project to digitise its collection of more than 110,000 artworks, photographs and videos reached a standstill when storage became an issue. That is, until Infront Systems developed a 'Protect and Preserve' program and installed an EMC Centera data storage solution, ensuring that Australia's cultural heritage would be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

In museums and galleries around the world, digitisation technology is rapidly superseding traditional cataloguing methods. Curators are turning to digital means to ensure that despite the irreversible effects of age, precious pieces in their collection will be preserved.

One institution which recognises the importance of creating images that remain unchanged and undamaged over time is the National Gallery of Australia.

Opened in 1982, the Gallery houses the country's largest collection of works by national and international artists. Its collection exceeds 110,000 pieces and includes exceptional works such as Jackson Pollock's controversial 'Blue Poles'. Its commitment to preserving works of art for future generations and making its collections accessible to art lovers who cannot visit the Gallery in person led to the founding of the Digitisation Project in 2004.

Making Art Accessible

Access to the Internet has meant that the traditional boundaries surrounding art appreciation are disintegrating. The ability to view many of the Gallery's collections online

is a huge drawcard, and visitors to the Gallery's website now outnumber those that walk through its doors two to one.

The Gallery's website currently houses 22,500 images of artworks from Australia and around the world. The Gallery believes that making art available to everyone is one of its duties to the Australian public.

"The National Gallery's Digitisation Project gives Australians a rare opportunity to access and research rare works of art in the collection," says Lyn Conybeare, Head of Development, National Gallery of Australia.

"Making images of artworks available on the website, and for reproduction through various mediums, enhances people's opportunity to really understand what's in the collection and gain insights into art."

"The program is particularly significant for Australians in remote areas who can't get to the gallery," adds Leanne Handresk, Senior Manager of the Digitisation Project at the Gallery.

"It is also a wonderful tool for Aboriginal communities in regional areas who are unable to visit Canberra to view their ancestors' art. The Internet gives them an opportunity to experience the work as if they were here."

Ensuring Secure Storage

However, as the number of digitised images grew, storage problems emerged. The Gallery was storing the images on a number of small file servers around the building, which were then backed up to DVD for long-term retention. Storing data in this way made files difficult to manage and hard to locate.

"We needed a flexible storage solution which could scale to meet our growing needs," says Handresk. "The existing system simply wasn't coping with the huge raw digital masterfiles we were creating."

The Gallery selected EMC partner Infront Systems to manage the digitisation project. Infront developed the current 'Protect and Preserve' program, using the EMC Centera's scalable storage platform to ensure the content authenticity of the Gallery's digital assets.

Migrating the enormous amount of data from existing servers to the EMC Centera Content Addressed Storage System solved this problem. The Centera's 4.8 terabytes provide ample space for storing vast amounts of data, and its scalable technology means that it can grow with the Gallery's collection. The Gallery is also using the Centera to archive its email in compliance with the National Archives seven-year record management policy.

The EMC Centera is a new, networked storage system specifically designed to cost effectively manage fixed content – static digital assets. The system ensures that data remains unchanged and uncorrupted by creating a 'forensic digital fingerprint' to guarantee authenticity.

The Centera provides a functionality and scalability not available in tape, optical or traditional disk solutions. One of the main advantages of this for the Gallery is the ability to leverage sub-second web speeds to reproduce data online so that the images can be accessed through the website. Compared to access times of one to three minutes for optical or tape, this is a significant advancement.

Not only are some of the Gallery's most fragile works now digitised, they are stored on an immutable, self-healing system that protects against data corruption, guaranteeing that the images stored today remain unchanged in years to come.

As an institution reliant on government funding and donations, the cost of storing and managing large amounts of data was also an issue. Storing the images on the Centera equates to about two cents per megabyte, compared to seven or eight cents on other high-end production style storage systems. This is in addition to the cost savings achieved by eliminating time-consuming back-up procedures.

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Head of Development, National Gallery of Australia.*

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About the National Gallery

The National Gallery of Australia in Canberra was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1982, and houses the country's largest collection of national and international art. In 2003 there were 400,000 visitors to the Gallery and over a million people experienced the artwork online. The Digitisation Project is making the Gallery's collection available to people for whom it would be otherwise inaccessible.

About EMC

EMC is the world leader in information storage systems, software, networks and services, providing automated networked storage solutions to help organisations extract the maximum value from their information, at the lowest total cost, across every point in the information lifecycle. Information about EMC's products and services can be found at www.emc.com.

About Infront Systems

Infront Systems is an Australian owned company that designs, implements and supports data storage and data management solutions for government and commercial clients. Infront have developed high level consultancy and implementation skills around business continuity/ disaster recovery (BC/DR) solutions. Over 50% of the company is directly involved in technical support. www.infront.net.au

At Infront "What we do, we do bloody well; what we don't do, we don't do."

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