

Visual effects company improves power efficiency, enabling business expansion

- Green efficiency
- HPC



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Steve Lynn, Senior Systems Engineer, Double Negative

Customer profile

Company:	Double Negative
Industry:	Arts, Entertainment & Media
Country:	United Kingdom
Employees:	800
Website:	www.dneg.com

Business need

To meet growing demand and maximise render power, Double Negative needed more power-efficient servers that were fast to deploy, easy to manage and well supported.

Solution

The IT team chose a cluster of Dell blade servers, fitted in Dell modular blade enclosures and protected by ProSupport for IT.



double negative visual effects

Benefits

- Business can expand thanks to improved power performance
- Project is completed ahead of plan with three-day delivery
- Company delivers better customer service with lower energy cost
- Simpler management frees up time for innovation
- Business continuity is protected with fast, flexible support

To Double Negative, processing power is everything. As Europe's largest provider of visual effects for films, and with projects such as Sherlock Holmes and Prince of Persia under its belt, the company relies on powerful high performance computing – or render farming – to process computer-generated images. In recent years, Double Negative has seen rapid growth in demand, as technology has evolved, allowing its customers to incorporate more and more realistic and complex high-resolution images into their films.

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*Steve Lynn,
Senior Systems Engineer,
Double Negative*

Keeping up with demand poses a constant challenge for Steve Lynn, Senior Systems Engineer at Double Negative. He must find ways to expand the company's processing power without losing control of manageability or power and cooling costs. The challenge was compounded when Double Negative neared the power supply limit at one of its two render farm sites. Lynn and his team could only expand capacity by deploying more power-efficient servers. “Power efficiency is our number one priority. We need to give our customers maximum render power in the most power-dense form possible. So, when we expand our render farms, we always go for the most advanced processor technology available,” says Lynn.

Business can expand thanks to improved power performance

On the look-out for ways to achieve greater rendering efficiency, Lynn and his colleagues began talking to Dell about Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 blade servers with Intel® Xeon® Processors 5500 series architecture. Over the years, Double Negative has deployed successive generations of Dell servers, which have served it well. Its 800 staff develop many applications in-house, and with most script compiled against Intel libraries, the company generally favours Intel Processors. The IT team received several test units of the PowerEdge M610 blade server to try out in Double Negative's environment, and soon became convinced that the technology was right for the company. Says Lynn: “Today, we're in a great position to meet increased

demand from our customers without worrying about encountering space, cost or energy restrictions. Dell PowerEdge M610 blade servers fit our requirements perfectly, because they offer maximised power-efficiency in a compact form with a high price-performance ratio.”

Project is completed ahead of plan with three-day delivery

The company received the infrastructure within three days of placing its order, which helped it accommodate tight customer deadlines. “In the film industry, it's often late in the day before projects are confirmed, which gives us little time to put together the extra capacity required. For this reason, quick delivery is critical. Dell delivered our servers in three days, which was not just exceptionally fast, but meant we were able to get everything up and running slightly ahead of schedule,” says Lynn.

Technology at work

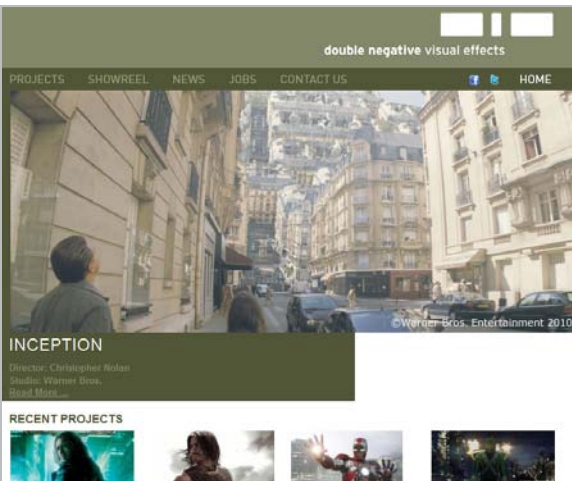
Services

Dell ProSupport for IT
– Next Business Day On-Site Service

Hardware

Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 blade servers with Intel® Xeon® Processors X5570

Dell PowerEdge M1000e modular blade enclosures



Double Negative began by buying 304 PowerEdge M610 blade servers with Intel Xeon Processors X5570 housed in 19 scalable and easy-to-manage PowerEdge M1000e modular blade enclosures. The company's IT support team deployed the servers in just two and a half days. "Deployment of our PowerEdge M610 blade servers was simple, which ticked another box for us. With short lead times and a multiple-server environment, we can't afford to spend much time connecting up the infrastructure," says Lynn.

Company delivers better customer service with lower energy cost

With increased power performance, Double Negative can deliver a better service to its customers without a corresponding increase in power consumption. "The more rendering capacity we can allocate to a project, the better the visual effects we can deliver to our customers," says Lynn. "Our PowerEdge M610 blade servers are more power efficient than the previous generation, allowing us to give our customers more for less energy."

Double Negative minimises its power consumption and heat emissions, because the PowerEdge M610 blade servers, together with the PowerEdge M1000e enclosures, are designed to maximise performance per watt. The enclosure comes with ultra-efficient power supply, fans and airflow design features. The company also reduces power consumption through the blade servers' Intel Intelligent Power Technology, which proactively puts the servers into lower power states during periods when Double Negative has less demand for them.

Simpler management frees up time for innovation

Management is simplified too. The company finds the Dell blade servers require little or no intervention from its 10-person IT support team. Lynn explains: "We don't really have to do anything with our PowerEdge M610 blade servers, because they're so reliable. They just work consistently round the clock, which is what we like. Management is the one thing on which we just don't want to spend time. Our Dell blades mean we can work on other projects, such as developing new solutions for our customers, rather than firefighting."

Double Negative uses industry-specific management tools to run its render farms. Because Dell PowerEdge blade servers are industry standard, the IT team was able to integrate these tools with ease, helping to protect the company's existing IT investment.

Business continuity is protected with fast, flexible support

With more than 800 servers across two sites, it is crucial for Double Negative to have access to strong IT support. The company protects its Dell servers with the Dell ProSupport for IT Next Business Day On-site Service, which gives it 24/7 telephone assistance and on-site service by the next working day.

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"We have complete confidence in our PowerEdge blade servers, but for extra reassurance, it's good to know that Dell ProSupport for IT is there. We've chosen the support level to suit our needs – in our case, the Next Business Day On-site Service is perfect. Because our infrastructure is so extensive, an issue with one server won't impact overall operations, as long as it's solved before the end of the next working day," says Lynn.

"We've always been pleased with the service we've received from Dell ProSupport for IT. In our experience, Dell responds to queries a lot faster than other vendors with which we've had support contracts. The last thing we want to do is spend hours on the phone to a help desk. With Dell, that doesn't happen," he says.

Lynn and his team are currently considering upgrading to the Dell

ProSupport Enterprise-Wide Contract (EWC), which would offer the company additional features such as a Service Delivery Manager and recurring performance reporting. Double Negative would also have the opportunity to apply for enrolment in Fast-Track Dispatch, giving its technicians Dell certification to bypass basic troubleshooting and order parts or services directly over the phone or internet. Says Lynn: "We have a lot of technical expertise in-house, so ProSupport Fast-Track Dispatch would be ideal, giving us a shortcut to the support we need. This might help reduce our management time even further, which would be great."

For more information go to:
dell.com/casestudies/emea and
dell.co.uk/casestudies

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