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SANDY THAILING & CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION:

Maximizing the video team's creative potential — despite COVID challenges

Presented by:
DigitalGlue / creative.space

Content creation *without barriers*

By RaeAnn Slaybaugh

Having worked with Church of the Resurrection (COR.org) in Leawood, Kansas, in some capacity for more than 20 years, it is safe to say Sandy Thailing knows everything there is to know about its video production setup.

Aside from his extensive work with this very large church, Thailing began his career freelancing on the Branch Davidian trial for CourtTV which has led to a lot of corporate production in Dallas, as well as the Kansas City metro area.

So, when the time came to take the COR video production team's output to the next level, he knew how instrumental a more efficient, accessible collaborative media storage system would be. And that would require finding just the right media server and storage-unit elements.

Last summer, Church of the Resurrection Video Production Manager Sandy Thailing was well underway in his search for collaborative media storage options when Senior Executive Director Dan Entwistle passed along a *Church Executive* article: "Storage made for Sundays." Coincidentally, it spotlighted solutions from creative.space that are designed to be "as simple to use as an iPhone and ideally suited to churches." That caught Thailing's attention.

"Our main goal was to have on-premise shared storage for our video editors to access and edit from, eliminating local RAID storage that filled up pretty fast over time," he says, referencing the use of Redundant Array of Independent Disks, a data storage technology that combines multiple physical disk drive components.

His reasons were good: each local RAID unit held eight to 24 terabytes, and each editor had their own RAID array connected to their Mac or desktop. "So, we would do some [video content] sharing, but it was always a little bit convoluted," Thailing explains. "We had to give certain permissions to connect and share media, which meant our machines always had to be on even when editors weren't at their desk."

Consequently, the church's methods for moving media around in the past could best be described as a "sneaker net." Content creators, editors and producers ferried flash drives or USB sticks from editing suites to control rooms instead of using the existing network.

"Most of the time, it was just easier to do it that way," Thailing admits.

Accordingly, this meant video content was stored in several different places — not at all centralized.

"As each RAID filled up (fast), we'd have to buy a new one and the old one would sit on a shelf," Thailing adds. "So, it was tough to know where all the media was. We didn't have a good library because we haven't really gone down the file / data asset management route yet."

Enter: COVID

When Coronavirus struck, the need to "build a better mousetrap" became even more pressing.

Pre-pandemic, the workload was already significant. Most important, Thailing and his team of four video producers — Greg Hoeven, Natalie Cleveland, Kersee Meyer and Cam Hershberger — produced content for the weekly sermon for Senior Pastor Adam Hamilton. They also created video content for live worship; produced a weekly online service (in both modern and traditional formats); and provided support for the rest of COR's ministries — from missions, to kids' discipleship, to youth programs. Additionally, they helped produce DVD-based books for ministry staff who are also published authors.

Once COVID-19 hit, Thailing and his team were asked to ramp up production in a big way — and a lot of it would need to be done from home.

To ensure continuity and engagement with church members, they would produce a weekly live-switched podcast in their small studio, as well as a handful of live-streamed conferences. The production of worship services would also be significantly elevated; pre-COVID, these two live streams were presented as if someone was simply watching the service in the sanctuary. Now, their TechnicalArts ministry would deliver full-production-value products: four different versions of each worship service, all scaled down to 59 minutes for TV. ›››

Technology guided by faith

A member of Saddleback Church for nearly 20 years, Sean Busby, president and co-owner of DigitalGlue and creative.space, says the release of Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* impacted him hugely. Given his 24/7/365 business commitments — servicing the broadcast television network industry with customers like FOX News, The CW, Trinity Broadcasting, and American Forces Network — Busby volunteered at the church in the only way he could manage: parking cars.

In 2003, a friend introduced him to Life. Church pastor Bobby Gruenewald, who was committed to simultaneously sharing the sermon given at the main campus with two new locations. "I immediately realized we were on the same mission," Busby says. Later that year, the Life.Church satellite network was up and running.

Sean Busby

Soon, others — Mars Hill in Seattle; Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall, Texas; and Church Unlimited in Corpus Christi, Texas — inquired about building the same type of network.

But there were only so many churches intent on going this expansive.

Fast forward to now, with Busby's offering of the entry-level //ROGUE PRO server for on-premise storage and the portable //ROGUE enterprise-based video storage system that can live on the editor's desk at church or at home.

Since churches' annual budgets are primarily based on the previous year's giving, creative.space's flexible contacts and all-inclusive monthly or annual OPEX payment structure are a huge appeal for houses of worship like Church of the Resurrection. Customers pay a flat monthly or annual rate that includes hardware, software, and 24/7 proactive support, and contracts are offered in one-, two-, three- or five-year options with the ability to lengthen or shorten the term as needed. For a limited time, the 96TB //ROGUE PRO starts at only $495 per month (usually $595 per month). The portable //ROGUE is the only unit available for one-time purchase starting at $4,795 for 48TB.

"With these tools, a church's video team is finally able to collaborate quicker, producing better and more content than ever before at a price that has never been possible," he explains. "For me, that incredible feeling of giving back, is back." CE

Moving forward, Thailing says remote access — and integrating new tools — will enable him and his team to edit as many as 10 streams of video at once.

With 192 terabytes of storage space, COR "hasn't scratched the surface" of the //AUTEUR server's capabilities.

Services were recorded on Fridays at the church. Outside of those recording days, Thailing and Video Producer and Editor Natalie Cleveland spent a lot of time driving back and forth between their homes to pass off Samsung USB-C drives. They were making it work — but that wasn't good enough for Thailing.

"Now it's a much different feel"

Fortunately, by the time he was introduced to creative.space and its offerings, Thailing was a few years into the search for a better media storage solution.

"We were still just not really sure when to pull the trigger," Thailing recalls. "It was a sizeable agreement to lock into."

What he did know was that on-premise storage was non-negotiable — but DigitalGlue offered something more than that, which was very compelling at the time (and now): remote capabilities.

"Since we were basically into COVID at that point, I thought, *Well, why don't we extend into those remote capabilities?*" he says. "It was clear we were going to need them."

The ideal formula emerged as two new NAS (Network Attached Storage) //ROGUE units as remote or at-home storage and an //AUTEUR storage on-premise server.

The //AUTEUR server "lives" at the church, in the machine room of Building A — one of three main buildings on campus and home to the church's new sanctuary and a large control room where most of the technology for producing worship services is maintained and weekly online worship services are produced. With 192 terabytes of storage space, Thailing says the church "hasn't scratched the surface" of the //AUTEUR server's capabilities.

Additionally, COR's IT team built infrastructure from the server in Building A, to a control room and studio in Building B — which includes a smaller worship venue and where the team produces some conferences — as well as to a new studio in the recently renovated basement of Building C. This new studio will be larger than the one in Building B and include a control room so the video team can manage more podcasts, music videos and conferences as needed for the United Methodist Church.

The two //ROGUE storage units live at Thailing's and Cleveland's homes, respectively.

Of course, Thailing and his team can only work more efficiently if their tools are easy to use. In this respect, he has positive things to say about the new //AUTEUR + //ROGUE setup.

"[DigitalGlue's] software for managing the system — accessed through a browser — is very intuitive: a video producer or editor can manage it," he points out. "This is more than shared storage; it's built more for editors and understands how 'teams' of people can work on 'spaces' and set criteria or permissions for use by 'roles' that are easy to understand for editors and bypasses the language most used by IT.

"So," he adds, "video staff gets it early without making support tickets and bogging down the IT team."

Making the switch (at an inopportune time)

Even in normal times, switching to a robust new media storage solution could present a big challenge, let alone during a pandemic. But that wasn't Thailing's experience at all, largely thanks to a great IT team — which was instrumental to the installation — as well as guidance from creative.space, plus the ease of migration to the DigitalGlue platform.

To accommodate it, the IT team installed fiber and 10-gigabyte copper data connections between the three buildings on campus.

"And creative.space just gave us the unit, told us the parameters that they needed, and then our IT team installed it," Thailing recalls. "It wasn't a big deal."

Thailing and his team began using the //AUTEUR right away, but chose to keep older content on existing servers for archive and backup for the time being.

Moreover, DigitalGlue was able to customize COR's remote video storage to on-premise storage so that, depending on the project, media synching happens overnight. "While COVID has moved our editors home to work, we've developed certain methods of editing that can take place remotely, depending on the project and the turnaround time involved," Thailing explains.

This accessibility made a real difference when Thailing and his team produced this year's Candlelight Christmas Eve and Easter services remotely.

"I just felt more at ease and safe that we had backup solutions already in place," he recalls. "Easter was smoother this year. Well, actually, it was *a lot* smoother this year than last year."

Today, the video production team is still working remotely, for the most part. As such, Thailing says COR is not yet using its new collaborative media storage setup to its full extent. He isn't concerned.

"We haven't put our new system through its paces, but I envision that our five editors will be able to access and crank out media at the same time, day in, week out," he says. "The efficiency of producing something once, in the studio, and having it live-switched over will drastically reduce edit time."

In the coming months, Thailing plans to follow a priority list for which ministries to onboard to the new system, and when. Aside from the other three video editors on his team, the technical arts team — which oversees live production — will likely be next. Following that, he wants to ensure that staff at the church's other campuses can directly access the shared storage server instead of using cloud support.

Thailing says he might also train some volunteers to use the system when things get back to normal.

"It'll be interesting to see how that comes back online as we move further into this year."

Future-focused

In the long term, Thailing is confident in the new system's scalability. He believes COR is set up to easily accommodate whatever the future holds for the video production team.

Actually, this was one of the primary reasons he ultimately chose the //AUTEUR server and //ROGUE storage units: they represented a chance to grow *with* DigitalGlue's managed devices and servers.

"I think we're in a good spot, because we started at the low end of their offering, with a three-year commitment," Thailing explains. "And their customer service is great. I was just on the phone with them this morning — they've been really good about technical support."

In the future, he says he might want to integrate tools that will enable him and his team at COR to edit as many as 10 streams of video at once. Remote access will be key, since Thailing anticipates more teleworking now that they are set up to do so efficiently and effectively.

He is also looking forward to integrating the video production team's creations with the church's streaming platforms. While he says COR's current streaming encoders are "pretty robust," there's currently little integration with the file set he and his team provide to them.

Video Producer and Editor Natalie Cleveland — who recently moved to Tulsa, Okla. — makes great use of one of COR's two //ROGUE storage units.

"It will be good to see a new process for how this platform can connect with our //AUTEUR server and merge these technologies," Thailing says. "DigitalGlue has developed concepts for this integration, and we hope to be an early adopter of the process."

More than anything else, Thailing says he's anticipating great options from creative.space in the area of asset management.

"Like I said, we don't have a library or anything yet, but that's something [creative.space] is working on," Thailing points out. "I'm curious to see what that integration looks like, and how we can find media quicker on the space."

"That's the key thing: they seem to always be improving their system," he adds. "They're always coming out with new ideas and ways to help the end user." CE

Meet Briauna Hankins, Lead Filmmaker and Editor at Faith Promise Church

Name: Briauna Hankins

Favorite Christian Artist/Band and Song: Hillsong UNITED 'Even When It Hurts (LIVE)'

Favorite Camera to Shoot with: Canon C300 MarkIII

Favorite Software to Edit on: Adobe Premiere Pro

BIO: I have been the Lead Filmmaker and Editor for Faith Promise Church in Knoxville, TN for 6 years. Faith Promise is the 49th fastest growing church in the United States according to Outreach 100, and in an average week, my team and I are creating and producing 15+ videos.

Favorite Storage Solution to Manage Your Content on: For a long time our "storage solution" was a constantly growing pile of almost full hard drives that lived on my desk. Then I found creative.space. creative.space is an easy-to-use enterprise-level shared storage platform without the complexity, price tag, and capital expense of an enterprise-level storage platform.

What creative.space System Does Your Team Use? We have the //ROGUE PRO with 96TB of RAW capacity. One of the biggest benefits of the creative.space platform that we weren't able to find with any other storage offering is that we get the hardware, software, and proactive support included in our fixed monthly cost so we never have to worry about hidden fees or expensive annual service contracts.

Biggest Roadblock when Producing Content: Before discovering DigitalGlue's creative.space platform, I was running into endless roadblocks in the form of "hard drive almost full" notification alerts. I found myself asking the question: how can I create a space where all of my content can live simultaneously while also having the ability to access it at any given time across platforms? The answer to that question is exactly what creative.space gave me with the //ROGUE PRO system.

Biggest Pain-Point Reliever of the //ROGUE PRO: The connectivity and accessibility features built into the //ROGUE PRO have helped save me hours of time previously spent finding, transferring, and managing video files. Not only do they have a desktop app that makes accessing our content easy, but there is also a web app that tracks and manages the flow of storage from my many hard drives to the system. On top of that, through the web app I have complete control as an admin to organize teams and grant certain permissions to view or edit specific files based on their role on a project. This has revolutionized our workflow since previous to this system, footage retrieval and collaboration between videographers and editors entailed multiple car rides shuttling various content-filled hard drives.

"We'd spent 4 years searching for a centralized shared storage solution before we found creative.space, and now because of the time it's saved us in the last 6 months, we're on track to make back our investment this year."

- Sandy Thailing,
Video Producer/Production Manager
at Church of the Resurrection

A Shared Storage Offering That Just Works

The creative.space platform is purpose-built to make enterprise storage simple to use and manage without the need for specialized knowledge or a dedicated I.T. department, giving content creators complete control over their projects by removing technology roadblocks so they can do what they do best: create.

Features designed for the day-to-day workflows of content creators:

- One-click mounting through Desktop App

- User-friendly Web App for system management

- Access anywhere with VPN integration

- Built-in FTP server and user management

To learn more email **sales@creative.space** or call **888.519.2021**

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