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Summit Studios stay on top of storage

New backup solution keeps client data secure and available



“In the last couple of years, the amount of storage I’m using has increased tenfold and backing up that amount of data was becoming a headache. With HP RDX, I can easily move my images and project files into a safe, offsite location but recover them very quickly when I want to. It’s the perfect storage system for any photographer.”
Darren Mahuron, Owner, Summit Studios

DARREN MAHURON
PHOTOGRAPHER

HP customer
case study:
Summit Studios

Industry: Fine Art
Photography

Objectives

- Back up project files and project data
- Move backups off site easily and quickly
- Recover older projects from archive simply and efficiently
- Reduce the amount of time spent managing IT

Approach

- Implement HP RDX Removable Disk Backup System as foundation of new data management and archiving approach
- 6 x RDX data cartridges

Results

- Reduced time and complexity for backup and short-term archiving.
- Streamlined processes yield more time to work on new projects
- Improved responsiveness to clients when updating earlier work
- Increased peace of mind knowing data is safely stored offsite

Under the shadow of the Northern Front Range, the city of Fort Collins sits on the border between the flat lands of Middle America and the epic mountains that guard approaches to the west. Like the peaks and the plains, art and technology are often placed on opposite sides of a cultural divide, even though they enhance and enable each other.



Nowhere is this truer than in the area of digital photography where technical innovation has created unparalleled opportunities for creating new works of art but also some challenges for preserving artistic forms. In Fort Collins, one creative company, Summit Studios, is overcoming this challenge using a new storage technology: the HP RDX Removable Disk Backup Solution.

Summit Studios and The Gallery Underground are the brainchild of digital artist and photographer, Darren Mahuron. Seeking a fresh challenge after establishing a career in product and business photography, Mahuron combined his passion for drawing and digital technology to start his own business.



“Setting up Summit Studios in 2006 allowed me to focus a lot more on the creative side of my work,” he says. “What I’m trying to do in my photography is realise a cinematic vision in a single frame. My aim is to confront people with several ideas that converge intuitively as they look into the frame. A lot of my work blurs the edges between the real and surreal and that’s why I think of myself more as a digital painter than a photographer. Photography is really just a means to an end: to get an image I can then manipulate and add meaning to.”

Mahuron prints dramatic life-size images onto panels made from masonite and aluminium using a special technique known as sublimation. The benefit of this approach is that the images retain a vivid, electric clarity that conventional media like paper or canvas just can’t offer.

But as a consequence, the file size of the print-ready artwork is colossal and this creates a problem: how to back up and archive files, both for short term ease of use, as well as long term storage.

Transformational technology

This is where HP RDX technology, with rugged, portable cartridges ranging from 160 GB to 500 GB, has transformed the way Summit Studios manages storing and preserving its artwork and photography. “The file sizes I’m working with increase all the time,” says Mahuron.



“My current camera is a Canon 5D Mark II and in RAW mode it creates pretty big image files. I sometimes take up 40 different shots to bring together into a single, finished picture using Photoshop, so each project can take up anything from a few hundred megabytes to several gigabytes. You can go through a hard drive pretty quickly like that.”

For Mahuron, the HP RDX Removable Disk Backup System has enabled him to take control of his storage and ensured he will always have safe copies of his portfolio and the underlying project files.

“My printer has copies of all the images he outputs, so in that sense, I would always be able to access finished copies of my work if anything happened to my own system. But even then, you’d be talking about restoring hundreds of DVDs, which would be hugely inconvenient and I would still lose all my RAW images and Photoshop project files. Plus it means relying on someone else’s backup arrangements too.”

The HP RDX docking unit connects via a USB cable to Mahuron’s editing station running Microsoft® Windows® Vista™. This has 500 GB capacity, 4 GB RAM, a NVIDIA graphics card with 512 MB VRAM and is linked to two 21” display monitors. He imports and manipulates his images using Adobe Photoshop CS3. The system is connected to a bank of six external USB hard disk drives each ranging from 250 GB to 500 GB to make 2 TB in total.

It’s not just the capacities of HP RDX cartridges that Mahuron finds appealing; it’s their small size and ease of transportation too.

“The different capacities mean I can back up each one of my external six hard drives to a separate RDX cartridge and take everything home with me for safekeeping. There’s no way you could do that with a DVD – I’d need about fifty just to back up one drive. I also like to cycle to work and I couldn’t do that with half a dozen hard drives on my back!”



Just as well that the RDX cartridges are shock-proof and able to cope with being dropped onto a concrete floor from heights of up to 1 metre. The ruggedness of the cartridges, with a minimum of 5,000 loads and unloads, is important too.

“I’m impressed by how tough the cartridges seem. I can’t afford to spend money on something that doesn’t give me good value. I don’t count each load/unload but I’m sure my storage needs will outgrow the capacity of the cartridge long before they wear out. And it’s good to know that I can then just buy a bigger cartridge and still use the same docking station.”

Freedom to choose

For someone running their business alone and without a formal IT background, the simplicity of RDX makes a big difference.

“I’m as technical as I need to be but I prefer to use my energy on getting better at what I do, which is creating art,” says Mahuron. “That’s why the RDX system is great because it’s so simple and efficient. I just bring the cartridges back on-site, move newer files across and then take them away again.”

HP RDX systems support Continuous Data Protection software, allowing users to maintain a “hands-free” backup strategy that always keeps the system up-to-date. Mahuron chooses not to use it but acknowledges its benefits.



“The CDP idea is interesting and a great option for those who want that kind of blanket protection but it doesn’t really fit with my workflow. I prefer to use the RDX cartridges to drag and drop files, with each hard drive mirrored to a different cartridge.”

The masonite and aluminium prints that Summit Studios creates are designed to be very durable and resilient but sometimes clients ask for changes to existing artwork. Which raises a different issue for Mahuron: managing his growing archive of completed projects.

“I like to keep all my old photos and project files easily accessible,” he says. “A lot of my clients return for changes to work we’ve completed previously and it’s really easy for me if I can just re-open the project folder without having to go through some lengthy recovery process. Again, it’s just a simple disk-to-disk transfer.”

Mahuron runs his photographic and imaging studio alone but rents out space at his workshop to other artists, creating The Gallery Underground.

“The Gallery Underground was originally conceived as a place where artists could come and display their work, but over time, it’s become more of a workspace – like an artists’ bubble – where people can work, bounce ideas off each other and find different inspiration. We’re right in the centre of town and members of the public are always welcome to come and drop by and watch what’s happening. It creates an interesting atmosphere that’s less remote and easier to engage with.”

But it’s not just through physical displays and exhibitions that Mahuron raises awareness of his work. Although Summit Studios is primarily about creating cutting edge digital imagery, he also uses video to promote his work on his web site and via social networking sites like You Tube. This also has an impact on storage capacity.



"Video is a great way for me to promote what I'm doing. When I'm doing a shoot for an album cover, for example, it's great to be able to record the process using a HDV camera. But high definition video consumes huge amounts of disk space for capture and editing even though the final sequence is mostly output to a compressed format like MPEG-2. The fact that RDX capacities will continue to grow and that I'll be able to use 750 GB and 1 TB cartridges in my existing docking unit is another advantage of using this system." He laughs. "I'm impatient. This thing can back up over 100 GB an hour and I still want it to be quicker!"

Why HP

Although HP has a proven track record in offering back up technologies to small businesses, Mahuron says that what's important to him is the fact that the company appreciates the challenges he faces and provides solutions to match.

"I'm an artist first and a business owner second. But art is how I make my living so I need to be focused on the practical details too. HP's RDX solution meets my needs without ever getting in the way. In the last couple of years, the amount of storage I'm using has increased tenfold and backing up that amount of data was becoming a headache. With HP's RDX Removable RDX Backup Solution, I can easily move my images and project files into a safe, offsite location but recover them very quickly when I want to. It's the perfect storage system for any photographer."

This is an HP Indigo print.