



Picture Shop Automates Creation of Final Deliverables with Telestream ContentAgent

“There had to be a better way to create every deliverable was a fully manual process. We had to reformat timelines, update audio configurations, and cross-reference studio, network, and archival specifications, which varied dramatically from project to project. With the number of series we had initially that was successful. But with the exciting growth occurring, and the increased number of projects that came with it, a new approach was needed.”

— Todd Korody,
VP of Workflow Technologies.

The Customer

Picture Shop, Streamland Media's picture division, is an award-winning, global, state-of-the-art postproduction house offering comprehensive picture services to the entertainment industry's most imaginative filmmakers and top-tier studios. Its roster of talent and technologists have contributed to such films and series as *The Fablemans*, Guillermo Del Toro's *Pinocchio*, *The Walking Dead*, *Better Call Saul*, *Bridgerton*, and many, many more.

The facility uses Telestream ContentAgent™, a user-friendly file-based workflow engine specifically designed for postproduction, to automate transcoding and creation of final deliverables, which often go straight to air.

A good problem to have: Growth

The company has come a long way since its founding in 2016 as a boutique post house in Burbank to today being the biggest picture postproduction company in the world. VP of Workflow Technologies Todd Korody and Editorial and Deliverables Workflow Specialist David Altschuler have been there since the beginning, making sure the postproduction pipeline keeps throughput high and errors low. As the demand for entertainment content and channels to watch it on grew, so did the company's success. The amount of work coming in and variation of deliverables going out began to outpace the existing transcoding and finals delivery process the two had previously relied upon.

Picture Shop wanted a solution that would create consistency and efficiency in creating and checking deliverables. “We needed something plug and play for the facility, so we wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel every time,” Altschuler said.

When considering an automation app, ease of use was top of mind for Picture Shop. “We didn’t want to be locked down to having a single specialized person that operated it. We wanted any deliverable operator to be able to come in and easily manipulate workflows, deploy them, and get them rolling for any new client deliverables as requested no matter how last minute,” said Korody.

Other requirements were the ability to support a wide range of codecs, and a robust API implementation and watch folder support that enabled quick deployment for one-off cases.

The Solution: Telestream ContentAgent

After comparing various solutions, they found that Telestream’s ContentAgent fit their needs perfectly.

The software-based application can automate creation of deliverables like broadcast, international masters and viewing copies. At its foundation is ContentCentral™, a powerful workflow software service manager that orchestrates everything from handing jobs out to the transcoding engines and overseeing watch folders, to managing the job queue and third-party interoperability during a workflow. “ContentAgent gave us an extremely user-friendly UI and watch folder API integration that we could use quickly and effectively to get the right tools for any job into our artists’ hands. That won us over,” Korody said. Picture Shop began using the app in 2019.

Korody explained, “We’ve tokenized the XML structure, allowing us to take one master file in, then create all the different client deliverables from it, simultaneously.”

Altschuler added, “What operators see is a dead simple tool. They just click and drag a bunch of files to it and the output is guaranteed to be the same every time. What is programmed and what is rendered and produced by ContentAgent is guaranteed to be accurate.”

ContentAgent automates a key part of Picture Shop’s workflow. Once their creative teams finish an episode or project, they output the graded and formatted files, tie in audio channels and necessary auxiliary materials in a standardized manner, and import into ContentAgent. ContentAgent then automatically outputs all of the separate deliveries from the content sources in the proper codec and layout.

While that sounds straightforward, complexity and time quickly adds up when considering the variety of deliverables needed, which can range from work-in-progress checkers to air masters to studio final archival -- all with different slates, different head build and tail formats, audio configurations, and more. It’s not uncommon for fifteen or more different deliverables to be required from one master file.

To achieve their vision of a tool that was easy for non-expert operators to use, Korody leveraged ContentAgent’s API to write a front end for the shop’s IO and Deliverables teams. He and Altschuler pre-process client deliverable spec sheets and create profiles that their front end uses to present operators with a quick and easy tool for selecting deliverables and reslating streams. They enter the timecodes for when things need to be chopped and/or trimmed, then in the background the XMLs get saved out and fed into the Content Agent watch folder system.

Impact: 4X throughput and error-free output

While ease of use is critical for Picture Shop’s operation, speed and throughput is vital to their growing business. Korody said, “Before we brought in ContentAgent we had to essentially make a unique timeline every time we had a different head build. If anything in the video changed, it was a separate render. Part of what ContentAgent does for us is that instead of needing an operator to render one thing at a time, we are able to create those timeline configurations on the fly, through our API integration, and also run them simultaneously within one content agent node. It can run four simultaneous drops. So it made things at least four times faster than having an operator do each render one at a time.”

Automating the process also reduced the opportunity for human error. “ContentAgent gives us the ability to handle complexity without having an operator cut up a timeline six ways to Sunday,” Altschuler said. “We just submit everything once and have all the files come out the way they need to be. Any kind of mistake is eliminated.”

Looking ahead

With the pandemic cementing end-to-end digital workflows, Korody and Altschuler see the opportunity to leverage ContentAgent in new ways, and to extend its use across Picture Shop’s other facilities around the globe. “We’re living in a file-based world now, and ContentAgent fits right into the pieces of the puzzle with digital delivery pipelines where everything flows directly from color into our process to QC to air. Having this tool helps us handle the influx of more requests and new types of formats. No matter what a client’s requirements are, it’s easy for us to create and encode, but still wrap it into a container they’re familiar with. It’s just a whole lot easier.”

