

VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL

HP Workstations powers tech-heavy entertainment education



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—Marty Hasselbach, Managing Director, Vancouver Film School

HP customer case study: Vancouver Film School turns to HP Workstations as tool for teaching graphics-intensive curriculum

Industry: Entertainment education

Objective:

Provide technology platform for intensive film/graphics educational program

Approach:

Vancouver Film School has standardized on HP xw-series Workstations for use in the academic program, with some 1,000 HP Workstations currently being used on campus

IT improvements:

- High level of reliability requires less IT support
- Standardization facilitates hardware deployment, support

Business benefits:

- Students can focus on creative choices, rather than the technology
- Leasing through HP Financial Services eliminates need for major capital outlay, facilitates regular technology refresh
- HP partnership enables quick problem resolution, promotes long-term technology planning



“Results Matter”—Marty Hasselbach, Managing Director of the Vancouver Film School believes it so strongly that it has become the school’s motto, proudly displayed next to the VFS name. “At the end of the day, our graduates need to go into the industry and show that they can do what the industry needs them to do. Everything we do here has to have a meaningful outcome. What you learn in class today will be important to what you produce tomorrow, and the next day, and so on.”

To make sure VFS graduates are among the best prepared in the world, the school teaches with professional-quality technology tools like those students will ultimately use in the ‘real world.’ The centerpiece

“Our master lease with HPFS gives us the flexibility and freedom to act quickly. We can add additional products whenever we need to.”

Marty Hasselbach, Managing Director,
Vancouver Film School

of those tools: HP Workstations. The school has standardized on HP Workstations and has nearly 1,000 of them operating across its campus.

“First and foremost, we choose HP Workstations for their reliability,” says Hasselbach. “They’re also certified by the software vendors whose products our students use—companies like Avid and Softimage—which is another important reason we’ve chosen to standardize on HP products.”

Leasing through HP Financial Services helps the school build technology costs into its annual budget, rather than requiring large financial outlays. It also facilitates regular technology refresh—a critical consideration given the central role of technology in the entertainment industry where VFS graduates will eventually work.

Intensive program demands reliable technology

Vancouver Film School, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada is recognized worldwide as one of the premier training grounds for filmmakers, digital animators, game designers and entertainment specialists of all kinds. With more than 1,000 full-time students, it is Canada’s largest entertainment school.

Its educational model is distinctive: one year of highly intensive instruction and production, incorporating lectures, tutorials, collaborative production, mentorship with working professionals, and guest speakers from the industry. VFS is “the studio that teaches.”

“In essence, a student here learns in one year what they would normally learn in four years,” Hasselbach

says. “The same way that language students benefit from going to the country where a language is spoken and totally immersing themselves in that culture, our students benefit from learning non-stop, around the clock, at an accelerated pace.”

He says the campus operates 24 hours a day. That goes for the HP Workstations, too. “Because we run 24 hours a day, we have to have equipment with the highest level of quality and reliability,” Hasselbach says. “HP Workstations deliver the reliability we need.”

Of the 1,000 HP Workstations currently on campus, about 80 percent are xw8400 and xw8600 Workstations used by students. The newest are HP xw8600 Workstations. They come loaded with both genuine Windows® Vista® Business, with a downgrade to Windows XP Professional custom-installed, and Linux operating systems to assure compatibility with the full range of software used in the VFS curriculum. The xw8600 Workstations are configured with 4 GB of RAM, 500 GB SATA hard drives for fast I/O, and NVIDIA Quadro FX-series or GeForce GTX video cards.

Many of the Workstations dedicated to student use drive dual monitors. One monitor is dedicated to displaying and previewing images; the other to software palettes, work spaces, and working materials (a collection of digitized film clips, for example). The Workstations are configured for the best possible graphics processing, since graphics are central to the applications used at VFS and throughout the entertainment industry.

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Students produce their work using a wide range of industry-standard software, from Avid software for editing to Autodesk (Maya, 3ds Max, MotionBuilder) and Side Effects (Houdini) software for digital animation, the full Adobe® Creative Suite graphics software, Motion Analysis Corporation systems for 3D motion capture and analysis, and much more.

Hasselbach says the educational focus is not simply on learning to use its palette of technology tools, but on using them effectively to tell stories. “We have

HP recommends
Windows Vista®
Business

Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

Desktop technology for entertainment education

Primary hardware

- HP xw8600 Workstations
- HP xw8400 Workstations

Primary software

- Genuine Windows Vista Business with downgrade to Windows XP Professional custom-installed*+
- Microsoft® Office
- Linux

HP Services

- HP Financial Services

HP recommends Windows Vista® Business

ambitious expectations for our students, and HP tools help them realize those expectations,” he explains. “We want students to exercise their creative muscle, and we want to make sure the technology doesn’t get in their way. The reliability and speed of the technology makes sure it isn’t. Instead, it becomes a transparent tool with which they can create.”

Third generation of HP technology

HP xw8600 Workstations are the third generation of HP Workstations to be used at VFS. The school’s frequent technology refresh—it aims for a two-year lifecycle for each generation—is a reflection of the central role that technology has assumed in the film and creative industries. “We absolutely have to stay current with the technology,” Hasselbach says. “It’s important for us to be in line with the lifecycle of the software we’re running, so that it runs quickly and reliably. We also want to prepare students by exposing them to the technology they’ll find in the workplace when they graduate.”

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Prior to VFS’ decision to standardize on HP Workstations, the school dealt with another vendor that fell short of Hasselbach’s expectations. “It was just a matter of overall support and service not meeting our needs,” he explains. “With HP, on the other hand, we deal with a variety of people—an account manager, service and support staff, financing specialists—and they all work together to give us, the user, the best possible experience.”

It all goes back to the idea that “Results Matter.” “HP delivers for us in every area where we interface with them. We only want to work with companies that deliver the results that we expect. And HP has earned that reputation here.”

From a managerial standpoint, Hasselbach adds, there’s a real benefit to standardizing on a single Workstation platform. There are several standardized software images (supporting the school’s 13 disciplines), and it’s important to find a platform that

supports all the software tools. Standardizing also facilitates component swapping, technical support, and re-balancing hardware in each of the school’s disciplines as enrollments shift.

HP leasing provides flexibility

HP Workstations are all acquired through leasing with HP Financial Services (HPFS). “HP Financial Services is an important part of the partnership we have with HP,” explains Hasselbach. “Leasing helps us to keep our technology current and manage our cash flow effectively.”

Leasing with HPFS enables the school to avoid having to make large cash outlays every few years. The built-in, steady cost of leasing is easier to budget for, Hasselbach notes—especially valuable in challenging economic times. And it gives the school the option of “down streaming” Workstations (most recently, some HP xw8200 models) to other parts of the school—such as administration—at a modest cost when it’s time to upgrade to new technology in the classroom.

The school’s master lease with HPFS gives the school flexibility and freedom to act quickly. “We can add additional products whenever we need to. Having the flexibility to just add lease schedules for additional items is a huge advantage. We’re not wasting the time going through a long leasing process and a lot of paperwork that you have when you start from scratch.”

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Hasselbach considers HP a partner—encompassing everything from technology to financing and other special programs. “The partnership with HP works for us because HP people are problem solvers. They’re quick to provide solutions and ideas. We turn to HP for reliable products because we’re open 24 hours a day and our Workstations rarely have downtime. And when they do need attention, they are taken care of very quickly.



"It's the same way throughout the organization, from the product experts to the educational support and financial services group—they all play a role in our relationship. There's a comfort level here that only comes from a long-term, two-way relationship."

Results above all else

Though a relatively new school in the big scheme of things —VFS is just now in its 21st year, but has developed a significant worldwide reputation. It draws half its student body from outside Canada, with its own full-time VFS recruiting offices located in Mexico, China, Korea and India. Alumni work for leading

companies including Pixar, LucasFilm and Electronic Arts, and have won their share of prestigious awards, including Emmys and Oscars.

Hasselbach says the educational program at VFS is constantly being re-evaluated and tweaked to ensure it remains responsive to the industry and to student needs. "We continue to fine tune the programs. At the end of the day, it's all about our students, our graduates, and their success," he notes. "VFS, like the entertainment industry, values the ability to produce quality results above all else. We want to see more and more great things happen for our graduates."

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