

Experts in Action

Superior Streaming

Many companies today want to differentiate their websites by integrating streaming video and audio into them, but they don't know how to do it. Streaming media over the web is a relatively complex process that involves overcoming bandwidth limitations, encoding the video, and putting the video onto a server for streaming. Sorenson Services USA, a member of the Apple Solution Experts program, helps its clients achieve the results they want with streaming media using the superior quality of QuickTime.

High-quality web video is a great way for companies to extend their reach and to enrich their websites. One client of Sorenson Services USA (SSUSA) — expert digital media training company Future Media Concepts, Inc. (FMC) — wanted to offer their training online to reach a broader audience. At the same time, they needed to maintain a high level of quality, comparable to in-classroom training.



SORENSON
SERVICES USA

FMC's software training video content is complex, featuring instructors speaking with the visual aid of detailed screen shots. This posed a challenge because FMC wanted to retain all of the rich detail of the video footage while still delivering training to a broad audience, including participants with dial-up modems as well as those with high-bandwidth connections.

This meant that SSUSA would have to find a way to retain quality and detail at the same time. Sorenson Services USA recommended QuickTime and

QuickTime TV, Apple's high-quality network for streaming audio and video. "QuickTime let us deliver top-quality web video, and QuickTime TV ensured high visibility for the training from Apple's promotional efforts," says Dale Sorenson, president of Sorenson Services USA. "For distribution, we used Akamai, a reliable Internet content delivery network affiliated with QuickTime TV."

SSUSA also devised a two-pronged delivery system, using progressive streaming to deliver to dial-up modem viewers and true streaming for broadband users. With progressive streaming, users must wait a few minutes for the video to download while users with high-bandwidth connections can view the video in near real-time.

"File size versus quality is the eternal challenge when it comes to streaming media," explains Sorenson. "Based on QuickTime's ability to support both progressive and true streaming, we were able to deliver the extremely high level of quality required for the online training to be effective."

"Pay Per View" Debut

FMC faced another challenge in delivering its training online. It needed a "pay-per-view" business model to ensure that those viewing the training were paying for it. This was the first time that a QuickTime TV channel was going to charge for its content. SSUSA developed a specialized means of authenticating users so that only valid students who pay for courses can view FMC's training.



The Facts

The Company

Sorenson Services USA

Solution Expert Type

Consultant

Website

<http://www.sorenson-usa.com/>

Description of Services

Provides expert digital video and streaming media consulting, training, encoding, compression, and project management.

Areas of Specialty

Digital video and streaming media consulting

“The Apple Solution Experts program is pure gold for us.”

— Dale Sorenson
President, Sorenson Services USA

“When QuickTime 5 is released, it will offer built-in authentication capabilities that will allow content providers to know who their viewers are,” says Sorenson. “This is going to be a great advance and it will result in an explosion in QuickTime content because providers will be able to rest assured that their content is protected.”

From ‘We Want Web Video’ to ‘We Have Web Video’

For clients like FMC, Sorenson Services USA provides “A to Z” services for integrating streaming media into their websites. SSUSA helps its clients choose which streaming formats are right for them, helps them select and implement a server strategy, advises them on video production for the web, develops budgets and schedules, then provides the project management to make it all happen.

SSUSA also helps its clients evaluate and select the right hosting strategy for delivering their QuickTime content. For clients who want to keep their capabilities in-house, the right choice for streaming media is often their own Macintosh Server G4 with Mac OS X Server running QuickTime Streaming Server. For others, the best choice is outsourcing to a hosting service like BopJet.net, another member of the Apple Solution Experts program. As a high-end choice, QuickTime TV provides optimal quality.



SSUSA guides clients through the process of selecting the right provider based on their needs and budget. “Essentially, we use Apple technologies to help our clients go from, ‘we want video on our website,’ to, ‘we have video on our web site!’” says Sorenson.

SSUSA has also developed a freely available tool for QuickTime content providers. The Video Bandwidth Estimator (VBE) web application helps encoders determine the ideal bit rate for their web video. “VBE helps encoders make the wisest possible size-versus-quality decisions and achieve the superior quality that the QuickTime architecture offers,” says Sorenson.

The Apple Solution Experts program not only helps keep Sorenson Services USA on top of all the latest technical developments about QuickTime, QuickTime Streaming Server, and other Apple technologies, but it also introduces Sorenson to new clients wanting to deliver web video. “The Apple Solution Experts program is pure gold for us,” says Sorenson. “We’ve had a substantial increase in revenue — directly traceable to the increased market exposure that the Apple Solution Experts program provides.”



Delivering Custom High-Quality Solutions with QuickTime

SSUSA's clients span the gamut, from companies wanting to deliver training online to companies like top multimedia medical communications company Hurd Studios. Known for the extreme high quality and realism of its work, Hurd Studios serves large pharmaceutical companies. Clients turn to Hurd to create animations, CD-ROMs, and other multimedia materials designed to educate physicians and consumers who might be candidates for particular drugs. Most projects depict how a disease progresses, then vividly illustrate through 3D animations how a new drug will act to curb or cure the disease.

When one company wanted to integrate a high-end medical animation into their website, Hurd Studios began the search for a consultant who could help. The overarching goal was to preserve the quality of the video, which would be aimed at physicians visiting the pharmaceutical company's website. After trying two different companies and being disappointed with the quality of the streaming media they delivered, Hurd Studios contacted Sorenson Services USA. SSUSA developed a delivery system with three different versions to suit the needs of a variety of website visitors — those with low-, medium-, and high-bandwidth connections.

“We were very happy with the end result. The video quality was maintained — a testament to Dale Sorenson's high level of QuickTime expertise — and our client was satisfied with the download times,” says Amalia Delicari, computer graphics producer for Hurd Studios. “Even more important, we learned we could trust Sorenson Services USA to deliver on time, answer our technical questions, and communicate clearly during all phases of the project.”

Now that Dale Sorenson has established himself as a leading consultant in the world of streaming media, he's excited about what's ahead. “Streaming media's time has come. It is a huge new market that's poised for explosive growth, yet there are only a few people who really know how to do it well,” says Sorenson. “Thanks to the power of QuickTime and a lot of experience and training, we're able to help clients take advantage of today's exciting new streaming media technologies.”