



Starz Shines Bright in Internet Movie Downloads With Help From Savvis

Overview

As one of America's leading and most innovative media players, Starz Entertainment delivers quality movies and videos – its own original productions as well as those acquired from other entertainment companies – through a variety of broadcast, online, and retail venues. A wholly owned subsidiary of Liberty Media Corporation, Starz is thriving in a highly competitive market. Starz Entertainment grew its Starz and Encore brands subscriber base by approximately 5 percent and 12 percent, respectively, in 2007, to approximately 16 million and 31 million subscribers each. In addition to selling DVDs and operating 16 pay TV channels that air more than 1,000 movies per month, Starz is in the forefront of the new media revolution. Because it views emerging digital technology as essential to the future of the media business, Starz is investing heavily in technologies that give consumers greater flexibility in how, when, and where they consume content.

Challenge

In January 2006, Starz released the first-ever subscription movie download service. Called Vongo, the service gave consumers unlimited downloads from a large library of movies and other content over the Internet for a flat monthly fee. The market response was immediate and favorable. Starz also had a longstanding goal of wholesaling a version of Vongo to license to cable and satellite companies, telecommunications firms, movie distributors, and other third-party content providers. These distribution partners, in turn, would sell the service to their consumer customers (much like they do for Starz' premium channels and traditional on-demand services. Today, through the Starz Play service – delivered via Starz partners such as Netflix and Verizon – consumers can access more than 2,500 movies and other video content via their Windows PCs and select portable media players.

Starz has two data centers of its own – one for internal operations, and one for its broadcasting activities – it made the decision upfront not to support its new download service internally. "We decided to go with a third-party hosting vendor so that we could quickly add capacity and bandwidth if the service took off without making a huge additional capital investment," said Jason Wyrick, Manager, Environment Team Starz. "We also needed assured,

Company:

Starz Entertainment

Industry:

Entertainment

Line of Business:

Produces, acquires, distributes, and resells movie and other video content through third-party content providers

Target Market:

Consumers

Location:

Englewood, Colorado

Summary:

After rolling out a strategic new Internet movie download service, Starz Entertainment needed to find a managed hosting vendor that could meet its rigorous availability requirements and aggressive growth projections. Starz turned to Savvis after a brief engagement with another vendor that resulted in unacceptable amounts of unplanned service outages. By providing utterly reliable and scalable managing hosting, network, and security managed services, Savvis is helping Starz become a market leader in the fast-growing, but fiercely competitive, digital download market space.



measured availability from our service provider. If we have an outage we risk not living up to our SLA with our wholesale partners.” But there was something even more at stake, he said: Starz’ reputation in a promising emerging market. “In this new market, we must maintain the highest level of availability, not just to retain our existing customers, but to attract new ones,” he said. “Without a reliable infrastructure, we simply wouldn’t be able to do this.”

Solution

Starz went shopping for a managed hosting vendor to help take on the challenge.

“We visited Savvis’ data center and the operations center, and sat down with the people who would be answering our calls,” he said. “We reviewed their processes, analyzed their escalation procedures, witnessed how they troubleshoot problems. We couldn’t have been more thorough – or more satisfied.” His conclusion? “Savvis is everything a top-tier managed service provider should be.”

Today, Starz depends on Savvis for a broad range of managed services, from managed hosting, to managed network and security. Savvis hosts the back-end of the Starz Play system, manages all the network devices, and provides firewall protection as well as distributed denial of service attack mitigation and other security services. Starz also contracted with Savvis’ Professional Services Group to design and migrate the data center, and to provide ongoing oversight through its Program Management Service.

Benefits

Starz experienced the Savvis difference even before the official start date of the contract. Because the outgoing vendor was unable to keep the Starz system available, Savvis jumped in and began the migration ahead of schedule. The migration itself was “flawless,” said Wyrick.

And Savvis professionals went the extra mile, he said. He remembers one weekend, early on, when he called Savvis for help with a network performance issue. The account management team Savvis had assigned to Starz not only responded immediately, “but gave up their weekend, without notice and without complaints, and worked around the clock until we’d solved the problem,” he said.

Wyrick saw the same devotion to customer service in the summer of 2008, when Starz rolled out a multimillion dollar movie marketing campaign that was centered on the company’s Web site. The Web site was struggling with a surge in traffic that was even greater than expected. “Savvis leapt into action – increasing our bandwidth over the firewall, monitoring our traffic over a very busy weekend, and generally jumping through hoops on our behalf,” said Wyrick, who said that despite the fact that there was no time to negotiate a formal contract for the extra work, “Savvis came through for us.”

The Future

Things are looking very bright for Starz, and its Starz Play service. Starz is optimistic that it will announce additional Starz Play affiliation deals in the future. Wyrick is confident that Savvis can help Starz handle the increased load. And it’s asking Savvis to take on more – and more prominent – responsibilities. “We’re driving more and more of our customer-facing services to Savvis because of the success we’ve had,” said Wyrick. “Everything that is critical from a brand or service-delivery point of view will be hosted with Savvis going forward. That way, we know it will be done right.”

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**– Jason Wyrick,
Manager, Environment Team
Starz Entertainment**

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