

CHESA Simplifies Complex Networks' Media Asset Management and Data Storage Solutions

New Reliable & Scalable Storage Systems Streamline Company's Workflow Throughout Continuous and Steady Growth



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OVERVIEW

Launching in 2002 as a print publication for men's fashion, Complex Networks has since grown to become one of the world's leading media entertainment networks for youth-oriented programming. A key acquisition significantly expanded its number of original series offerings as well as size of its team. With these expansions, technical requirements for a scalable, reliable and unified storage network increased. To address its growing needs, Complex Networks brought on CHESA, leading experts in media asset management and storage solutions, to upgrade its media technology network and optimize the company's workflow.



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“(CHESA) were a wealth of information right from that first call. We discussed all of our needs, talked about all the solutions I had been researching and diagnosed all of the challenges we had been having.”

- Jermaine Harrell

Manager of Media Infrastructure and Technology
Complex Networks



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ABOUT COMPLEX NETWORKS

Complex Networks is a New York-based global media and youth entertainment network with a unique and expansive reach to millennial and Gen Z audiences. Co-founded in 2002 by CEO Rich Antoniello and fashion designer Marc Ecko, Complex is a media platform and an online community that publishes the best, most diverse, and most relevant voices in pop culture, reporting on popular and emerging trends in streetwear and style, sneakers, food, music, and sports.

The company has grown considerably since 2002, when Complex was a print publication covering men's fashion. In September 2007, Complex launched Complex Media in order to fully capitalize on the trend toward digital content. By 2016, Complex was acquired by a joint venture between Hearst Communications and Verizon Communications, Verizon Hearst Media Partners. The venture emphasized a goal of building "a portfolio of the emerging digital brands of the future for the millennial and Gen-Z audience," and proposed that Complex would develop content for Verizon-owned AOL and gogo.

Currently, the network produces and licenses more than 35 hit shows, including *Sneaker Shopping*, *Hot Ones*, *Everyday Struggle*, *The Burger Show* and *Full Size Run*, airing on its own YouTube and owned and operated channels, as well as a host of channels including Netflix, Hulu, TBS, Tru, BET, Apple TV, Roku, Pluto TV, ESPN, Fuse and more.

COMPLEX
NETWORKS™



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CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

As Complex Networks continued to grow, it was producing more and more video content. As a result, the video content team was shifting and Jermaine Harrell, who had already been with Complex, had also become a bigger part of that team. By the time the joint Hearst Communications/Verizon Communications acquisition took place in 2016, Harrell's role had taken shape and he was Manager of Media Infrastructure and Technology. With the company producing or licensing more than 35 programs, Harrell recognized that the makeshift and off-the-shelf networking solutions it was relying on for its storage and media asset management were no longer cutting it, and it was time for a change.

"We were amassing large amounts of content, and we needed a much more robust system," explains Harrell. He says that when he first joined, the post production team of eight editors captured, ingested, and edited in-house, but today that number has grown to 45 to 50 in-house editors. There's also an in-house production team that's shooting content, and the network is licensing content too.

Harrell continues that, prior to the acquisition, Complex Network was editing shows such as Hot Ones and Sneaker Shopping in house, as well as 10 to 15 other shows. After the acquisition that number increased, bringing with it two other verticals — VH Media Partners' Rated Red network for heartland millennials and the Seriously TV sketch comedy network. The team then had additional responsibilities — for Verizon's AOL and gogo platforms [advertising-based media service], producing short form and pushing it to gogo. The number of Complex employees engaging with the Media infrastructure also increased with the acquisition.



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"We had various makeshift solutions throughout the network for different groups of people, working on different shows," explains Harrell. "We had another storage system here that our main editors were working off of in 720p and 1080p and in reduced frame rates. We had about 10 editors cutting on Adobe Premiere on that system at a time without struggling, but with the additional responsibilities, we still had homebrew solutions for other teams. We had Mac Pros attached to large Thunderbolt storage arrays. One team had one solution, another team had a different solution — some were professional solutions while others were really just makeshift. And we were constantly hitting maximum capacity. I knew we needed one robust and reliable system, for storage and asset management, that could stand up to the heavy usage as well as the team's continuously evolving needs. It needed to scale up along with the company."

Harrell says that in 2016, when he was attending the National Association of Broadcasters show in Las Vegas, he was researching various solutions and speaking with a number of industry professionals. However, it wasn't until he returned from the show, that a chance encounter at a training session led to a recommendation for CHESA, leading experts in media asset management and storage solutions.

"I was told that CHESA had an amazing team, and it was so true," says Harrell. "They were a wealth of information right from that first call. We discussed all of our needs, talked about all the solutions I had been researching and diagnosed all of the challenges we had been having."

CHESA offered Complex Networks a four-stage solution. First, looking at the fractured asset management and storage system, the CHESA team recommended a **Quantum StorNext SAN**, a modern file system with advanced data management and high-speed access to data, with 16 fiber seats. First and foremost, it boosted Complex's speed in accessing files, while also allowing editors to see what each of the other teams were working on. This enabled a more collaborative workflow and increased productivity.

"I couldn't believe how completely different the new workflow was from how we had previously been doing things," said Harrell. With one single point of storage, multiple users/teams are now able to access files. "With more capacity, it increased the connectivity for multiple groups," he adds. "And the system will grow along with our needs."

While the initial storage and asset management challenges were addressed, CHESA also assisted in integrating **Telestream's Vantage video transcoder** into the company's system. Initially needed for specific cases, Vantage was eventually integrated with their MAM for file format support. Among other things, it was intended to help bridge incompatible devices with fast, file-based transcoding. Running on the Telestream Lightspeed server, the solution helped accelerate the team's video processing power.



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After the acquisition took place, the company's New York City headquarters were relocated to a new Times Square address in December 2017. That's when CHESA provided a third solution to Complex Networks, setting the company up with a custom CHESA solution utilizing Linux and Archiware to provide a backup to the SAN at the old location and secure that content throughout the transition. That system then transitioned to back up and archived the content at the new location long term. CHESA helped the team not only decide which technology and teams to move first, and how the solutions should be wired, but also what telecom companies to use in the new location that would offer the best connectivity.

Once the move was complete, CHESA expanded Complex Networks' storage because at the new office, the editors wanted to be working on fiber. Complex added another 96-port fiber switch to connect 80 potential users. "We had 40 edit stations in 15 suites and then added another 250TB to storage," explained Harrell.

"Complex Networks has seen significant growth for many years in a way that really tested the ability of their infrastructure and media workflows to scale with them. We believe that your technology solutions have to be positioned to both handle and accelerate organizational growth, not lag behind and slow it down," explains Jason Paquin, CHESA's Chief Executive Officer. "The whole Complex team has been excellent at looking forward, planning ahead, and collaborating with our Solutions Architects and Service teams to position their asset management and storage environments to handle their continued growth."

THE CHESA DIFFERENCE

According to Harrell, what he values most about CHESA is their ability to bring advanced technical knowledge of various systems and solutions to the table. "They certainly get deep into the technology, there's no question about that," he says. "But what's also great about the company are the key relationships that have developed from working side by side with them."

He explains how the first point of contact forged introductions to other CHESA team members which lead to long-standing relationships. "I know more people at CHESA than with any other vendor," he says. "People and relationships are everything! The company offers outstanding customer service that is ongoing and is solutions-oriented. They created custom monitoring tools for us and came in with solutions that solved every one of our storage and media asset management challenges. Now I feel as though they are life-long technology partners. In fact, they call us whenever they're alerted and when there are updates we should have. They are always one step ahead. We really value the extra effort."



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OUTCOME

CHESA was able to help streamline integrating a viable storage system at Complex Networks so that the company now has a unified, robust, and scalable solution that will grow along with the company. CHESA was also able to help make Complex Networks' New York City move as easy as possible, securing the company's content throughout the process.

"CHESA is our first point of contact for any hardware needs we may have when it comes to upgrading," says Harrell. "We're currently having some significant discussions with them now on distributed software and hardware, considering cloud services or more likely, a second tier of storage to accommodate our continued growth."

"CHESA goes the extra mile to look at pain points and considers the road ahead. Alongside their high-level consultation and support services, they realize the importance of the research and discovery phase before the sale. That's the kind of partner we need to help with our continued success."

This case study demonstrates ways that CHESA can help organizations develop a successful, scalable solution with ongoing support that fits your needs.

**Ready to discuss how we can
bolster your organization?**

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