



**“Everything’s A-OK” with Sesame Workshop’s  
10+-Terabyte Storage Solution from Nexsan and Hitachi GST**



The *Information Please* online almanac lists just two inspiring milestones for 1969. One is Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the moon. The other is the debut of *Sesame Street*, the landmark educational show that introduced the world’s children to Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch and Cookie Monster. Thirty-five years later, *Sesame Street* and its lovable characters continue to delight millions of children speaking more than a dozen languages in 148 countries on six continents.

Now, with help from Nexsan and Hitachi Global Storage Technologies (Hitachi GST), the non-profit Sesame Workshop has a new digital asset management solution that not only preserves *Sesame Street* episodes for posterity, but also gives the non-profit a leg up on productivity for re-purposing content in future productions.

“We use and reuse our content because the basic educational lessons don’t change. Children still need to learn their A-B-C’s and 1-2-3’s,” said Sherra Pierre-March, Sesame Workshop vice president of information systems. “That’s why a show in 2004 can have segments that go back to 2000 or 1994 or even 1969.”

**From Manual to Online Access**

Though Sesame Workshop is best known in the United States for producing *Sesame Street* and a host of other children’s shows, it also provides content to producers of children’s shows in other countries. The non-profit organization also manages the licensing of *Sesame Street* characters for books, toys, games, clothing and other popular retail merchandise.

Historically, the process of providing material has been manual. Video and audio content were stored on reels of tape, photographs and other artwork were locked in file cabinets, and digital content was spread across a variety of different servers in multiple locations. “Our company is not so different from other industries that face time-to-market challenges,” said Pierre-March. “We recognized that we needed to improve how we delivered content to better compete – to sell more efficiently, to close contracts more quickly, to get licensees the content they needed faster.”

In defining a solution, Pierre-March identified three specific objectives.

First, Sesame Workshop required a solution for effectively mining and accessing content so that it could be repurposed for other uses. This had technical implications in terms of how the content was organized, stored and secured from misuse.

Second, the company needed a more efficient means of working with its large variety of partners around the globe – from publishing houses, to television production and distribution companies, to licensed merchandise manufacturers.

And third, Sesame Workshop wanted to improve its ability to aggregate content around specific themes. “Looking at individual pieces of content is a good start,” she explained, “but we asked ourselves how we could better structure our creative assets so that we and our licensees could more quickly pick and draw content to support any given theme.”

### **Sesame Workshop and Big Bird Choose Big Disk Storage from Nexsan**

Pierre-March and her team spent six months defining a solution that supported each of these objectives. “Projects like this are huge exercises in risk and reward because getting technologies to work together can be very challenging,” she said. “Our plan was to build an open architecture that used standards like XML and SOAP – technologies that would give us flexibility to extend and expand the system.”

With the architecture defined, the company set about finding partners with the right products as well as core competencies for marrying different technologies together. Sesame Workshop selected Nexsan’s award-winning 10.5-terabyte ATABeast as the best choice for its massive, global initiative. The advanced design and features of the ATABeast, which contains 42 high-capacity 250GB Hitachi Deskstar drives, enables higher availability and greater data protection of Sesame Workshop’s assets.

“The ATABeast storage array drives gives us the cost-effective speed and reliability we needed,” said Pierre-March.

The storage solution is OS independent, needing no special software drivers or server-based management applications. The ATABeast is connected to an IBM blade server running database applications that are designed to manage different types of content. Additionally, the content management software allows Sesame Workshop to search for information by theme.

### **Early Results Forecast “Sunny Days”**

Pierre-March hasn’t yet calculated the economic return on investment from the new storage solution yet, but she has seen two strong examples of how the system is already improving productivity.

Globally, Sesame Workshop works with International Television Productions for 20 unique educational programs in 148 countries on six continents. Generally, 70-80 percent of the international show is based on scripts and video from the U.S. production. In the past, Sesame Workshop would create a domestic reel of segments that other countries could use for their shows. Putting the reels together was no simple task; required knowing what was available, where each piece of content was located, how it would play in the different countries, scripting dubbing, editing, and other steps. The entire process typically took three or four week just to pull together a single show.

**Now that the assets are becoming available online, the time to pull together a show has been trimmed significantly. “We’ve gone from three or four weeks to just seven days,” said Pierre-March.**

The organization is also seeing similar productivity and efficiency gains in its licensing business. “Our licensees used to call and give us a general idea of what they were looking for,” said Pierre-March. “We’re respond by sending out artwork on DVDs, CDs and flats, which took time.

Plus, if what we shipped didn't meet the needs of the licensee, we'd have to go through the entire process again." It could take several weeks of effort to satisfy a request for information. "Now, through a secure portal, we can give licensees direct, real-time assets online," she said. "They can choose for themselves without us having to act as a middleman."

The work is not yet completed. So far, the domestic library of video is about 7,000 hours, and *Sesame Street* productions alone will add up to at least 15,000 hours. "We're digitizing entire shows first, and then going back and carving up the segments for further reuse," said Pierre-March. "We had a lot of work to do in the database structure and the applications," said Pierre-March.

But even the early results are pleasing her. "Since we went live, we haven't seen any degradation in terms of how we are able to access content and present it back," she said. "Just last week, we had a large demonstration for some of our partners. They commented how fast it was in streaming the video."

**Best of all, however, is Pierre-March's perspective as the top IT executive for Sesame Workshop: "I don't hear about the Nexsan ATABeast unless I ask about it," she said with a smile. "From where I sit, that's a very good thing."**

Nexsan Technologies

phone: +1(818) 715-9111

[www.nexsan.com](http://www.nexsan.com)

# # #