Case Study: Sky Group

Challenge

The Sky Group, Europe's leading direct-to-consumer media and entertainment company, needed to move away from traditional media asset management and workflow systems, with their inherent constraints on efficiency, agility, and scalability, and toward a cloud-based solution for media processing. In doing so, the group also sought to modernize and centralize operations across Sky UK, Sky Italia, and Sky Deutschland.

Kevin Hughes (left) and Steve Hale (right)

"Sky had reached the point where we could go no further without some major changes within our current supply chain," says Darren Long, Group Content Processing Director for Sky UK. "We were struggling to cope with the volume and complexities of our supply chain. It had become such a manual task, requiring costly time and resources with every channel launch. As we learned about the possibilities of cloud-based processing, we realized it could really supercharge dynamic processing of our content."

It had become difficult to scale existing on-premise systems while maintaining efficient resource utilization, particularly at Sky Deutschland. Because these systems were older and heavily integrated into other systems, even small changes took time and extensive testing, drawing out time to market. For quick-to-market propositions, Sky relied on manual processes performed by the content handling team. Over time, these manual processes increased, growing more onerous and more prone to error.

"Our content and services are incredibly important to us and become increasingly valuable over time, so we needed to reinvest to make sure that we had the right level of video quality and service availability, and that we were able to support new standards for new products quickly" says Kevin Hughes, Director of Broadcast Engineering at Sky Deutschland. "SDVI's Rally platform offered a really good opportunity to build a system for our normal content volumes which can also be immediately scaled for the big peaks we see when processing back catalogues or when we bring in new rights. And this can be done instantly without investment. Ultimately, what's really great about having an end Cloud based supply chain is the benefits it brings to our customers. We can now rapidly deliver high quality content and catalogue parity across all of our products from launch."

Solution

Sky has started to incorporate the SDVI Rally cloud-based media supply chain platform across its operations in the U.K. and Germany with Italy following in a few months. Rally is a cloud-native platform that supports increased agility, efficiency, and business growth, deploying all the applications and infrastructure to create a dynamic, responsive media supply chain. These resources can be located on-premise, in a public cloud, in a private cloud, or in any combination.

In the UK, Sky uses Rally to enable a simple transmission packaging workflow. Assets are delivered into AWS S3, metadata is added, and assets are transcoded and then delivered to on-premise production systems, with BSS (Sky's in-house scheduling system) updated to ensure assets are available on appropriate systems. In Italy, Rally is initially being used to underpin a disaster recovery platform for a mix of long-and short-form content.

In Germany, Rally is built into Sky's cloud processing (CP1) platform, taking finished media and enriching it with metadata, as well as orchestrating a number of tasks including QC, encoding, packaging, and securing that content for all 27 Sky Deutschland distribution points. The platform supports delivery to Sky Go, Sky Store, and the web for consumption on various devices. To this end, Sky has moved from a mix of manual and automated processes to a fully automated workflow with supply chains completed much more quickly and accurately without intervention.
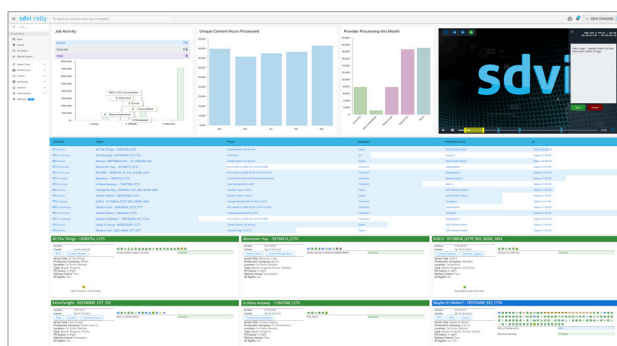
SDVI Rally User Interface

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> *– Darren Long*

Unlike a managed service, the Rally platform allows Sky to build its own supply chains, control the workflow, and adapt quickly and efficiently, without having to work through change orders.

"We know our data and our files better than anybody, and we know what goes wrong with them and where we have challenges, so it made sense to build our own platform using the Rally toolset," says Steve Hale, Head of Content Platform Development at Sky. "By leveraging Rally and backend AWS cloud services to fully decouple tight integration between legacy systems, we gain flexibility without the need for complex integrations or concern over potential issues downstream."

Implementing application services from multiple vendors, Sky enjoys greater agility in deploying the best-in-class tools required in the workflows. Sky has found it is now easier to work with both new and existing vendors, uniting their preferred applications on a single platform.

"Building a cloud-native solution with the mature functionality of Rally would take a serious commitment of internal resources over a very long period of time," notes Hale. "If you want to get up and running quickly across multiple regions, as we did, then Rally is the ideal platform."

Result

Sky is making massive technical and operational leaps in how it processes content. No longer limited by the capacity of on-premise systems, Sky can simply spin up in the cloud for highly adaptive and elastic content handling.
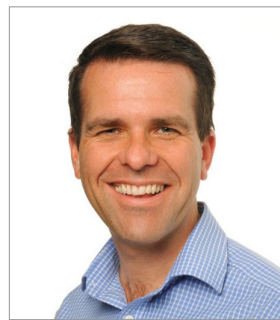
No longer limited by the capacity of on-premise systems, the broadcaster can simply spin up in the cloud for highly adaptive and elastic content handling.

Sky's automated workflows increase efficiency by enabling the processing of content in a near-to-live model. As a result, Sky can stand up new propositions and take them to market quickly, a critical capability in today's marketplace. Sky can also now rapidly package media for additional endpoints and platforms without a significant increase in resource.

"In the past, working out price-per-minute costs was very challenging," says Hale. "To create internal business cases, we had to think about human resources, capital investment and depreciation over time, and utilization — a complex set of variables. Now we can do that very accurately and very quickly to determine which services and workflows are most viable for us."

Over time, Sky's Rally platform will provide a transparent view of costs for Sky UK, Sky Italia, and Sky Deutschland. Sky will be able to compare differences and commonalities across these sites and retool workflows based on that understanding. Knowing every part of the process and what it costs, the media group can map out a more economical way of working.

"For me what's most exciting is that we can understand our costs and the value we're getting on the back end," says Long. "I think there's so much opportunity as we move forward. We're only scratching the surface at the moment. As our Rally implementation gets deeper and more sophisticated, the platform will open up opportunities we've not even thought about yet."

Darren Long, Group Content Processing Director, Sky UK