FilmoTV cuts costs and improves workflow using Dolby Hybrik

FilmoTV, a French VOD (video-on-demand) service, wanted to keep up with demand, improve its workflow, and keep costs manageable. FilmoTV CTO Frédéric Le Diberder looked at the options available to improve the service with cloud media processing and decided Dolby Hybrik was the right choice. We chatted with him to learn about the challenges Dolby Hybrik addressed and the payoff for FilmoTV.

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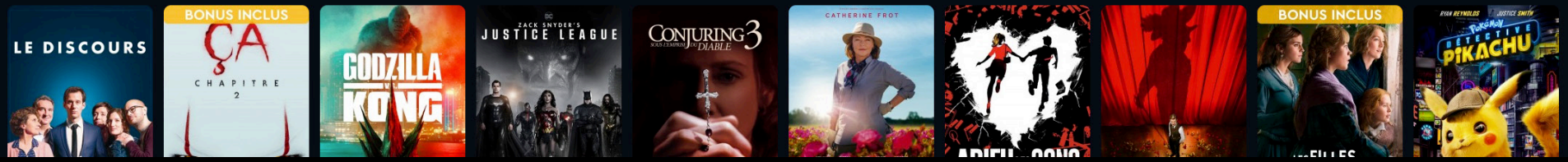

Can you tell us a bit about FilmoTV and what it provides to distributors and viewers?

FilmoTV is a VOD and SVOD (subscription-video-on-demand) service launched in 2008. We're distributed in France via all the French ISPs (internet service providers), including Orange, Bouygues Telecom, Free, and SFR. FilmoTV content is available for viewing on PCs, mobile phones, and tablets, and through OTT platforms such as Molotov and Amazon Prime Video. Our focus is movies and our strength has always been content curation. We also produce supplementary content, including interviews with filmmakers, actors, and behind-the-camera contributors.

Our TVOD (transactional-video-on-demand, a pay-per-view option) catalogue has around 5,000 titles, while the SVOD offering comprises 800 titles, with new films added monthly as older ones are removed. The films come from major distributors such as Warner, Universal, 20th Century Fox, Pathé, Gaumont, and StudioCanal, as well as smaller distributors.

FilmoTV sounds like a movie lover's dream. What challenges were you looking to address with Dolby Hybrik cloud media processing?

We first made use of the cloud in 2014, when we needed an encoding solution that would fit with our technical architecture. Making this change while keeping the costs under control was, of course, of great importance for us. But we're a small organisation – just 15 of us – and the technical team is just three people. So a solution that offered good support was very important to us.

Initially, we outsourced encoding. But it really slowed our workflow, both with communication back and forth, and simply the need to exchange large files. Costs were high and we had some bad experiences with cheaper solutions that produced low-quality video files. Dolby Hybrik really turned all that around for us. It's been a great experience since Day One.

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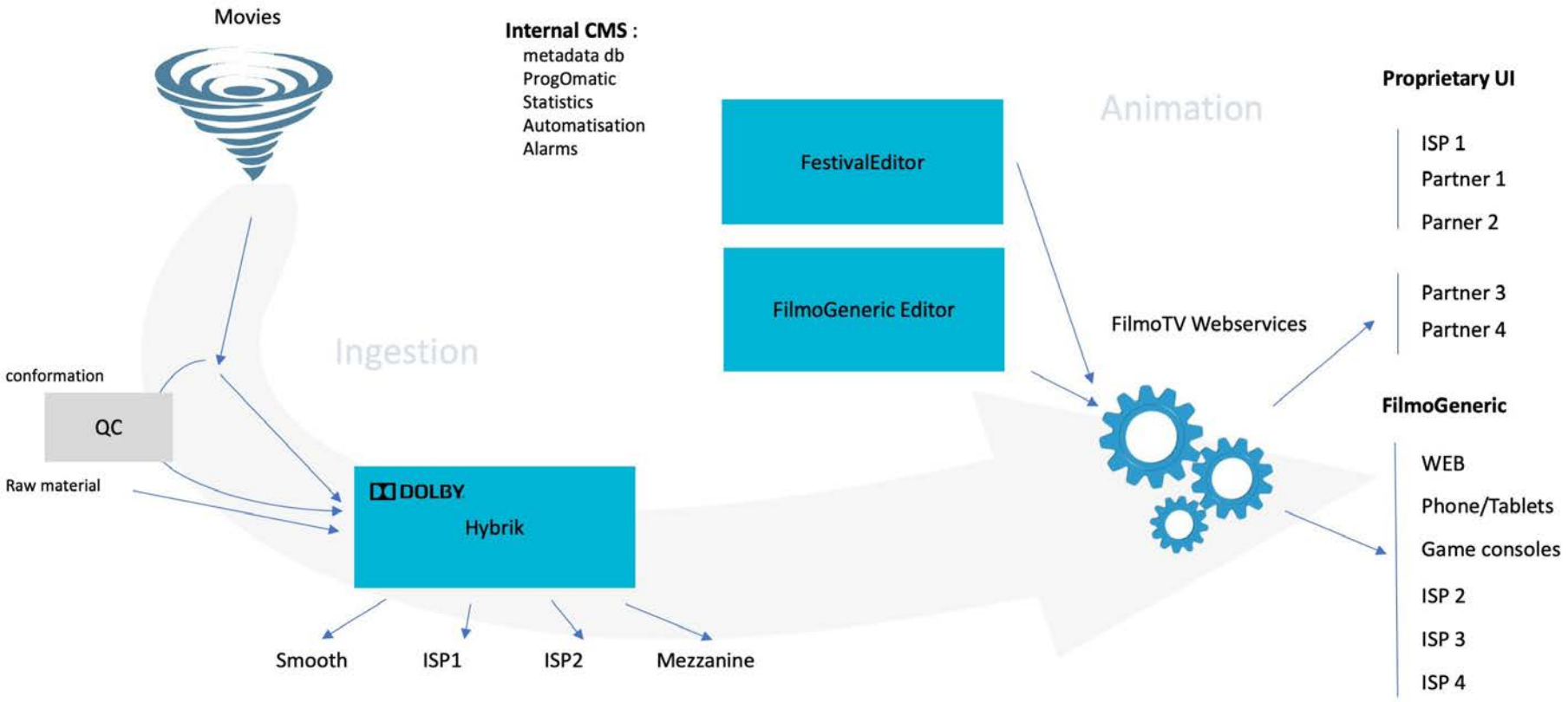

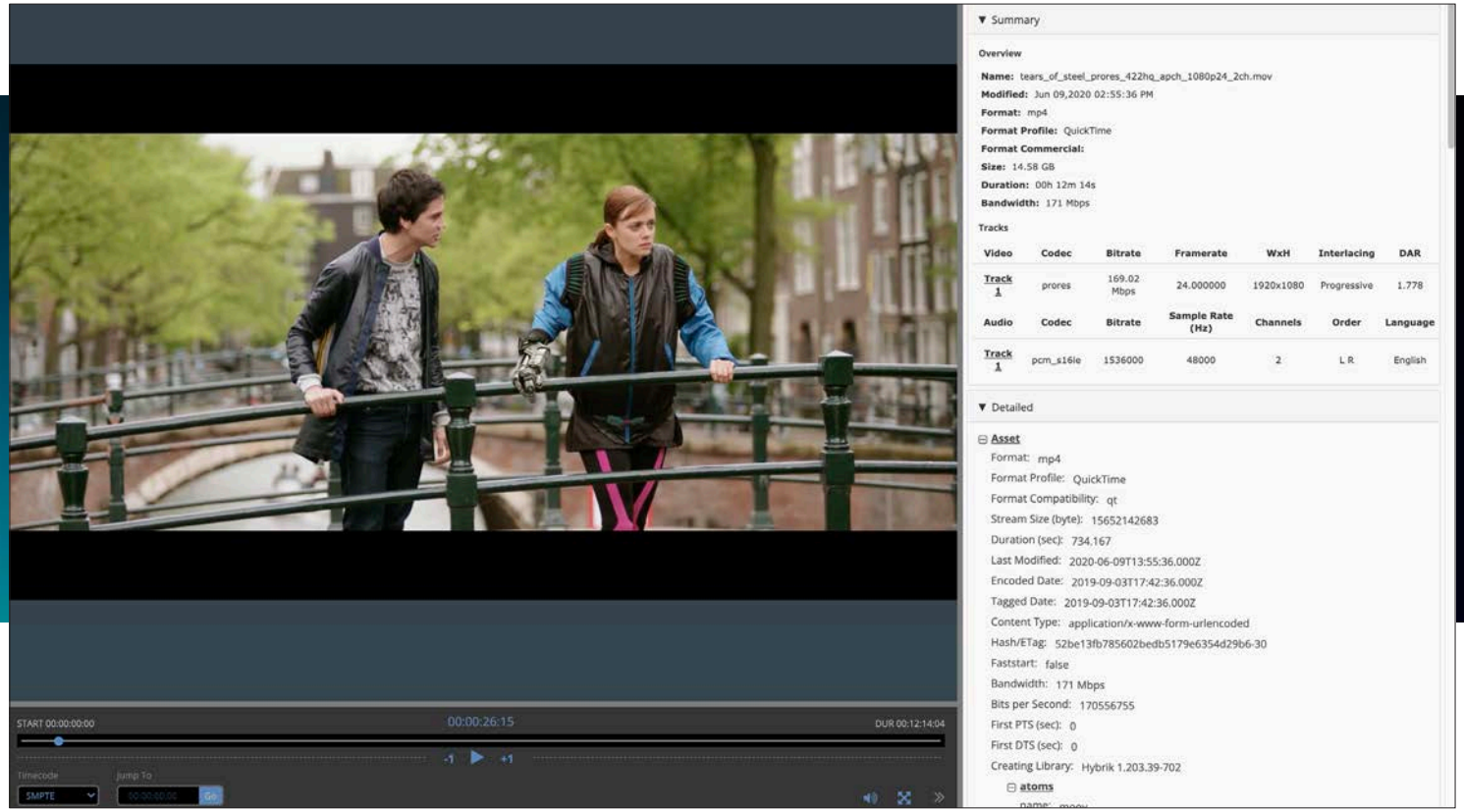

It's a big step to entrust such an important part of your business to another company. How did you learn about Dolby Hybrik, and why did you choose it?

I was contacted by Dolby France – by Anaïs Libolt and Benoit Leteneur – who gave me demo access to the platform. So I was able to see how it would perform for us, before I made a commitment. I was impressed that the Dolby Hybrik team took the time to learn what FilmoTV needed and discussed the best way to implement the platform-as-a-service [PaaS] model into our workflow.

Dolby Hybrik proved easy to use, and we were able to start integrating it into our workflow in a matter of days. The pricing model is also a big plus. The basic cost is quite reasonable – a predictable flat fee – and the dynamic pricing for processing is great. We can spin up huge production capacity at a moment's notice and the cost per minute of video processed is so low that even very large jobs are economically priced. For a company like FilmoTV – a company that wants to minimise costs without compromising on quality – it's the perfect solution.

Getting used to a new system can be difficult. Did FilmoTV have to make a lot of changes or adjustments when you started working with Dolby Hybrik?

We get movies from the different studios chosen by the distributor. Once we have the content, the first step is producing a mezzanine file. The specifications of the mezzanine file correspond to the specs of the highest-quality format we have to produce, and often exceeds it by some margin.

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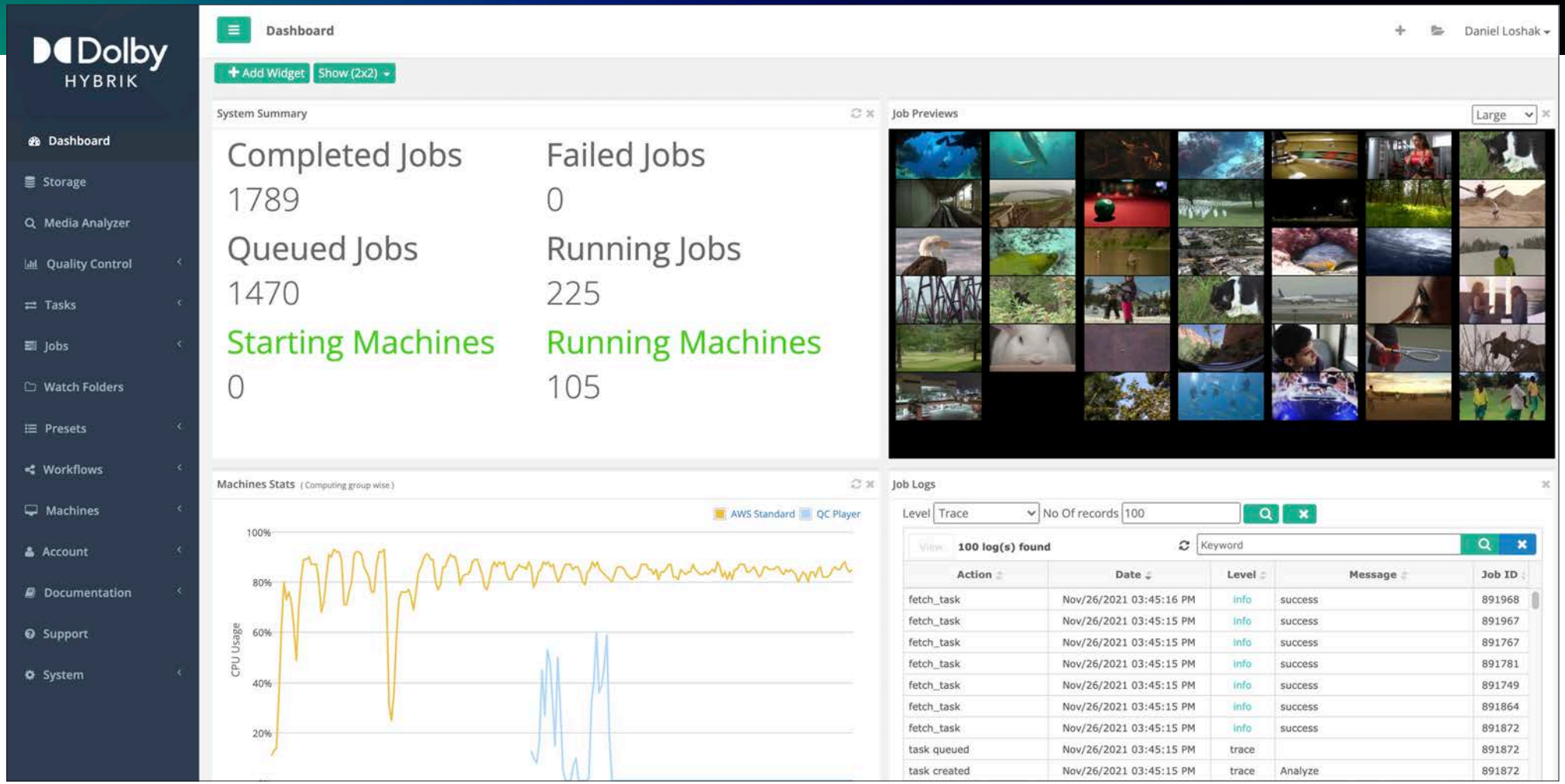

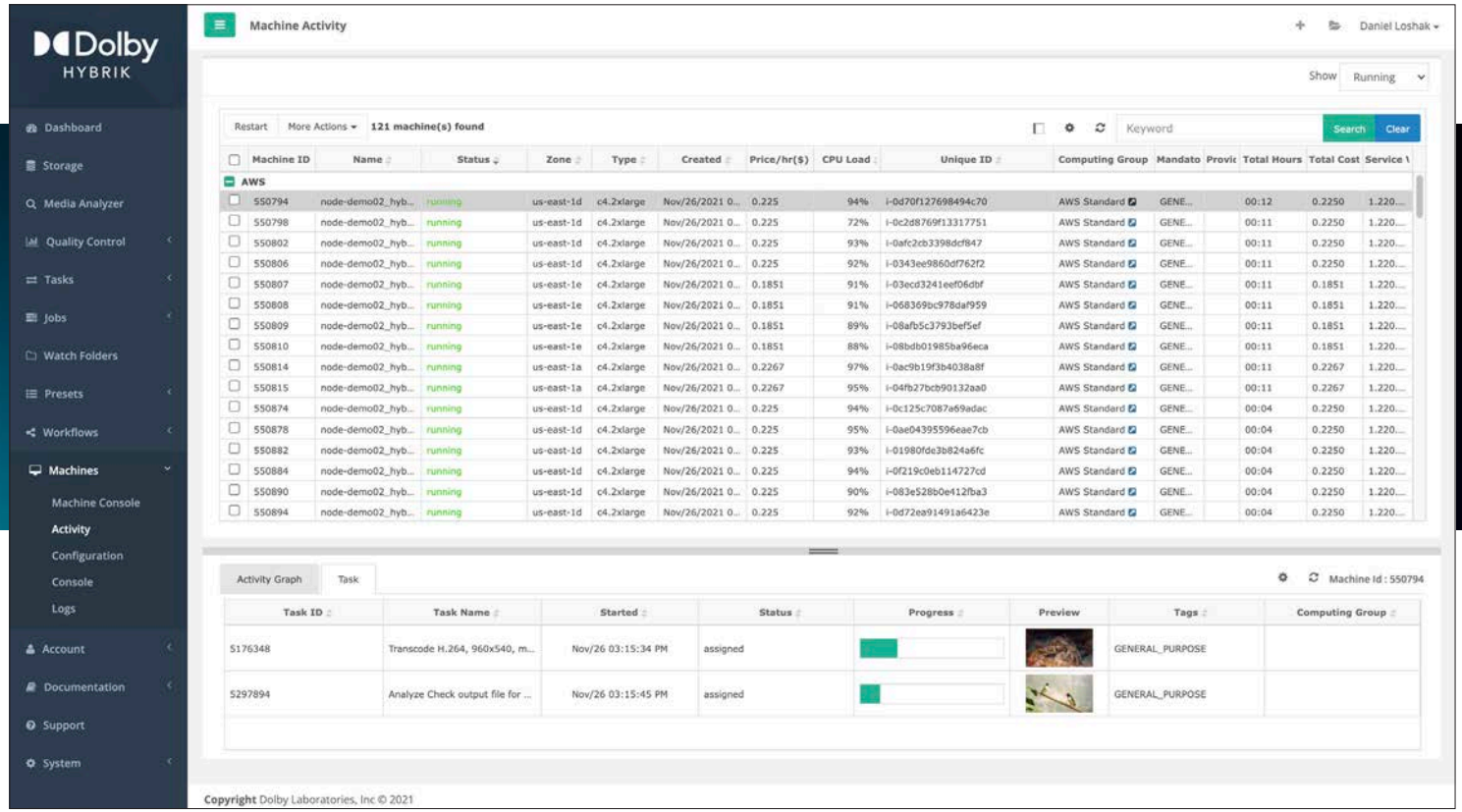

From that mezzanine file, we re-encode the file to match the needs of the platform it will appear on. We have to make sure it will play with no problems. For example, for ISPs, we face some tricky requirements due to some constraints they have relating to their managed networks. Thanks to Hybrik's flexible approach, and the support we got from the technical team at Dolby, we could set up workflows that correspond to these requirements.

You didn't have to make any changes to your workflow to use it?

No. If anything, it allowed us to do what we were previously doing, but better.

So you didn't have to completely change how you work?

No, we didn't have to change our approach. And now we're also looking at using Hybrik to drive further improvements. Not because we have to, but because we see how adopting these new capabilities could help us. We're currently extending the use of Hybrik to the mezzanine production, and we'll be transcoding files on demand rather than storing transcoded files once they're produced. It's actually more cost-effective, in the long run, to do that. That's a savings benefit we couldn't achieve without Dolby.

What was the process of integrating Dolby Hybrik into your workflow like? What was the learning curve?

The learning curve was very smooth. We did some test cases and validated them with the ISPs. The support from Dolby was great. We implemented our workflow step by step, preparing the encoding profiles for one ISP, then validating it with the ISP expert, then putting the workflow into production. We didn't find anything Hybrik couldn't do – it's like a Swiss Army knife for video production. Each time we face a technical challenge, Hybrik has the solution.

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How much of your content is produced with Hybrik?

We process all our movie catalogue via Hybrik. And all our in-house productions.

Has FilmoTV seen real business benefits from making the change to Dolby Hybrik?

Hybrik exceeded our expectations in term of costs and efficiency. We've already run thousands of encoding jobs with no problem. Once, we even had to re-encode a large amount of files requested by a customer, and we did it in just a few days, with no negative impact on the regular work we were doing.

Our overall cost for processing has been halved – reduced by 50 per cent. Amazing. And our marginal cost – the cost of processing additional hours of material – has gone down 90 per cent. We previously had to worry if the cost and the time involved in processing extra hours would be a problem. By using Dolby Hybrik in our workflow, we get both faster processing and reduced costs with no capacity bottlenecks. It's a success any way you look at it.

What does the future hold for FilmoTV and Dolby Hybrik? Are there other capabilities you want to try?

Well, we're not using 100 per cent of Hybrik's features yet, so we're going to keep incrementally implementing them to see how they work for us. First up will be some of the automation features, like QC and watch folders. I guess this next round is a sequel of sorts – one that we at FilmoTV are really looking forward to. We see many benefits to come.

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