

Digidesign DigiDelivery

Simon Leadley finds a system that delivers.

Since the advent of computers and the internet, the way we do business has changed, the world has become a smaller place and the most valuable resource is information. For us in the studio trade (both large and small), programs such as ProTools have forever changed the way music is created. No longer do we buy a reel of tape, now we buy a 120GB hard drive. Communication too is changing, as we rely more and more on the internet for long-distance messaging. Here in Australia, this can be an advantage for work done in places as far flung as the US and England, where we can work 'during the night' and have it ready for the next working day in Los Angeles. I have done many projects this way, and if we are to become a clever nation we should capitalise on our technological and financial advantages to expand the possibilities of work in overseas markets.

The big question is how to efficiently and simply transfer data to and from clients, regardless of where they are and what computer platform they are on. Another consideration is the technical savvy of your clients – if I had a dollar for every time I had to talk a

client through downloading an ftp client, where to put the info, which client to use etc, I'd be a wealthy man. The last consideration is the technical savvy of your facility. Now I'm not sure, but as far as I'm aware there are very few studios with a full-time IT department to help set up a secure ftp server. Then there's the decision to go Mac, Windows or Unix, and with that is an associated cost of the software/hardware. At first glance it definitely seems like it should be relegated to the 'too-hard basket'. In fact, I had a go at setting up an ftp server using an older Mac running Linux with the help of an IT person, and while we got it up and running, keeping it that way seemed to be too difficult. (I won't go into details but suffice it to say it was a hardware issue.) So I figured there has to be an easier way. Enter DigiDelivery.

Rocket Fuelled

DigiDelivery is based on the technology that fuelled the Rocket Network servers that Digidesign acquired a while back. Basically there are two flavas (to use the modern nomenclature) of the DigiDelivery appliance: the LT (light) and the GT (with overhead cams... just kidding). The one I have is the LT version, which consists of a single rack unit that is very deep, contains an 80GB hard drive, and besides power, has only two 1000 base-T (Gbit) ethernet connectors on the rear.

Essentially DigiDelivery is a fully-featured web server and mail server based in UNIX with a simple browser-based interface, allowing setup via a remote computer anywhere in the world. Initial setup is performed via the second port and requires you to have a Mac or PC with an ethernet port. The other requirements are a static IP address and the ability to open various ports on your router/firewall. Many ISPs now sell packages that include the facility for a static IP address. For those who aren't internet savvy, a static IP address is an address that does not change and is assigned specifically to your host machine; in this case



the DigiDelivery box. Since you'll be giving out your IP address to other users to allow them to connect to the server, it's essential that security is tight, and to that end Digidesign has implemented 128-bit file encryption for security from sender to recipient. There is also the facility to create an SSL certificate and to apply to one of the authentication agencies for SSL authentication.

The main differences between the LT and the GT version of the appliance relate to the way users interact. In the LT version, you can create an unlimited number of users, in our case any client we wish to share information with: you can send files to them and they can send them to the studio, but they cannot send files to another user. In the GT version there is an unlimited number of standard users who are then able to share with any other user.

Three Flavours

Users come in three flavours: Admin, Standard and Guest. The Admin has access to administer the server, but cannot access files sent by other users – though they can delete files if necessary. A Standard user can send files to anyone in the world. A Guest user can only send to a standard user. And herein lies the major difference between the LT and GT versions. The LT can only have one Standard user and 20 pending transfers, but it *can* have unlimited Guest users. The GT has unlimited Standard users, unlimited Guests and unlimited pending transfers. Now, at first glance, the LT version would appear to have a major limitation, but actually it's well suited to a facility where all you want is data coming to and from the server and users.

You don't need an account to receive a delivery, just to send one. Accounts are created by the system administrator via the web-based interface and can be done anywhere there is an internet connection. However, it's important to note that the administrator is unable to access the files stored on the server (besides the ability to delete files). This makes security very tight. Once a user has been created they are assigned a unique username and password and you include a valid email address. You then use the DigiDelivery app to drop a file, folder or ProTools session, then assign the destination to any of the users in the system (if you have a Guest account) or anyone in the world (if you have a Standard account). You can also add a message with any extra information you might want to include in the email to clients to get them up and running. DigiDelivery then creates an email message and sends it to the recipient. If they don't have the app there's a link to the Digidesign site to download it (versions are available for Mac OS9 and OSX and for Windows XP and 2000). The email contains a download link that the recipient clicks on, which then launches the app and prompts the user with a dialogue box to store the file. Included in the email is a 'key' so that only the recipient can download the file destined for them. There's no need to give your recipients the IP address of the server, a username or password. The sender also gets an email confirming the delivery has been successful. All the email templates can be customised using a web browser.

The system sends an email log to the administrator so it's possible to create billing logs based on a per-megabyte costing. This daily log also helps the administrator keep a track of transfers. Files are kept on the system for a period of time, then erased when that time (configurable) has elapsed. Collected files are also erased after a configurable time, so the size of the drive need only accommodate the amount of data you're transferring at any one time. It isn't a backup system, so there's no need for huge hard drives.

Software updates install automatically after you press a link in the admin page and the machine automatically re-boots. I did a system update during my

tests and all went perfectly. There's no way for a user to access the core of the system, so if something goes wrong with the hardware or a drive, it'll require a trip to Digi service. However, this seems perfectly reasonable to me. I imagine there'll be a few ready formatted drives with the software loaded on, so you can be up and running as soon as possible in the unlikely event of a hard drive crash. It would be great to be able to back up all your user settings somewhere in this event, as it'd be annoying to have to create new users for all your clients.

From Paris with Amour

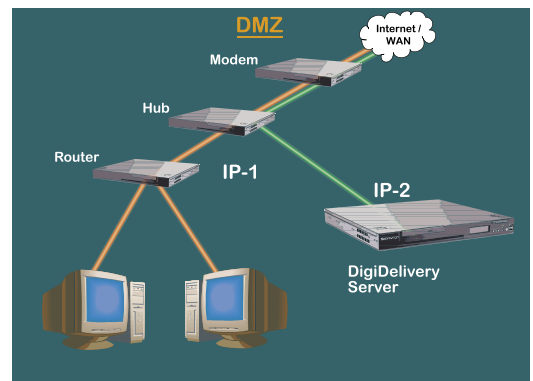
I've been using the system for several weeks with quite a few projects, one of which was in Paris, while others involved 'local' clients on the northern beaches of Sydney. In

most cases it's been flawless, and everyone has commented on the simplicity of sending the files. It's important to note the system uses a lossless compression (thus, it has algorithms particularly designed for media files) to make downloads faster, so there's no need to zip or stuff files first.

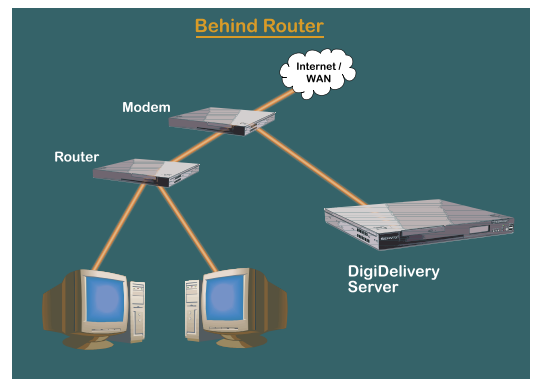
Also, DigiDelivery is ProTools session aware, so in order to send a session, all you need to do is drop the session file on the delivery app and it'll find all the necessary files even if they're scattered over a few drives. You can also select to send audio files, video files, and plug-in settings or not. For this to operate correctly the session must not have any offline files (unless you deliberately have offline files



The Client software with Host name of the DigiDelivery appliance and user name and password for the User.



Typical install with modem and a hub with digiDelivery installed ahead of the router.



Typical setup with a modem and DigiDelivery set up after the router.

and don't wish them to be included in the transfer).

Setup was straightforward and the included browser interface is clean and simple. One problem that's been overcome in the newer software is that you can operate the appliance behind a firewall or router – as in our case we only needed to supply the info of the ports we wanted to open and all was well. In this case you need to have two addresses for the server, an internal address for users within the LAN and an address for WAN users (which will mostly be your clients). The system worked first time and the transfers are quick and protected by strong encryption. Best of all, you don't need to be an accredited computer geek to get file transfer up and running. The cost of the LT is inexpensive when you factor in the simplicity of the setup and administration, compared to a fully blown ftp site.

Delivery Room

It seems to me that data transfer is becoming a very important part of the studio service; it speeds delivery of digital pictures and facilitates the transfer of data over large distances, offering great opportunities to facilities that offer the service. DigiDelivery is a turnkey solution that even an IT anti-geek can set up and administer, providing secure and simple file transfer for administrator and client alike. I highly recommend it to anyone. The LT version will suit facilities that work

with clients who don't need client-to-client transfers and with a light load of file transfers to deliver (the LT version allows 20 pending transfers while the GT is unlimited). The GT has a larger hard drive, the ability to create many standard accounts that can perform client-to-client transfers and is well suited to a facility that would also make money providing an ftp site for various external clients. One of the major advantages of DigiDelivery is that it's impossible to get the wrong file, as the link that the receiver gets links only to the correct download. This is a major difference between competing systems.

I think the system is brilliant! It's simple at both ends, simple to set up and administer and even simpler to use on a day-to-day basis. It provides feedback for billing, and software updates are simple to install. A must-have if you are into large file transfers and require a simple secure system.



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• *Digidesign*
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Price

• *GT: \$13,995; LT: \$4,475*
