Founded in 2008 and based in Madrid, Spain, SummuS Render is one of the world’s largest render farms. The company owns its data processing center, and can adapt its rendering services to each client’s specific requirements. Thanks to its secure and efficient, multi-award-winning design of its infrastructure, SummuS Render can often offer significantly lower costs than many of its competitors, giving it a unique advantage in the industry.

Business benefits:

**One hour**
to provision a new studio—a task that typically takes weeks or months

**60%**
cost saving by avoiding investment in tools, workstations and rendering clusters

**EUR 10 million**
projected annual revenues for Simple Animation by 2021

**Simple Animation**

**Transforming the visual effects industry with cloud-based Animation-as-a-Service**

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**Business challenge**

Animation is a complex and expensive art, requiring skilled artists and producers, and powerful technology. SummuS Render wanted to find a way to help studios bring their stories to life at lower cost.

**Transformation**

Using IBM® Cloud™, SummuS Render built Simple Animation: a service that helps studios build automated animation pipelines and manage the entire project lifecycle more efficiently, without investing in specialist hardware and software.

**Sergio Gonzalez**
CEO
SummuS Render

“Switching to Simple Animation will enable studios to reduce production costs by around 60 percent. You can build sophisticated animations on even a low-spec laptop, because all the tools you need are running in the IBM Cloud.”

Sergio Gonzalez
CEO
SummuS Render

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Sketching out a plan

Since its inception ten years ago, SummuS Render has grown rapidly to become one of the world’s largest render farms, providing powerful computing clusters that are crucial in the final stage of bringing computer animations and visual effects to life.

When SummuS Render started out, its goal was to allow production companies to outsource the rendering process, instead of investing in their own rendering infrastructure. Its services quickly became popular with studios, and within a few years SummuS Render had acquired clients across the globe. As the company gained experience, it recognized that many of its clients faced challenges not just in the final rendering process, but across the entire animation lifecycle.

“IBM Cloud was an excellent fit for our needs, and the IBM team was very enthusiastic about our idea. They were keen to help us not only build the technical platform, but also plan out our business model and promote the platform.”

Sergio Gonzalez, CEO, SummuS Render

“Whenever a studio wanted to start a new project, they typically had to purchase dozens or hundreds of animation workstations, plus all the state-of-the-art software. There was also no way for animators to work remotely, so everyone had to relocate to wherever the workstations were. Moreover, since there was usually no integration between the different animation and rendering tools, each studio had to build its own rendering pipeline, which was time-consuming. All in all, it could take months — and millions of dollars of investment — to get a new project underway.

“Breathing life into the idea

SummuS Render has built Simple Animation, a state-of-the-art cloud service that supports production studios across the entire animation process. Producers use a browser-based management tool to control and configure the entire studio, and track their current spend. Artists connect to the studio via a virtual desktop, accessing a high-performance workstation tailored to fit their precise needs. As well as the specialist animation software, the virtual workstation is equipped with the Simple Animation solution that helps artists to manage and coordinate the pipeline of jobs.

“Our animation workstations look and feel exactly the same for users connecting locally and via the cloud,” comments Sergio Gonzalez. “Access is secure and remote workers cannot download or upload content without permission — safeguarding the studio’s valuable intellectual property.”

Simple Animation is built in a private cloud environment on IBM Cloud Bare Metal Servers, using VMware solutions to provide a virtual desktop for each user. To transfer large volumes of creative content reliably and at high speed, SummuS Render relies on IBM Aspera® software, and the creative content is stored on secure, resilient storage systems in IBM data centers around the world.

Sergio Gonzalez, CEO of SummuS Render, explains: “Whenever a studio wanted to start a new project, they typically had to purchase dozens or hundreds of animation workstations, plus all the state-of-the-art software. There was also no way for animators to work remotely, so everyone had to relocate to wherever the workstations were. Moreover, since there was usually no integration between the different animation and rendering tools, each studio had to build its own rendering pipeline, which was time-consuming. All in all, it could take months — and millions of dollars of investment — to get a new project underway.

“We also knew that if we could find the right formula for animation, we could apply the same model to serve companies in other industries where workstations and tooling are expensive — such as special effects, and even architectural design and advertising.”

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The idea to work with IBM actually came from our IBM Business Partner, Repessa,” recalls Sergio Gonzalez. “It turned out to be a stroke of genius. IBM Cloud was an excellent fit for our needs, and the IBM team was very enthusiastic about our idea. They were keen to help us not only build the technical platform, but also plan out our business model and promote the platform.

“We knew that we needed a vendor with data centers in our main markets and excellent connectivity, to reduce latency for users. That requirement alone shrunk our shortlist of potential suppliers to just a handful. One other factor that set IBM apart was that they do not charge for transfer of data between data centers. That was critical to the viability of our business model, because artists working remotely will frequently need to transfer large files to and from the studio.

One of the toughest requirements was to find a cloud service that could offer servers configured with the high-performance graphics processing units [GPUs] required for animation—as well as a virtualization solution that makes it possible for users to access those GPUs, even if they are working remotely.

Sergio Gonzalez comments: “IBM was one of the first cloud providers to offer GPUs in the cloud, and the VMware hypervisor gives us the power to make them available in a virtual desktop solution. The IBM Cloud solution makes it possible for us to scale our service to meet clients’ requirements over the course of their projects.”

For larger studios, Simple Animation now also offers rendering via the IBM Cloud—enabling studios to scale their resources to align with peaks and troughs in demand. For smaller projects, Simple Animation completes the rendering on its shared render farm in-house.

“Instead of taking weeks to set up the studio infrastructure and relocate hundreds of animators, our clients can provision a full virtual studio in the IBM Cloud in about an hour. Artists can log in and start working on the movie straight away.”

Sergio Gonzalez, CEO, SummuS Render

**Setting the wheels in motion**

Studios stand to reap enormous benefits from Simple Animation, as Sergio Gonzalez remarks: “We estimate that switching to Simple Animation will enable studios to reduce production costs by around 60 percent. The main saving comes from avoiding the purchase of an animation workstation for each user, as each machine costs thousands of dollars, and licenses for specialist animation software are expensive too. With Simple Animation, you can build sophisticated animations on even a low-spec laptop, because all the tools you need are running in the IBM Cloud.

“The benefit is particularly profound for mid-size studios. In the past, they had to purchase enough workstations to support hundreds of animators working in parallel during peak periods, and were left with dozens of machines sitting idle during quieter times. With our Simple Animation service, the up-front investment is minimal: studios can keep the workstations they already have, and supplement their capacity with our offering during busy periods.”

He continues: “Simple Animation makes it easy for producers to bring local and remote artists together on a project, and adjust the personnel, software and pipeline as their needs evolve.”
“For example, if a new version of an animation software package comes out, producers can easily roll it out to users on a trial basis, and revert to the older version if things don’t work out. If new software requires additional computing power, studios can purchase additional capacity from Simple Animation, rather than having to upgrade or replace hundreds of expensive workstations.

“Unlocking such massive cost savings helps studios significantly reduce risk. For any given animated movie, around 10 percent of the budget is spent on rendering and another 15 percent on workstations and high-end storage, so around 25 percent of the cost stems from technology. By reducing IT investment, we hope to help studios bring more and better movies to our screens at a fraction of the cost.”

The solution also helps studios gain vital speed and agility. Sergio Gonzalez explains: “Instead of taking weeks to set up the studio infrastructure and relocate hundreds of animators, our clients can provision a full virtual studio in the IBM Cloud in about an hour. Artists can log in and start working on the movie straight away.”

Tapping into the IBM Cloud has helped SummuS Render to accelerate the launch of Simple Animation, improving the company’s chances of gaining first-mover advantage in its new market.

Sergio Gonzalez remarks: “It would have been much more difficult to develop our solution without the support of IBM. We know from experience that managing a data center is complex and expensive, so it made sense to engage a cloud provider.

“IBM was an excellent choice; they saw the potential of our business model and they were very helpful in providing resources even when we were a long way from having paying customers. The commercial model we’ve created gives both us and IBM an incentive to promote the service and make it a success.

“With the launch of Simple Animation, we are already thinking big. We plan to acquire 10,000 users within four or five years, and the service should be generating EUR 10 million in revenues by the end of 2021. With IBM behind us, we really feel that the sky is the limit.”

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