



John Grow, SLP Photography: Optimizing an Offsite Backup Solution for Small Business at an Affordable Price

Before he became a commercial photographer, John Grow of SLP Photography designed disk drive systems for Seagate and Maxtor, so he knew that he needed backup for every hard drive in his company.

Eventually, he ended up with five external hard drives and discovered that he had problems keeping track of what photos were on which drive. The solution he came up with? Drobo.

SLP Photography offers wedding, special event, portrait, sports and commercial photography to its San Francisco Bay area clients. After nine years of digital shooting, John had 1.7 terabytes of image files stored among five external USB drives. So he set out to find a better solution.

“My intent was to replace all the various desktop, half terabyte and three-quarter terabyte drives we had that were plugged into various file servers or edit stations that we have in the studio. It’s hard to keep track of photos that way. We’re talking years’ worth of pictures and we’re trying not to lose them. I’m fed up with trying to archive these things onto CDs or DVDs.”

Trades Five External Drives for One Drobo

John has saved money with Drobo. “With what it cost me for the Drobo and the drives to put in there, that’s probably only about 70% of what I paid for all the individual USB drives that do the same thing. Each of those drives takes up a ton of space and each one has to have their own power supply. You’ve got a power strip plugged into a UPS device, just to run all these individual drives. Now I only have one cable, one power connector.”

John’s first attempt to centralize his image files was a Netgear NAS drive. “It didn’t have enough capacity and the thing moonlighted as a frying pan. It was hot constantly. So when I heard about Drobo I went, ‘oh, cool.’ It seemed like it was a marvelous idea for people that aren’t necessarily technically inclined, and I don’t want to be a network administrator.”

Life got much easier once John installed Drobo. “When we shoot, the files are huge, 22 megapixel pictures. The files are in the 25 MB range, and we’ll deal with 180 or 200 pictures. So we’ve got to ship a ton of data. In the past, we had to archive data into one of those other USB drives. And it was a pain in the neck, because if I didn’t remember to do it, I had stuff on one drive that didn’t match the stuff on the other drive. Now, with Drobo, I only have to put it in one place. *You only have to go out and find one machine, one drive, one folder, to go retrieve this stuff.* I don’t have to go out and look through the two drives that were on the original machine or three drives that were on my machine or the one drive that was on the other edit computer for visiting photographers. So it’s made life a whole lot simpler.”

QUICK FACTS

OS

- Windows Small Business Server 2003

Current Application

- Central data repository

Favorite DroboPro Features

- Large data repository in one place
- Accessible by all users

Now that the studio's entire photo collection is loaded onto Drobo, John can satisfy customer requests much more easily. "This is a commercial studio so the vast majority of what we do has to be archived. My clients have a habit of ordering these photos two years down the road. 'We need those product shots that you shot for us in 2006.' Now that's no problem. I still have pictures from my first digital camera that periodically get opened up and re-edited. I'd like to hang onto these because I'm sure there's going to be stuff coming in the future that's going to allow me to fix them even more. The thought of losing these things because I didn't properly store them has not been a good feeling."

Eliminating the Risk of Disk Failure

As a former disk drive engineer, John knows that drives are going to fail. Now that he uses Drobo, he doesn't worry about that anymore. "I don't have all this other stuff to worry about. No worries about whether or not one drive is going to fail. I bought this unit because a drive failure is going to happen and it's going to happen at the worst possible time. And Drobo will survive that drive failure and I'll be able to go and put another drive in there, which I have on the shelf, and Drobo will rebuild itself while I'm sleeping. Again, not sitting here on a Friday night at one o'clock in the morning trying to get all the drives rebuilt. They rebuild themselves."

Servers Fail Too: DroboPro Can Protect Them

The only problem John has had since he's owned a Drobo was with the server it was connected to. When that machine crashed, no one could get to the image files. "Drobo is mapped to each desktop, so users can go in there and pull up the contents of the drive. But when the machine went down, I get a call that says, 'We can't get at the pictures on the Drobo.'" John decided that another Drobo, located offsite, would give him redundancy and protection against future server failures.

John will use a second DroboPro at a different location to back up his Drobo just for added security. Backing up data and server images is possible with DroboPro's large capacity and iSCSI interface. So if there ever is anything that happens to one of them or the server they are connected to, it's backed up somewhere else. That is, for me, the ultimate. That's the last thing I could actually ask for. I can't think of any other storage requirements that I need."