

West Coast Customs

When small business calls, HP elite-series delivers



HP customer case study

HP Elite and Z Series infrastructure provides world-renowned custom car builder world-class service

Industry

Custom car building

“Having professional-grade IT wasn’t a priority for us for a long time. We had to catch up. When things went down and we lost access to designs and other work we’d done, it was clear how important technology had become to the business. We needed HP.”

—Ryan Friedlinghaus, owner, West Coast Customs, Corona, Calif.

Objective

- Improve reliability and help manage growth with solid technology infrastructure
- Deliver high-end processing to speed rendering and production processes
- Automate and streamline workflows to build efficiency in project management and delivery

Approach

- Replace unreliable multi-vendor infrastructure by standardizing on HP hardware
- Centralize data resources and improve accessibility through managed infrastructure
- Support growing base of fans from TV and social media exposure

IT improvements

- HP Elite-series standardization facilitates common user experience, seamless technology integration, simpler IT support
- HP Z Workstation performance provides efficient design rendering
- Business rugged infrastructure streamlines processes

Business benefits

- Improved efficiency: staff can move from one workstation to another seamlessly, share central resources
- Improved project management: uniform access to project plans schedules, budget parameters and project delivery requirements



Car enthusiasts know West Coast Customs (WCC) as the place to go for outrageous custom car building. Its work was the centerpiece of Pimp My Ride, Street Customs and most recently Inside West Coast Customs, the highest-rated show on Discovery Network’s HD Theater and its newest channel, Velocity.

WCC delivers one-of-a-kind custom car builds for celebrities ranging from Shaquille O’Neal and Mark Wahlberg to Will.i.am and Justin Bieber. What viewers did not see is the behind-the-scenes drama when owner Ryan Friedlinghaus’ computer and designer Jeff Transou’s computers both crashed. Business hit the brakes.

“That’s when we turned to HP,” says Tito Arteaga, brand development manager for West Coast Customs. “We knew we couldn’t depend on the hodgepodge of technology we had cobbled together over time. We needed world-class IT to continue delivering world-class custom car builds, and HP was the partner to deliver it.”



West Coast Customs has since been transformed, with HP technology ranging from PCs to high-end workstations, digital signage displays, and large-format printers. Key to that transformation is adoption of HP Elite PCs, HP's toughest and most reliable PCs in business today.

HP EliteBook PCs used by key employees meet tough military standards testing for vibration, dust, altitude and high temperatures¹ with spill-resistant keyboards and durable casings. "We need a business-rugged machine in this business, so all the reliability testing that HP puts into the products is important to us," Arteaga continues. "You have people actually dropping things on the floor here. We need to know the technology meets the environment we work in."

From custom cars to media giant

As its fans all know, West Coast Customs was born 17 years ago when Friedlinghaus got a \$5000 loan from his grandfather to launch WCC. Since then, Friedlinghaus has grown the business. But television exposure has transformed it.

Today WCC is a hybrid: part custom car business, part media enterprise, part tourist destination. It is a unique, category-leading enterprise that draws car enthusiasts like a magnet. It has spawned franchises worldwide including locations in Malaysia, Japan, Mexico City, Germany, Russia and Dubai.

One result is that, while West Coast Customs portrays its multi-talented car technicians doing amazing things in the world's coolest garage, the whole business is driven by technology. That fact was never clearer than the day Friedlinghaus' and Transou's computers both crashed.

When West Coast Customs is hitting on all cylinders, technology supports the design process. It speeds customer approvals. It facilitates efficient project management. And, it feeds the need for content from West Coast's media empire and social network presence.

The problem was, West Coast Customs' existing IT infrastructure was not up to the challenge. The business had grown so quickly that its IT had fallen far behind.

Professional needs require professional tools

The company's PCs struggled to run the most demanding design software. They ran slowly, and crashes stymied the design process. As a result, customer approvals were at a standstill. So was project management. There was no centralized IT resource where employees could access data they needed to share. Instead, employees would move files from one computer to another by "sneaker net," hand-carried on flash drives.

"Having professional-grade IT wasn't a priority for us for a long time. We had to catch up," says Friedlinghaus. "When things went down and we lost access to designs and other work we'd done, it was clear how important technology had become to the business. We needed HP."

WCC had built a customized vehicle for HP several months earlier. The computer crash pointed out to Friedlinghaus that it was time to expand the HP relationship in order to make technology a strength for West Coast Customs.

HP recommends Windows.

The company began working with Intelli-Tech, an HP partner. Intelli-Tech consultants toured WCC's headquarters in Corona, Calif., examined the existing IT infrastructure, and talked with Friedlinghaus about his vision for how the company should run.

“We knew we couldn't depend on the hodgepodge of technology we had cobbled together over time. We needed world-class IT to continue delivering world-class custom car builds, and HP was the partner to deliver it.”

Tito Arteaga, brand development manager, West Coast Customs

Soon Intelli-Tech developed a recommendation for a soup-to-nuts update of the IT infrastructure. It included robust new computers for individual users: HP Z Workstations for the most demanding tasks, such as design and rendering; HP EliteBooks for mobile workers; and HP Compaq Elite Desktop PCs for other employee users. Tying it all together would be a robust network anchored by HP ProLiant servers.

The HP EliteBook Mobile Workstation runs genuine Windows® 7 Professional and is configured with a 1.73 GHz Intel® Core™ i7-740QM processor, 8 GB of RAM, and NVIDIA Quadro FX Series graphics with 1 GB of video memory.

Business solution

Within a day of the first crash, HP was on-site to empower Transou with an HP Z800 Workstation. The Z800 Workstation is routinely used to run the most demanding computer-aided design and rendering software on the market.

“The HP Workstation is ridiculously faster than the PCs we had before,” says Transou. “When it comes time to do something challenging, I don't have to wait for an hour glass to spin on my monitor; the process just happens.”

A 30-inch diagonal HP ZR30w widescreen monitor gives Transou plenty of room to work. “With a smaller monitor, I spent a lot of time zooming in and zooming out. With this much space, I can work faster and concentrate more on the design itself.”

WCC projects begin when Friedlinghaus engages a customer in blue-sky thinking about design possibilities. The design takes shape in Friedlinghaus' brain. Then he explains his vision to Transou, who uses Adobe® Illustrator® and Photoshop® to translate it into images that are used for customer approval and to guide the customizing process.

Friedlinghaus recalls when those images were all hand-drawn. A small change could take hours. Now, he says, Transou can switch out one wheel style for another in seconds to expedite changes. Once the rendering passes review with Friedlinghaus, it can be emailed to the customer for approval.

In addition, Transou prints the renderings out on an HP Designjet T1200 large format printer. In the past, WCC sent someone to the local quick print shop for 11 x 14 printouts. It often took hours; when the prints arrived at the shop, the color was a poor match to the original or streaks marred the image. That could hold up production of the television show, since the renderings were needed for a scene with Transou and Friedlinghaus.

No longer, though. “Now we're in control of print quality,” says Transou. “The prints are flawless and consistent and meet our expectations to feature on camera.” Walls throughout the business feature printouts of WCC's most dynamic designs, all created on HP large format printers.

An HP Designjet L25500 Printer is used to translate Friedlinghaus' wild ideas into vibrant vehicle wraps printed on 60-inch vinyl or polyester film.

Rugged Elite PCs stand up to shop abuse

HP Z Workstations were also deployed to other designers at WCC, and HP EliteBook 8540w Mobile Workstations for other key players in the company.

Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

Variety of small business applications

Primary hardware

- HP EliteBook 8540w Mobile Workstation
- HP Compaq 8000f Elite Ultra Slim Desktop PC
- HP Compaq 8200 Elite All-in-One PC
- HP Z800 Workstation
- HP ZR30w 30-inch LCD Monitor
- HP Designjet T1200 Printer
- HP Designjet L25500 Printer
- HP t5740 Thin Client
- HP ProLiant DL380 G7 Server
- HP LD4200tm 42-inch LCD Digital Signage Display

Primary software

- Genuine Windows® 7 Professional
- Microsoft® Access®
- Microsoft® Excel®
- Adobe® Illustrator®
- Adobe® Photoshop®

HP recommends Windows.

“We all have HP EliteBook Notebook PCs that we take with us so we can continue working at home,” says Arteaga. “Mobility is important to the way we work, and it’s great to have the EliteBook with high processing power and performance.”

In addition, he says, standardizing on HP Elite-series and Z-series models means consistency between work areas so employees can move throughout the office or garage without missing a beat.

In the shop area, Intelli-Tech chose to install HP t5740 Thin Clients. Thin clients give shop workers complete access to the network, including shared resources such as project renderings, and applications running on HP ProLiant DL380 G7 Servers. And because they have no hard drive or moving parts, they also stand up to the harsh, dusty environment of the shop.

It’s simple to swap out one thin client for another as needed. As soon as the new thin client boots up, it has complete access to all the existing files and applications.

For guests (including fans from the television shows), the impact of HP technology is immediate. They sign in digitally as visitors using an HP Compaq 8200 Elite All-in-One PC, where they can also see images of WCC’s most outstanding work. As they tour the facility, they view videos and other content about WCC’s projects on HP LD4200tm Digital Signage Displays.

HP digital signage displays are also prominently featured in the shop, where they replaced digital “countdown” clocks. The digital displays are run by HP Compaq 8000f Elite Ultra-Slim Desktop PCs. They provide workers access to

project management information needed to move cars through the customization process efficiently. That helps WCC meet deadlines and deliver exactly what the customer wants.

Arteaga is anticipating how the power of HP servers and workstations can be used to streamline business processes at WCC. One short-term target is automating employee timesheets with the project billing system, so that WCC can track labor and project costs continuously. Another is creating an integrated system for parts ordering, eliminating the need for individual research by phone, and enabling consolidation of orders for standard parts.

Looking ahead

Friedlinghaus believes strongly in relationships. With customer after customer, what started as a simple car customization has turned into a long-term relationship with WCC. Now he’s anticipating how the company’s relationship with HP can flourish.

One dimension of that relationship is using HP technology in WCC custom car builds. “I’m envisioning ways we can customize HP Tablet PCs into vehicles,” he says. “We are constantly looking for next steps to push forward.”

Also in the visionary plans is a different type of custom build. “We want to apply our concept to creation processes into a learning experience for students,” he explains. “How that will evolve is still in the idea stage. That’s our business. Every project we turn out is an idea that hits the street.”



Get connected

www.hp.com/go/getconnected

Get the insider view on tech trends, alerts, and HP solutions for better business outcomes



Share with colleagues

© Copyright 2012 Hewlett-Packard Development Company, L.P. The information contained herein is subject to change without notice. The only warranties for HP products and services are set forth in the express warranty statements accompanying such products and services. Nothing herein should be construed as constituting an additional warranty. HP shall not be liable for technical or editorial errors or omissions contained herein.

Adobe, Illustrator and Photoshop are trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.

Intel and Core are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries.

All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

¹ Testing was not intended to demonstrate fitness for DOD contracts requirements or for military use.

4AA3-9170ENW, Created January 2012; Updated October 2012, Rev. 2

