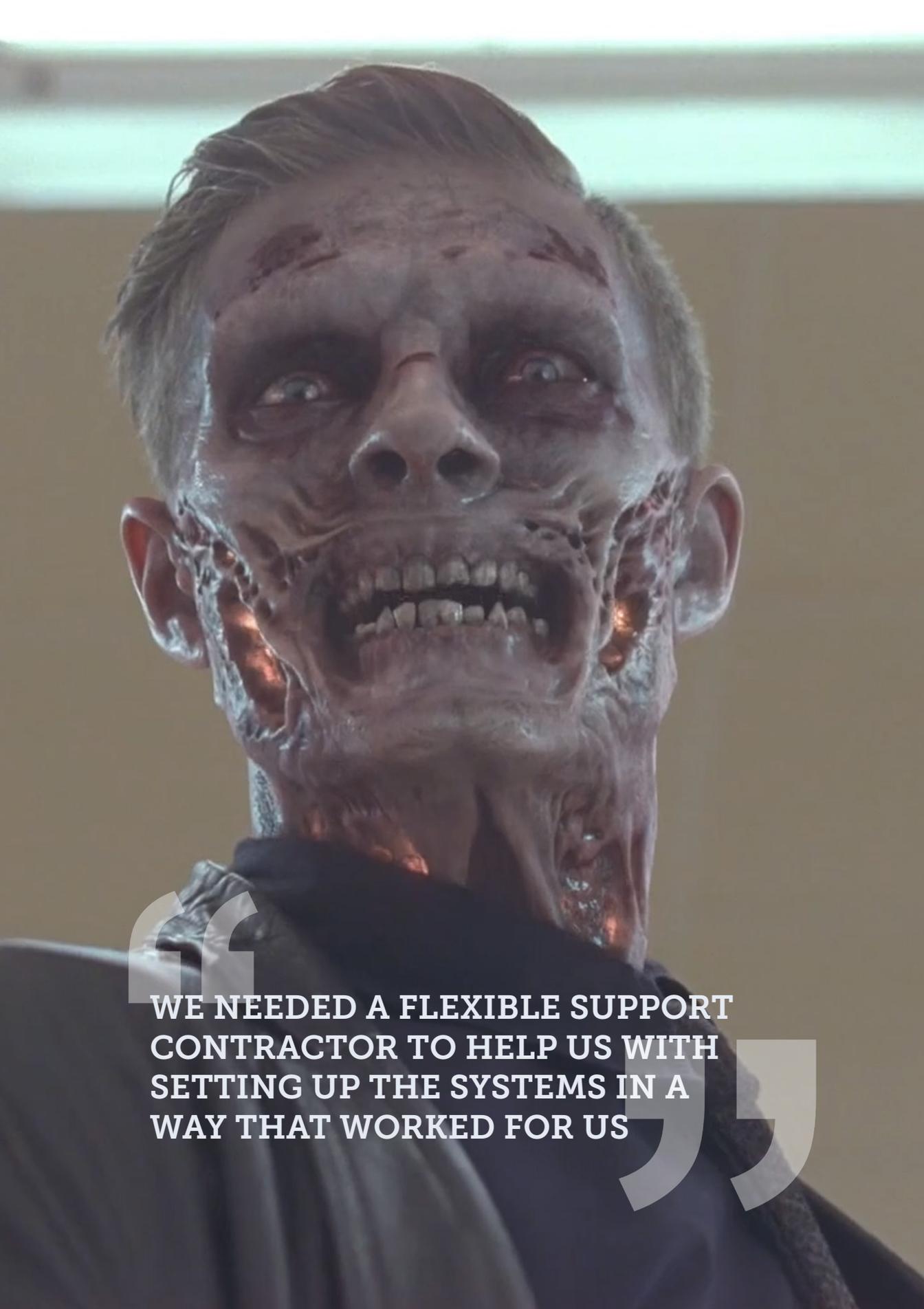


VINE FX

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

AN ESCAPE TECHNOLOGY CASE STUDY



**WE NEEDED A FLEXIBLE SUPPORT
CONTRACTOR TO HELP US WITH
SETTING UP THE SYSTEMS IN A
WAY THAT WORKED FOR US**

The story of Vine FX is as much about place as it is about technology, vision and ambition. This tale of a leading visual effects studio, which has worked on *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*, *Patrick Melrose* and *Crazyheads* to name but three, starts out just like many others.

“I was working at Cinesite in London and I wanted another challenge,” explains Michael Illingworth, Vine FX’s founder, “so I decided to set up my own visual effects facility.” That was in 2007 and, as Michael puts it, “at that time, the only place to run a visual effects company was Central London. I managed to find a small office, and it was just me, a desk and a settee.” ➔

But things didn't stay quite so small, or so static for long. "In 2010 we set up in a small office in Leavesden Studios," Michael continues, "where we worked with the Harry Potter team in-house on the two Deathly Hallows films. After that we occupied Cutting Rooms in Central London, and in 2012 we worked on the Merlin TV show and had a team of 15 artists."

But, and this is a pattern that's a key part of Vine FX's story, the company didn't stay in Central London very long, choosing instead to go back out to Leavesden Studios once more. "We set up an in-house team doing post-vis for *Fantastic Beasts*," continues Michael, "and after that I went back to operating from Cutting Rooms again where we worked on *Crazyheads* with a team of around 12 artists on site. After we'd finished, as usual we put everything back into a box and stored all the gear in my garage."

Hello Cambridge

With so much moving around, it's clear that Vine FX had yet to find its home, and with good reason. "It was always my long-term ambition to set up a company outside of London," Michael states. "I've lived in Cambridge for over 20 years and I enjoy being here. I enjoy getting out of London and going somewhere a little bit quieter. But it didn't feel like it was possible to run a visual effects company outside of Central London... so I started small."

"A few years ago I saw the productions sending more work to Canada. Lots of systems had been put in place at that time to ensure that was an efficient way of working." If it can work for Canada, then there was no reason it couldn't be as successful – if not more so – in Cambridge. "We're in the same time zone, can speak to the client

during reasonable hours and if we could transfer data effectively, this was something that could definitely take off."

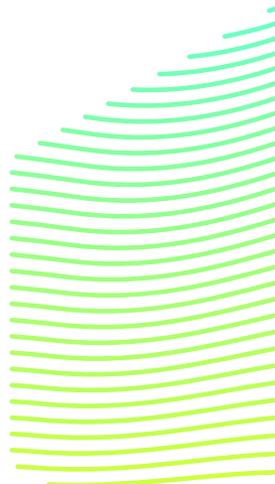
Michael began in Cambridge with just the Autodesk Flame he'd been using for the last 20 years. He's a big fan because Flame allows him to get a feel for the footage and explore a range of possible solutions to the shot he's after. "The storage is so quick I can whizz up and down 4K in real time. I don't want to have to wait for things to render. I just need something that's instant. The speed gives the artist the opportunity to experiment. And there's a great community out there."

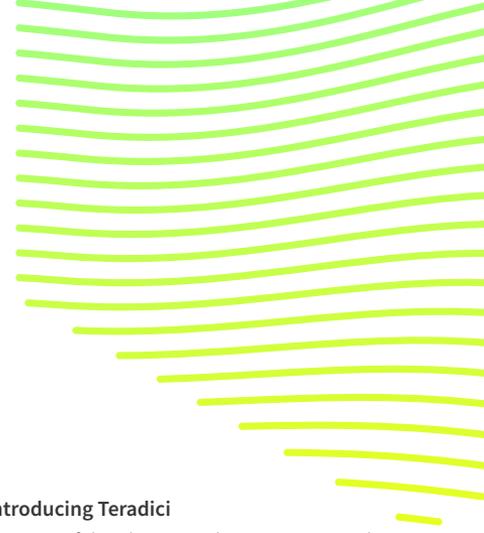
Initially Michael found a few small projects and worked on the shots himself. Slowly but steadily though, people began to notice. Soon he needed to scale up to meet demand, firstly adding an additional compositor and producer, and then growing significantly over the last two years, with plans to expand further.

But what is it about Cambridge that's so attractive to Michael and the people who work there with him? "It's a lot calmer," Michael begins, "with the leaves and the trees blowing in the background, and not much traffic noise. It's a calm place to work." And with the team often back in London for face-to-face meetings with clients, a reminder of what they're not missing is never too far away!

Support from near and far

Throughout all of these moves, scale-ups and scale-downs, Escape Technology has provided expert support to Vine FX. In fact, this support contract was one of Escape Technology's first, and therefore one of its longest, beginning with initial set-up way back when. Like the company itself, the





technology has come a long way since Michael's first desktop-computer based Flame in 2007. "We get all of our hardware and software from Escape Technology," states Michael. "We needed a flexible support contractor to help us with setting up the systems in a way that worked for us."

"We could budget what we needed in terms of the projects we were running. They came in and set up all of our systems in 2012 and did it in a way that meant we could scale, whether we were buying just two or three machines, or scaling up to thirty or forty artists. It's always been a contract that's worked for me. There was a fear that the support contract might not work now we're far away, but we were reassured by the Escape Technology that they could still help us, whether we were up the road in Central London, or up the A1 in Cambridge."

Flame on with HP Z8s

Vine FX has just recently upgraded its Flame which runs on an HP Z8. "We've got a brand new box and 16 SSD hard drives so it's blazingly fast. We've also upgraded our storage to half a petabyte, again all maintained by Escape. We've been using HP machines for a good six or seven years now." Michael even admits that they are still running some machines from the original 2012 set up.

"HP Z640s and 20s were the main boxes we bought for our Maya artists. If there's something that requires an extra bit of oomph, we go for the Z8. Often we need to expand the boxes. We might have a particular task that needs more RAM, or a speedier hard drive and it's easy to get those things delivered straight up to us. Any emergencies, or if I've broken something, someone from Escape will jump on the train and come and help us out."

Introducing Teradici

Because of their location, the company employs quite a few remote artists, which has seen Escape Technology recommend and set up Teradici PCoIP, which connects these remote artists to the Cambridge office as if they're sitting in the same room, with access to all the same tools and resources as the rest of the team.

The Teradici Host Card and software combination allows remote artists to connect to the powerful Z8 workstations in Cambridge, and stream images as compressed and encoded pixels, dynamically adapting the level of encoding based on the available bandwidth. In essence, it means Michael's team in Cambridge has the potential to expand globally, without ever leaving the calm of its now firmly-established home.

With this peaceful environment and influx of talent, it's no wonder that Cambridge plays host to leading brands such as Amazon, Microsoft and Apple, many of whom happen to be on the same street! "There are some great technology companies in Cambridge," Michael finishes, "and some great games developers too. We're just happy to slot in making pictures and creating visual effects."

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