

# The Road to Success

## OpenDrives Powers Dave Grohl's "What Drives Us" Documentary



### Rockers reminisce about the salad days

As we get older and achieve measures of success in our careers, we tend to look back fondly on our “salad days.” Often those are the days when we were younger and hungrier for success (and sometimes for good food), but were having fun and living more fully in the moment. Even world-renowned rock stars wax nostalgic about their younger, leaner years—about those times when they hadn't quite made it, before the non-stop adulation,

seemingly glamorous lifestyle, and all that comes along with fame and success.

Dave Grohl—Foo Fighters frontman who rose to international fame as the drummer for Nirvana—decided to share those experiences and how it felt to live them. With the help of his production partner, Jim Rota (Blackmagic Design and Therapy Studios), Grohl (Roswell Films) hopped into a tour van once again to give a glimpse into life on the road, all while

regaling stories and interviewing a host of iconic musicians to get their perspectives on one of music's most universal journeys—the gritty, low-budget van tours that launched their careers. With a van, the requisite amount of equipment (including Blackmagic cameras capturing 4.6K RAW footage to work with in Blackmagic Resolve), and a handful of fellow travelers, they hit the road again to film a different kind of rock documentary, **What Drives Us**.

## Paving a road to remote post-production

The timing of this project unfortunately collided with the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020. With footage captured and rough cuts assembled, Grohl and Rota, along with fellow producers John Ramsay and Mark Monroe, were ready to go into full-blown post-production editing when all creative activities ground to a halt. The pandemic shuttered the film industry; with post-production facilities closing their doors to keep workers isolated and safe, Grohl's project was thrown into a holding pattern.

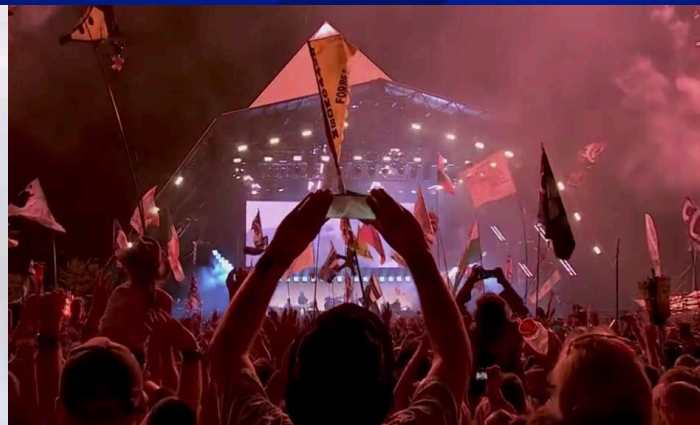
As with any entertainment project, delays can only be sustained for so long before financial and investment considerations start to ratchet up the pressure. Somehow, post-production for **What Drives Us** needed to resume remotely if on-premise operations were out of the question—and they certainly seemed out of the question.

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**It's easy to see the impact of COVID-19 from the consumer's eyes: movie theater shutdowns, canceled concerts, sporting events and live performances of all kinds. But Hollywood has been just as hard hit behind the scenes: movies and TV shows can't be created with a 'business as usual' approach to filming or post-production,” said Rota. “Without the speed and performance we have on-premises, audio and video quality is completely compromised.**

A number of challenges stood in the way. Restarting activities with a distributed and remote creative workforce wasn't as easy as just leveraging the VPN capabilities on workstations. Most post-production workflows depend upon on-premise equipment and personnel. Co-locating storage solutions and creatives' workstations vastly reduces performance degradation (caused by data transfers and multiple concurrent users) and allows for smoother collaboration and handoffs between editors and other creatives working side-by-side. The danger in a remote workflow was that uprooting them from a familiar on-premise environment could trigger significant upheaval and further loss of productivity.

This put Grohl's and Rota's post-production team into a solution-testing dilemma. They experimented with a cloud-based remote workflow in which all the RAW footage from the Blackmagic cameras was uploaded to a public cloud service provider, but after many weeks of data-transfer activities just to move files—in excess of 45 TB of total data—to the





“ We were able to handle a fully digital end-to-end post-production and envision a new future for post-pandemic times, an era when film can finally leverage cross-continent expertise to carry out the best projects possible.

—Jim Rota

cloud, then testing out many different adjustments to the remote workflow, the performance they achieved was mediocre at best. And post-production does not thrive on mediocre performance. On top of that, the team worked with Blackmagic RAW content going directly from the cameras into Blackmagic Resolve's editing suite, which is a cutting-edge practice that would require every bit of performance they could get from a storage solution and workstations.

## OpenDrives Anywhere helps the show go on

Given the caliber of projects we had previously supported in the past, especially those involving Blackmagic Resolve, Rota approached OpenDrives to craft the right solution. As a vendor of ultra-high-performance data storage and management solutions with a team largely comprised of media and entertainment workflow experts, we were eager to help. From an industry perspective, the ability to support distributed and remote post-production workflows was a novel concept, but one which OpenDrives had been working on even prior to the

pandemic, so the challenges weren't new to us, and we knew the right course of action.

The timing was aligned, as we were already in the process of codifying and documenting our remote solution, OpenDrives Anywhere. An in-place private cloud solution, OpenDrives Anywhere does not require any under-the-hood changes to our storage products, but rather facilitates remote users with a unique reference architecture we had extensively tested out internally and were prepared to deploy by the time Dave Grohl and Jim Rota engaged our team. The goal of OpenDrives Anywhere was to support even the most demanding collaborative workflows by delivering the same level of performance virtually as on-premise for geographically scattered end-users. Now we had an opportunity to prove it out.

We dedicated an OpenDrives Optimum storage solution and three 'headless' high-performance workstations to serve as the co-located equipment in the post-production private cloud. Remote users controlled these workstations using a secure

connection from wherever they happened to be. For example, one editor was working in Chicago via remote connection to the storage infrastructure and workstations co-located in Los Angeles. The critical component of all this is to ensure that creatives can work with media—even up to and including high-resolution RAW files—without any degradation in project loading, playback, or scrubbing. Unlike their previous attempt with a cloud-based solution, which delivered sub-par performance with an often-choppy user experience in playback, OpenDrives Anywhere provided the data infrastructure they needed to make remote post-production possible without distracting technical barriers.

It only took five days to set up OpenDrives Anywhere and migrate content for the team to quickly return to work. They wrapped nearly one full month ahead of critical deadlines and the minimal investment to deploy the solution kept the project on budget. By creating a private cloud architecture that brings the same level of performance natively as on-premise, a world of new possibilities is opened.