



Kroll Ontrack Reclaims Animation Tape for Christchurch Production Company After Earthquake

Ontrack® Data Recovery

“Within minutes water was coming up through the floor of Orly’s studios. We literally had over four inches of water suddenly appear. It looked like a CGI (computer generated image) project. It just appeared out of the ground.”

Orly Productions is one of New Zealand’s most experienced film and television production companies. From its studio in Christchurch, Orly’s tight-knit creative team oversees the production of television commercials, technically advanced interactive media for sales and marketing, and business communications. Its clients are a “who’s who” of leading local and global organisations.

As might be expected for such a company, Orly’s studio represents a substantial investment in high tech equipment including state of the art cameras, non-linear editing systems, special effects gear, voice over recording and online client viewing facilities, and a temperature controlled central server room. Orly also uses the specialised high volume Linear Tape-Open (LTO) magnetic tapes to back up and store all its data.

Disaster strikes

Around midday on 22nd February, 2011 an Orly animator got up from his desk to return the company’s animation LTO to its secure data storage safe. The tape held all of the company’s animation output for the past twelve months. Ross Beck, Managing Director of Orly Productions explains, “The material on the LTO is essentially the blueprint for a year’s worth of projects. We store it on the LTO for future reference by our clients and ourselves so if they need to be used again we can draw the material from that back-up file. It’s a pretty important part of our business.”

As the animator approached the data safe he realised that other staff and a client were working nearby. Rather than intrude he placed the tape on top of the safe and decided to lock it away later. It was an unfortunate decision because, as Beck notes, “Within the hour the earth moved.” At 1pm a massive 6.3 magnitude earthquake rocked Christchurch causing immense loss of life and extensive damage throughout the city.

At Orly’s studios the building was extensively damaged and liquefaction quickly set in. It’s a relatively common process arising during earthquakes whereby the ground vibrations turn solids such as soil into a liquid mass. “It’s a bit like taking flour and compacting it by shaking it in a bowl,” Beck says. “All the water particles come free and a fine silt-like mix of sand and water forces its way through minute holes in ground surfaces, even concrete slab floors.”



An Altegrity Company

And the animation LTO? The earthquake had knocked the tape off the data safe and onto the floor where it was soon covered in the liquefaction mud.

The aftermath

Given the extensive damage to Orly's studio, fixing a mud-soaked tape wasn't high on the company's immediate priorities. Setting up a temporary studio and keeping the business running seemed a more sensible focus. Besides, Beck points out, the tape was a back up.

However as life began to get back to normal the Orly team pondered the animation tape. Orly had two LTO machines but one had been damaged and they was reluctant to try the tape in the other. No one wanted to take the risk of causing any further damage to the tape or the machine.

"A big part of our work is the support we provide clients. A lot of production companies give clients their copies of a finished project but don't necessarily keep back-up files. That's not the way we do business. Our clients have the use of their animations not only within the original projects but we also make the material available for changes and ongoing work. If we were suddenly unable to provide this, the potential for losing work would be high," Beck says.

Unsure where to start with the tape, Beck searched online and spoke to contacts. "We had a local guy that had worked with us when we had a hard drive failure some time back. He pointed us in Kroll Ontrack's direction. Because the LTO wasn't physically damaged we hoped there could be a chance to get the data off. We had doubts but we didn't really know enough."

The LTO was sent to Kroll Ontrack's Brisbane clean room where the damage could be assessed but, Adrian Briscoe, General Manager APAC, Kroll Ontrack explains, "The contamination was so severe we decided to ship the tape to our specialised tape facility in the U.S. to increase the chances of a successful recovery."

The results surprised everyone who had seen the tape. The Kroll technicians recovered 100 per cent of the data. Despite being shaken up, dropped to the ground and covered in mud, nothing had been lost. Within ten days the contents of the animation tape were on their way back to Orly.

"To be honest, we were just writing it off. We didn't even think that there were people around who did this sort of work. It's been a really fantastic outcome for us," Beck smiles.

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- » **Tape duplication and de-duplication**
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