



# NFL FILMS AND CONNX SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY



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**Industry**  
Tele-production

**HQ**  
Mount Laurel, NJ

**Solutions**  
CONNX for VAX



## CONNX Helps Manage Vast Football Video Library

With dozens of pro football teams playing on Sunday, and hundreds of news outlets seeking first-rate video for stories airing mid-week, NFL Films faces a level of pressure rivaling that encountered by the players themselves. To help producers of sports programs satisfy fans' insatiable appetite for dramatic and comprehensive coverage, the organization must rapidly catalogue and quickly retrieve key segments from the vast quantity of footage it shoots weekly during the season.

Every Sunday, award-winning NFL Films dispatches two crews to each NFL game. For high-profile contests, the standard coverage - a ground level

camera and one above the press box, - is augmented with long lenses and an end zone camera. Four or five games may also have special sound crews. The 16-millimeter film is processed, edited and transferred to video immediately after the games.

Dave Franza, Director of Information Technologies, had developed an extensive "Vault", or tape library system used by the production, scheduling, sales and accounting departments throughout NFL Films since 1988. However, Franza saw both a need and opportunity to migrate the system from a VAX/RMS-based one to the more robust client/server platform, which

*"CONNX is much faster than the alternatives. Without CONNX, we wouldn't be able to preserve the data that's on the VAX."*

- John Murphy | Consultant for NFL Films

## Highlights

- ◆ NFL Films successfully tackles massive video cataloguing project using CONNX.
- ◆ Company scores efficiency gains using CONNX to create new barcoding system—without having to rewrite its database.
- ◆ Organization's game plan includes orderly migration to PCs, with CONNX providing on-going access to its VAX system.



would eventually provide a much more substantial footage logging, archival and research system for producers. After researching several software vendors and commercially available logging packages, NFL Films decided to develop the system in-house, thereby retaining all rights to the finished product. Franza's tools of choice were Powerbuilder and SQL, running on the Windows NT based network in place at NFL Films as of May, 1995. Enter one John Murphy, an experienced Powerbuilder and systems programmer hired by Franza to consult on the logging system project.

As a first step, Murphy needed to interface the company's legacy Vault application to a new logging one designed to record content. The new client/server application would provide access to the RMS files on the VAX, with the new content-oriented database housed on clients. In addition to the information about logistics, the new logging system also needed to display two other key pieces of information from the RMS files: a master file record that exists for each tape, and an activity log for each time a tape leaves Vault.

In a previous job, Murphy had used DBIntegrator as an interface, but found it slow and hard to work with. "It seemed to blow up on large results sets," he recalls. "If we had a few thousand rows to retrieve, it went belly up." He had replaced DBIntegrator with CONNX, a software tool from SolutionsIQ in Bellevue, Washington. Among its many features, CONNX provides read/write access to RMS files on a VAX. It also includes an ODBC driver to provide fast access to RMS files without a major programming effort. Murphy knew that CONNX would enable him to meet the interfacing challenge he confronted. "When I got this job, there was no question what I would use," he says, "especially when I learned that CONNX included an ODBC driver." Murphy used Powerbuilder for Windows and Windows NT to create the new, content-rich logging system. Between Monday morning and Thursday afternoon, a logger watches each video and records what's taking place. The program is all menu-driven, with drop-down boxes containing the various categories of content. These categories enable the logger to note details about the tape with great precision -that a throw was a bomb, over the middle or a sideline pass, for example. The logger can also key in additional information that does not have a predefined category - such as "coach shouting at a player from sidelines."

"There were three major advantages to CONNX," according to Murphy. "First, CONNX works— especially with large results sets. Second, CONNX has special fields defined that help implement RMS files, particularly in the date and numeric processing areas. That means our old COBOL and Basic program structures still work. And finally, there are real performance gains."

Over the next two years, NFL Films will continue their move from terminals to PCs. During the transition, many producers will keep using the Vault system on the VAX. "We currently have about 100 users with old VAX terminals, as well as 60 PC users." Murphy explains. "As we add PCs and switch to new software, CONNX makes it possible for us to continue to run our old key searches from a terminal or a PC."

For those users still on VAX terminals, Murphy re-did some of the screens, bringing a new look to the old VAX system. After the success using CONNX to create the new logging system, NFL Films decided to use the product to extend the Vault system by creating a barcoding system. NFL Films uses the barcoding capabilities to print barcodes for the tapes, drawing on information in the Vault system. "CONNX enabled us to augment Vault, instead of having to rewrite it," Murphy says. "We can use the data from the barcoding program without touching the database on the VAX. Using CONNX also enabled us to develop a whole new set of PC tools and a new relational database - again, without touching the database on the VAX." According to Murphy, for NFL Films' high-profile, high-visibility and high-stakes needs, the key benefit of CONNX is that "it makes the impossible possible. As far as I'm concerned," he says, "it's the whole ball game."

## About NFL Films

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## About CONNX

CONNX Solutions, Inc., with its flagship software product, CONNX, brings EAI/universal data access technology to over 3,000 organizations worldwide by enabling access to all enterprise data, regardless of origin, through one interface. The company maintains strategic relationships with industry-leading organizations including Microsoft Corporation; Oracle Corporation; Sybase Inc.; Informix; Computer Associates International, Inc.; IBM Corporation; and Compaq Computer Corporation. Founded in 1989, CONNX remains locally owned and managed through its headquarters in Redmond, Washington. For more information, contact CONNX Sales at (425) 519-6600, or visit our Web site at [www.connx.com](http://www.connx.com)



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