Vincent Laforet & the G-SPEED Studio XL:
Opening New Doors With G-Technology's Compact, Next-Gen Storage

Photographed by ©2014 Jon Carr

For a man who has spent the last five years based out of his Los Angeles studio office, renowned director and photographer Vincent Laforet shows surprisingly little remorse over closing the doors and moving out. If anything, he seems anxious to be gone.

Every surface in the narrow studio hides under cases, drives, cameras, lenses, printing supplies, cabling, tripods, and all manner of detritus accumulated during a career that has evolved well beyond his roots as a photojournalist. In the center of it all sits a thigh-high rackmount enclosure stuffed with hot-swappable hard drive bays. Atop the rack sits several smaller storage enclosures. All told, Vincent's server boasts 100 TB of storage cobbled together over Fibre Channel, SAS, and Ethernet connections. Vincent sank nearly $75,000 into the 400-pound mountain of equipment, and it's served him well, enabling him not only to protect and manage his data but also send files to clients at a moment's notice. Five years later, though, Vincent is ready to move on.

"I don't know what to do with it," he says. "A guy on Craigslist asked what I wanted for it, and I have no idea. Don't get me wrong – it's earned its keep. At a time when most people weren't using hard drives for their photo business, I once made $30,000 on a job because I was able to use a plane's Wi-Fi to send a file from that server with my tablet. The thing is, everything that server could do, I can now do with a G-SPEED® Studio XL, and the Studio XL doesn't require a forklift."

G-SPEED® Studio XL with Thunderbolt™

©2014 Vincent Laforet

Storage For Change

Not since his first camera has Vincent had a product so profoundly impact his life. Scarcely larger than a briefcase and fashioned with a sleek black exterior akin to the new Mac™ Pro, the G-SPEED Studio XL houses up to eight hard drives configurable in hardware-based RAID formats from 0 through 60. Armed with two Thunderbolt™ 2 ports for easy, scalable daisy chaining, the G-SPEED Studio XL can sustain data transfer rates of up to 1350 MB/s, perfect for multi-stream 4K workflows, and is fully compatible with HGST's latest top-capacity drives.

Vincent has nothing but praise for the Studio XL. Within five minutes of discussing his mammoth storage server, though, Vincent will inevitably refer to it as his "ball and chain," the thing that keeps him tied to the Los Angeles studio. Years ago, he found it difficult to find a New York apartment that could accommodate its weight, security, and energy requirements. (His summer air conditioning bills would cost $700 a month, and the enclosure could heat his entire apartment in the winter.) The thought of having one server on each coast was ludicrous. Now, Vincent plans on cloning his first Studio XL onto a second, placing one in each city, and traveling between them as work and leisure allow.

No more studio office. No more spending thousands of dollars every month on space and electricity. Vincent sees no point in it. At best, he might bring clients to his office four or five times per year and then leave with them immediately for a restaurant or job site. With its glass and steel décor, pockets of tech gear, and oversized art collection, the studio might impress, but no one ever hired Vincent for his interior decoration skills. The space was necessary at best and, at worst, an anchor weighing down his finances, creativity, and life.

"Could you find better uses for $30,000 a year?" he asks. "Take a big adventure trip with the family? Make a movie? I mean, have an experience! That's what wealth is: the people in your life and the time you share with them. The Studio XL is liberating me to better pursue the things that matter."

G-SPEED® Studio XL with Thunderbolt™

Why the Studio XL?

The market is not short on external storage options. Vincent should know — plenty of them sit buzzing and blinking in a pile next to his assistant's desk. (Not coincidentally, Vincent's own desk is at the opposite end of the office.) But a handful of factors set the G-SPEED Studio XL apart from other storage solutions. Not many products can accommodate over 40 TB of storage in a form factor about the size of a gaming console. Also, on those occasions when Vincent does have colleagues and clients in his office, he would rather display tools that reflect the sleek nimbleness of his current and future business, not a cumbersome hodgepodge of cobbled-together products better suited to a former decade.

One of Vincent's favorite features is the Studio XL's noise output, or rather the lack of it. The compact enclosure, with a footprint smaller than a sheet of copy paper, stays cool with only two low-RPM, dynamically controlled case fans. In contrast, the server's rack enclosure alone features four 120 mm fans, plus the dozen or two fans spread throughout the storage system and all its satellite devices.
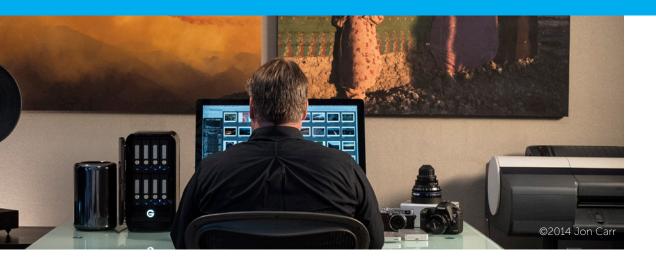

G-SPEED® Studio XL with Thunderbolt™

"Ah, God, and the noise of that server on every interview I've done in here!" Vincent says. "You should hear the sound engineers rage about it."

After five years of constant, insectile buzzing, Vincent finally shuts down the server. He backs away, halting in the middle of the concrete studio floor, sandwiched between two-story high walls filled with rock and roll cover art canvases. He and his assistant observe a moment of true silence as the server's many fans and motors spin down. For practically the first time since moving in, Vincent hears ... nothing. The G-SPEED Studio XL operates near the old server, but its whisper is inaudible from more than a few inches away.

"Ahhh," Vincent sighs and glares at his officially deceased server. "How could anyone work in here with that thing's noise? I don't. I can't be creative around that. I have to go to the beach or my home or something."

As an artist, Vincent appreciates the Studio XL's aesthetics, but, as a former IT guy, he cares just as much about his storage solution's reliability and the performance of its components. G-Technology packs the G-SPEED Studio XL with up to eight Enterprise-class HGST Ultrastar drives, refined over decades from the same hard disk line developed by IBM. Unlike the consumer-grade drives used in most network-attached storage (NAS) solutions, Enterprise-class hard drives are designed from the ground up to run under constant load around the clock, every day, for years. Plugging consumer drives into such environments is asking for protracted performance and premature drive failure. G-Technology also takes care to use the industry's finest hardware-based RAID controllers. The enclosure features a sturdy, vibration-dampening design. And, like all G-Technology products, the G-SPEED Studio XL underwent stringent product testing, both in the lab and with real world

©2014 Jon Carr

creative professionals like Vincent, whose feedback help make sure that solutions are optimized for their specific markets.

On performance, Vincent requires Thunderbolt 2 throughput for the terabyte or so of 4K and higher project footage he imports on any given shooting day. As a backup device, though, Vincent has a more intuitive way to measure performance. With his prior server, a full archive duplication (roughly 100 TB) required five days. With the Studio XL, the job can be done in a single business day. While backup is ostensibly a background task, faster completion offers two benefits: 1) it reduces the window of risk for errors to creep into the backup process and 2) completing the task more quickly lets the storage device return to full availability sooner, meaning more bandwidth for more pressing tasks.
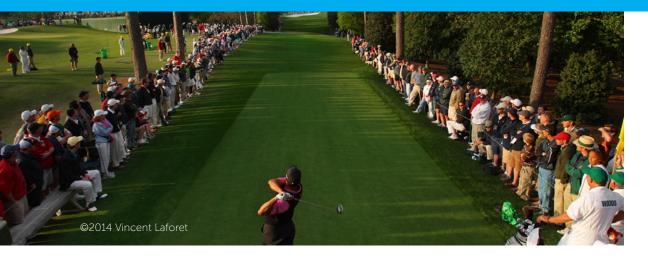
Not least of all, there's price. Specifics depend on the drive configuration, of course, but the G-SPEED Studio XL will ring up for only four figures, not the five of Vincent's original $75,000 solution. At this level, Vincent can have his dual-coast storage strategy and all of the freedom that comes with it.

Changing Storage, Changing Lives

Ultimately, Vincent's storage transition reflects the maturing of his career. A decade ago, with his shared Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography still freshly minted, storage was his employer's problem. By 2008, though, Vincent's pioneering of DSLR cinematography made him a rising star in commercial video, and he needed all of the gear that accompanied the trade — big cameras, big cranes, and a really big storage server.

Today, though, a growing career means that Vincent must be lighter, nimbler, and effortlessly mobile. As his jobs grow larger and more ambitious, his ability to maintain the technology necessary for those jobs becomes increasingly infeasible. Counterintuitively, a bigger career requires a smaller footprint. The Vincent of tomorrow will be paid for his knowledge and vision, not the tons of steel he has gathering dust on rented floor space.

The G-SPEED Studio XL frees Vincent from his ball and chain of old school storage. It provides the same security, speed, and ability to deliver content to clients from anywhere in the world on a moment's notice, but without dragging down Vincent's options. Some people might assume that a rackmounted, data center-type storage backbone would inherently offer more stability and better support than a device that can tuck under one arm, but Vincent is a long-time G-Technology user. He knows better.

©2014 Vincent Laforet

"People ask me what I think of G-Technology's support, and I have to tell them I don't know. Sorry, I wish I could tell you, but ... over all these years, I've never had to use it. In this case, ignorance really is bliss."

For Vincent Laforet, the G-SPEED Studio XL is about less doing more. It's about getting smart with operational expenditures and putting that money toward more creativity and a higher quality of life. It's about shedding limitations. Perhaps most of all, the Studio XL gives Vincent more freedom to pursue his biggest career challenges of today — and the even grander visions he'll dream up tomorrow.

laforetvisuals.com

instagram.com/vincentlaforet

twitter.com/vincentlaforet

g-technology.com