Keeping Students and Organizations Connected at Georgia College

Digital signage provides high-tech communications to campus groups

Georgia College & State University (GCSU) is a campus alive with Greek life, intramural sports and various academic and honors societies. With more than 200 student organizations and a wide variety of campus and community activities to promote at this school in Milledgeville, Ga., simplifying the flow of information is vital to communication and student involvement.

In 2007, members of GCSU's Student Government Association came to the Office of Student Affairs and Campus Life requesting to broaden the university's arsenal of communication tools. They wanted something with a wow factor that would make announcements stand out to students who were already overwhelmed by online advertising and info on bulletin boards.

"The Student Government Association found itself planning and communicating events on Facebook, through student e-mail and with old-fashioned posters," said Billy Grace, a senator in the Student Government Association. "Announcements in Facebook and e-mail can be ignored and deleted easily, and continually printing posters is costly and not environmentally friendly."

So Grace and other members of the Student Government Association scoured the Internet to find more innovative and creative mediums for communicating with their peers. The solution had to be cost-effective and adaptable to future needs.

"The forms of communication we were working with were not expansive enough for our needs," said Grace. "We wanted to create a flagship medium for communicating student announcements and events."

It didn't take long for the Student Government Association to discover digital signage, which appeared to be the perfect vehicle for broadcasting what students needed to know. Student groups, as well as campus faculty and administrators, would have the ability to distribute important news and updates quickly and in a more practical manner.

Georgia College & State University

After considering various digital signage providers, GCSU approached Scala to power its new communication network. With the help of Capital Signs, a Scala Certified Partner based in Lilburn, Ga., GCSU started installing the digital signs in March 2008.

Bobcat Vision

Bobcat Vision, the name of GCSU's digital signage network, consists of 18 32-inch and three 42-inch high-definition displays, which are mounted in various campus areas, including,

- Student activities center (one screen)
- Terrell Hall faculty offices and student lounge (one screen)
- Arts & Sciences building (three screens)
- Herty Hall science building (one screen)
- Einstein Bros. Bagels (one screen)
- Parks Hall administration building (one screen)
- Atkinson Hall business building (two screens)
- Maxwell Student Union dining hall (six screens)
- Kilpatrick Hall education building (one screen)
- Porter Hall music building (one screen)

The Capital Signs crew worked with GCSU's IT department to install players and servers in secure network closets, as well as design and install each monitor location. Additionally, they worked with the GCSU Physical Plant to install power and network capability at each player location. A high-definition feed via campus cable links network content to residence halls and will allow content to be broadcast to future campus locations.

To run the network, GCSU obtained 12 licenses for Scala Players, Designer, Content Manager and Template Composer EX module. Capital Signs designed all of the graphics and templates stored in Scala Content Manager. Scala Designer is available in the student activities center, and it is used by the system administrator (a student) to build new templates and graphics for all users of the digital signage network.

Scala Content Manager software, which allows student groups and campus members to add their own messaging to the templates, is available to any authorized student with Internet access. This gives them the ability to add messages from off-campus housing, as well as from computer labs and dormitories.

Student organizations and authorized campus members who would like to use digital signage receive a system login and password, a basic tutorial and the Web site URL. Through the Web, users can log in directly to Content Manager to add their messages. Authorized users are organized in the system using the user roles and workgroup features of Content Manager.

Some authorized campus members such as the sports information director have the ability to automatically approve their own content. For those who don't have that permission, once they add a message to the system, it remains in a queue until an administrator reviews it and sends it to the Scala Players.

"With the Scala solution, Georgia College's opportunity to communicate to the student body has greatly expanded, and it will allow the Student Government Association to simplify and better package a continuous flow of information to students," said Andy Panos, vice president of Capital Signs.

"Once we really played with the software and functionality, we realized that it is extremely flexible and can be pushed as far as we want," Grace said. "We're consistently finding new features and opportunities, and we know that as we grow with Bobcat Vision, we will continue learning how to improve the way we use it."

Currently, Capital Signs is integrating campus RSS feeds — the same ones that appear on the GCSU Web site — into Bobcat Vision. They are also installing a Player that will drive Bobcat Vision to GCSU's campus cable network to reach the TVs of anyone on campus plugged into it.

GCSU is using one dual-output Scala Player to operate two versions of the cable channel. One channel will broadcast in standard definition (SD) for anyone who views cable with a standard TV. The second channel will be broadcast in high definition (HD) via a QAM digital channel. This will make it easier for more displays to be added with HD content based on the existing coaxial cable network.

Scala's content scaling capability will prevent content from appearing distorted in either SD or HD format. GCSU will have the ability to create content specific to each channel, and any generic content will scale as appropriate to display without being distorted. Managing both channels is virtually transparent to administrators due to the ability to use metadata to control what appears on each channel.

Return on investment

With Bobcat Vision fully operational, GCSU's administration and student organizations are no longer burdened by the cost of paper, printing, and recycling campus posters. Time costs have decreased, too, as groups no longer need to design advertisements on various mediums to reach students.

Bobcat Vision also has helped greatly improve student awareness of campus events. Recently, the Student Government Association used Bobcat Vision to announce the band line-up for GCSU's homecoming concert.

In the days before the concert, a game similar to Wheel of Fortune ran on the digital network. Each day, a new letter appeared on the monitors across campus, and whoever could complete the puzzle was awarded free concert tickets and backstage passes. This year's homecoming was better attended than in years past before using digital signage for promotion.

The Student Government Association will continue to measure the digital network's return on investment by comparing awareness and subsequent attendance at recurring events before crediting the digital signage with attendance rates now. They also plan to assess the reception of the system via student-run media, including the campus newspaper.

"With Scala digital signage, GCSU's opportunity to communicate to the student body has increased," Grace said. "The Student Government Association is looking forward to expanding the use of digital signage to better package a continuous flow of news and information to people all over campus."

About Georgia College & State University

Georgia College & State University, the state's designated Public Liberal Arts University, combines the educational experience expected at esteemed private liberal arts colleges with the affordability of public higher education. Its four colleges – arts and sciences, business, education and health sciences – provide 6,600 undergraduate and graduate students with an exceptional learning environment that extends beyond the classroom, with hands-on involvement with faculty research, community service, residential learning communities, study abroad and myriad internships.

Founded in 1889, Georgia College boasts one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation with Corinthian columns fronting red brick buildings and wide open green spaces.

Georgia College also offers graduate education at the historic Jefferson building in downtown Macon, at Robins Air Force Base and online.

About Scala

Driving more than 300,000 screens worldwide, Scala is a leading global provider of digital signage and advertising management solutions. Scala is the world's first connected signage company, offering the leading platform for content creation, management and distribution in digital signage networks and the first unified platform for advertising management of both traditional and digital signage networks. The company's digital signage customers include Rabobank, IKEA, Burger King, T-Mobile, Virgin MegaStore, Warner Brothers, The Life Channel, Rikstoto, Repsol, NorgesGruppen, Audi, ECE Flatmedia, Kaufhof (Metro Group) and thousands more. Advertising management customers include CBS Outdoor, Clear Channel Outdoor and Magic Media, among others. Scala is headquartered near Philadelphia, USA, and has subsidiaries in Canada, The Netherlands, France, Norway, Germany and Japan, as well as more than 450 partners in more than 60 countries. More information is available at www.scala.com.