

Digital Signage Evaluation

Background

In order to raise the profile of the school and provide targeted information to visitors, staff and pupils it is proposed to install a digital signage system.

Requirements

The proposed system must include the following functionality...

- Utilise a central/remote management interface for easy deployment of information
- Ability to target information to specific zones – e.g. Sixth form data in the Sixth Form Common Room, menus in the Refectory, etc.
- Ability to manipulate the presentation without having to stop the existing presentation
- Should be easily managed by non-technical staff members
- Use of templates to unify the appearance across the school
- A scheduling system to aid in the management of content
- Ability to include multimedia content, including video and audio
- Ability to use dynamic content such as RSS feeds
- Extendable to include further zones in the future
- Upgradeable to use digital TV and other sources if required in the future

The initial system should comprise of the following...

- Reception Area/Front Office
 - 32" LCD Monitor
 - Tilt & Turn Mount – to angle screen towards the seating area
- Refectory
 - 42" Plasma Monitor
- Sixth Form Common Room
 - 42" Plasma Monitor
 - Replace the exiting LED signage

Solutions

Following research into the systems and discussions with suppliers, three systems were proposed with two suppliers offering the same system. The relative merits of these systems are discussed below.

DigiSHOW Genesis/Fireblade Solution

Supplier: Oliis Solutions

Advantages

- Easy to use interface with 'drag and drop' functionality

Disadvantages

- Windows-based therefore leaving questions about reliability
- Fireblades are too large to be mounted near the screens, therefore requiring video extenders
- The Fireblade for the Sixth Form Common Room would require a secure location in that block
- Due to the size of the Genesis and Fireblades, a new server rack would also be required in the main block
- Very expensive compared to alternatives (approx. £25 000)

School Voice Solution

Supplier: Zentek Solutions

Advantages

- Relatively simple to use
- Linux OS gives improved reliability
- Not too expensive (approx. £9 000)

Disadvantages

- Quote is for incorrect screen sizes
- User interface is not as well finished as the other, more mature, systems
- Limited central management

Navaho MediaCat Solution

Supplier: Qual / EuroLaser

Advantages

- Relatively simple to use
- Linux OS gives improved reliability
- Provided solutions mount the controller near the screen; cutting out the of expensive video extenders and racks
- Mature product
- Very competitively priced (under £7 500)

Disadvantages

- May take a little longer to learn than other systems

Evaluation

From watching demonstrations of the products and through discussions with the suppliers, the Navaho MediaCat solution appears to be the best fit for our school. All the requirements are met with the added benefit of it being slightly cheaper than the competitors' solutions.

The DigiSHOW solution was ruled out primarily because of the solution's cost. We felt that this cost could not be justified since there would not be any return on investment as such. Although the Windows interface meant that the solution was easy to administer, we felt that this was also a drawback due to the inherent instability associated with Windows systems. The large form factor of the systems was also a big drawback.

The School Voice solution, although very capable, seemed lacking in a couple of key areas – most notably the central management. The 'less polished' user interface also detracted from what was otherwise a capable product. The quote provided was also disappointing, with incorrect screen sizes and a relatively high total price.

The MediaCat solution fulfilled all the criteria and the installation options provided by two suppliers meant that we could have a choice. EuroLaser have proven very helpful and always provide an excellent level of pre- and post-sales service whilst Qual customer service seems to have worsened of late. The solution put forward by the EuroLaser representative also seemed like a good fit for the school, mounting the MediaCat appliances in small comms cabinets adjacent to the screens or (in the case of the reception area) on the opposite side of the wall where it would be securely out of sight.