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Displays

## A Better Way to Communicate on Campus: Digital Signage

When it comes to on-campus communication, digital sign content is king.

VICKI HODDER

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There was a time, not so long ago, when paper fliers covered every available surface at Pepperdine University's School of Law, says Jared Padgett, web development and digital media manager.

Easels installed to minimize the school atrium's clutter ended up becoming cluttered instead. So six years ago, the California school turned to digital signs to help straighten up the mess. Today, the university has about 20 signs at two of its six California sites and plans to install at least 10 more signs within the next year, Padgett says.

"We gave the student groups a better outlet," he says. "It started cosmetically, and then the greater potential started emerging."

Colleges and universities install digital signs for a variety of reasons. But before doing anything else, the most important task is to define the goals for a digital sign program, says Richard Ventura, sales director at NEC Display Solutions. The next step is to determine how many signs are needed, and in what sizes. Other considerations include deciding where the signs should be placed and whether commercial- or consumer-grade technology is needed.

Ventura also recommends lining up content creators — student organizations and athletic department are good places to start — and establishing controls before implementing a new program. Anyone who has anything to do with content should be involved, Ventura says.

***We gave the student groups a better outlet. It started cosmetically, and then the greater potential started emerging.***

Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, experimented with in-house digital signs for a few years before settling on a package for Carroll Hall, which opened in 2009. Administrators wanted the highly visible technology's "wow" factor to impress prospective students, says Patrice Bruneau, Winthrop's director of technology services. By the time the school's DiGiorgio Campus Center opened in 2010, digital signage was deemed a necessity. Winthrop's campus center now features four 47-inch Sharp Electronics screens placed throughout the center and nine 32-inch NEC Display screens grouped into a

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single wall-mounted configuration.

All of Winthrop's digital signs are commercial grade, which means they tend to come with longer warranties and are built to withstand intense use. "Those signs have to be on and playing something most of the day," Bruneau says.

At the **State University of New York at Potsdam**, administrators had scalability in mind when they installed a digital sign system in 2007 to provide an emergency-notification network. "From the start, we wanted an enterprise system that would be able to grow," says Dan Simmons, a SUNY Potsdam instructional support technician who oversaw the system's installation. The university started out with five signs but now has 10 throughout its campus.

Typically, institutions place digital signs in high-traffic areas or where people linger for some time, such as long lines. A sign's size should be determined by its purpose and location. At Winthrop, for example, just outside the DiGiorgio Campus Center's movie theater, there is a small digital sign hung in portrait mode, mimicking a movie poster.

Content for digital signs is readily available on campus, with student groups, athletic departments, libraries, faculty members and alumni organizations among the contributors. The key, Ventura says, is getting that content to the digital sign network. Administrators tend to marshal campus-sign resources online. At Pepperdine, students, faculty and staff members are invited to submit files or videos for display using online style guidelines and submission forms. Each school within the university manages and reviews its screens' content.

"There's a little something for everyone, but students are the primary users," Padgett says.

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# 3–5 years

Typical length of a warranty on commercial-grade screens

**SOURCE:** Eric Farkas, senior research and development engineer, Black Box Network Services

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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