Willow Creek Goes Digital: Innovative Information Sharing for Student Ministry

Willow Creek House of Worship

The Willow Creek House of Worship, a non-denominational Evangelical Christian Church in the suburbs of Chicago, is the fourth largest church in the United States with 24,000 members. Completed in 2004, the church is known for its state-of-the-art worship center which was a $73 million project that created a 7,200 auditorium with more than 100 flat panel HDTVs and monitors.

This type of advanced technology helps the church communicate weekly services to its congregation. Willow Creek is considered one of the top examples of how AV can enhance the delivery of messages to a mass audience. In late 2007, Willow Creek AV Engineer and Integrator, Dave Cooke, realized he also needed a new and creative way to deliver information regarding events, church services, streaming video of community service trips and more in the Student Ministry lobby. In addition, he wanted to install flat screens in the cafeteria for use as digital menus.

In order to reach the diverse member population of the Student Ministry, Cooke looked to unique digital signage applications for inspiration. He had just three key requirements that needed to be fulfilled as he looked for a solution to deploy:

1. The technology had to be user friendly. Whatever A/V system was to be integrated needed to be easy to operate and update with new information since people with varying degrees of technology know-how would need be programming the system.
2. The monitors must have the intuitive ability to connect to an existing network. Willow Creek has a complex A/V system already in place and needed a solution that could plug-and-play into the existing framework of operations without extra wiring.
3. The solution must be cost-effective. The budget for the renovation project was a strict $44,000 leaving no room for add-on components or additional resources.

After careful planning and research, Cooke knew he needed at least two nine-monitor video walls to fit on either side of the student ministry lobby entrances.

In February 2008 Cooke chose LG Electronics' 42-inch "HD" 720p LCD Monitor (model M4210C-BA) based on its thin bezel and video wall application capability. The LG display model met his initial criteria of user friendliness, network connectivity and affordability. Designed to be a turnkey solution for system integrators, this application was the diverse and innovative option Cooke had been looking for to help deliver content to Willow Creek members.

Incorporating unique IP-Cast™ Internet Protocol (IP) Solution technology, the LG digital signage monitor enabled video content delivery to multiple locations with centralized video

content and display control capability. LG's IP Solution allowed Cooke to easily integrate the HDTVs into the existing network just as he had hoped. Using LG's IPD-710F IP Cards along with the 42-inch LCD monitors, Cooke was able to schedule programming by the hour and is able to remotely control the screens anywhere at anytime. This application was especially ideal for the two monitors he installed in the food service area to act as digital menu screens.

Once the technology for the installation was chosen, Cooke needed an innovative way of mounting the two nine-monitor video walls. The walls needed to be hung on a brick wall but also be removable for servicing needs while still hiding the cabling. To do this, he worked with architecture design firm Goss/Pasma to create pre-hung mounts on three-quarter inch plywood. The plywood was then bolted to the bricks. In order to hide the cabling, two empty wood columns were created to hide the wiring (see concept drawing) and to add a design element to the installation.

Completed on time and at budget in just six months, the installation of the 20 high-def LG displays fit seamlessly into the student ministries lobby, and communicates new messages and event schedules on an hourly basis. Using the scheduling and automation of the IP-Cast solution, Cooke has cut back the amount of the time required for programming, and the paper waste previously created from hard copy delivery of information. Digital menus are customized based on the special of the day and the ever-changing menu.

As a result of the easy programming, the youth program is also now actively involved in creating content and uploading it to the screens to display their latest accomplishments and activities.