USC Viterbi School of Engineering: Making Sure They Get the Message

The University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering in Los Angeles has approximately 3800 graduate and 1800 undergraduate students pursuing degrees. USC's graduate program in engineering is consistently ranked in the top 10 in the U. S. News and World Report rankings.

The school has come a long way since the first classes in engineering disciplines were offered in 1906. Jason Dziegielewski, Digital Communications Manager took time out to discuss their **AxisTV digital signage system**.

"One of our overriding communications philosophies is: How can we re-distribute our existing content in multiple places and through multiple delivery channels?" explains Dziegielewski. "I inherited a brand new building with displays and an A/V distribution system, but no way to get our content to these screens and manage it. AxisTV matched our needs. It's one of many distribution channels we're leveraging to deliver as much information as possible, to as many people as possible, in as many ways as possible, in the environment they're most comfortable with."

Ronald Tutor Hall has fourteen 42-inch NEC LCD panels displaying AxisTV. There are four more panels with interactive SMARTBoard capabilities that revert to AxisTV bulletin screensavers, ensuring no messaging opportunities are missed. "**Student services** is the main focus of this building's first two floors, so it's a high traffic area. Faculty, staff, students and visitors all get their first impression from the digital signage," comments Dziegielewski.

Two channel players drive content to café and common building feeds which broadcast to screens throughout the facility. Displays are mounted in hallways, lounges, **conference rooms**, offices and outside of classrooms. Olin Hall of Engineering, which houses graduate student affairs on the first floor, is also running AxisTV on a 50-inch display.

Message saturation and reinforcement is the focus. "The more times someone is exposed to a message, the odds of retention are greater," continues Dziegielewski. "Our various methods of delivery allow us to reach audiences with different preferences and viewing patterns. For example, our event calendar is on the Web, on AxisTV screens, sent in weekly emails and delivered via an RSS feed. People are bound to get the message."

Over 80 percent of the school's AxisTV content is sourced from **automated feeds**. Bulletins are primarily event related, with schedules being pulled from PerlCal – a system the school has used for over ten years. They adapted the legacy software to the newer technology by importing data with AxisTV's schedule bulletin feature. "The flexibility of AxisTV allowed us to add on versus replace," says Dziegielewski.

The school has published their procedures for requesting, creating and scheduling ads. Departments generally create graphics in PhotoShop and then import them into AxisTV. Student groups create their own content and submit it to umbrella organizations for authorization. There are six administrators who can approve and publish content. "We're always getting calls from people asking 'Why isn't my event up there?' From word of mouth and experience, I can tell you that people are definitely paying attention to the screens," comments Dziegielewski.

USC and Viterbi promotional ads also run on the screens for the benefit of campus visitors. "In the case of visitors, the system is a PR tool in addition to a communications tool." Dziegielewski expands, "It gives that wow factor that we want to project to prospective students and visitors. It shows that we're technologically advanced, and that we don't just advertise what we do. We do it."

Future plans focus on both expanding the capabilities of the AxisTV system, as well as the overall digital signage presence. "We're looking for ways to incorporate more content and different content. We're investigating the best ways to automate our processes," explains Dziegielewski.

Other USC schools come to the Viterbi School of Engineering to research digital signage solutions. Most of them are currently running PowerPoint or television feeds, so they are investigating more sophisticated visual communications systems. A "Me, too!" attitude has also developed within the school. With the Viterbi School encompassing more than twenty buildings, the desire for digital signage has caught on with other departments who now want their own systems.