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Digital Signage at Colorado Army National Guard Helps with Soldier Retention

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Ever since the military became an all-volunteer force, soldier retention has been a major issue. The Colorado Army National Guard is trying a unique approach to encouraging re-enlistment: digital signage from Tightrope Media Systems.

The Colorado Army National Guard is nearly 3,600 soldiers strong and growing all the time. Its forces vary from the most modern high-tech units such as Space Support to classic, hardcore, hard-charging infantry that harkens to its origins in 1860. It has 14 armories located throughout the state, with the bulk of them along the front range of the Rocky Mountains, but some in smaller outlying towns.

"We are constantly looking for ways to improve soldier retention," reported OC Edward Tuholske, Marketing NCO. "Our commander, Major Bert Pennell, started asking if we could use digital signage to provide our soldiers with better communication about career opportunities. The task force we started included two people from IT and two people from recruiting."



Signage at the Colorado National Guard

The team decided to install one flat panel screen in the commons area of each armory. The primary information to be carried would be open job postings to encourage the soldiers to advance their careers within the National Guard. The system would also provide National Guard news, motivational posters and videos and general information.

Early in the planning process, the team recognized that they had a challenge to overcome. "Because of the sensitive nature of the information carried on the intranet that connects all of the National Guard facilities in Colorado, it is tightly controlled," Tuholske said. "We could not use it for the digital signage system."

The solution was to connect the signage network through the Verizon Express Network wireless data service. "Once this solution was designed, we made sure to select components that would function effectively with this system," Tuholske said.

After evaluating three digital signage alternatives, the team selected Tightrope Media Systems' Carousel solution.

"We were immediately impressed by how easy the Tightrope system is to use and update with content," said Tuholske. "We liked that it is browser based, so that we could use the Internet to monitor the content on every display from our central office. This is especially important when some of these installations are a six-hour drive away from us."

The Guard selected the Tightrope Carousel Pro server and 14 Carousel Solo 220 players, each of which feeds a 42-inch Sharp 42SB45U LCD display, which has 1080p capability. The players connect to the network via a Verizon Air Card. "The Solo 220 player has an extremely small footprint so that it could easily sit behind each LCD even after the air card was installed," said Tuholske.

The Denver office of Ford Audio and Video installed the digital signage system.

"The major concern for this type of system is the logistics and testing, not the actual installation of product," said Project Manager Will Schmetzer. "We were required to visit 14 remote locations over about a two week period. After the installation of each screen and Carousel player, we tested them locally to make sure they were functioning. Thanks to Tightrope, the implementation was no problem."

One big advantage of the Tightrope system is the flexibility it allows in choosing a screen layout. The IT team designed a message screen where the left half rotates between job postings, career opportunities and full-size motivational posters. The upper right quarter of the screen shows motivational pictures and videos, most often of local or national training exercises,

troop deployments or special events. The bottom right quarter of each screen is divided in half. On its right half is the time and local weather information and on its left half is contact information for the job opportunities and for re-enlisting.

Another advantage is that there is no annual licensing fee.

"The response to the digital signage system has been 100 percent positive," Tuholske said. "We are getting more and more requests from our commanding officers to add extra information to the digital signs because they see that more effective communication is improving the morale of our soldiers. Everything we have heard so far indicates that the signage system is improving soldier re-enlistment."

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Tightrope Media Systems www.trms.com

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