



AV in Action

ROCK SOLID

SIGNAGE SYSTEM MUST FUNCTION 100% OF TIME AT MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM IN PHOENIX.

by Don Kreski

"Everyone has had the experience of entering a museum, trying to interact with a piece of technology and it just doesn't work... We wanted our museum to function at a higher level, to make sure that, at any point in time, 100% of our systems are running."

The Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona

That's how Mark McCauley, Director of Technology at the new Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Phoenix, describes his priorities in buying AV systems. His concern is well founded: he describes sound and video as roughly half of the experience at MIM.

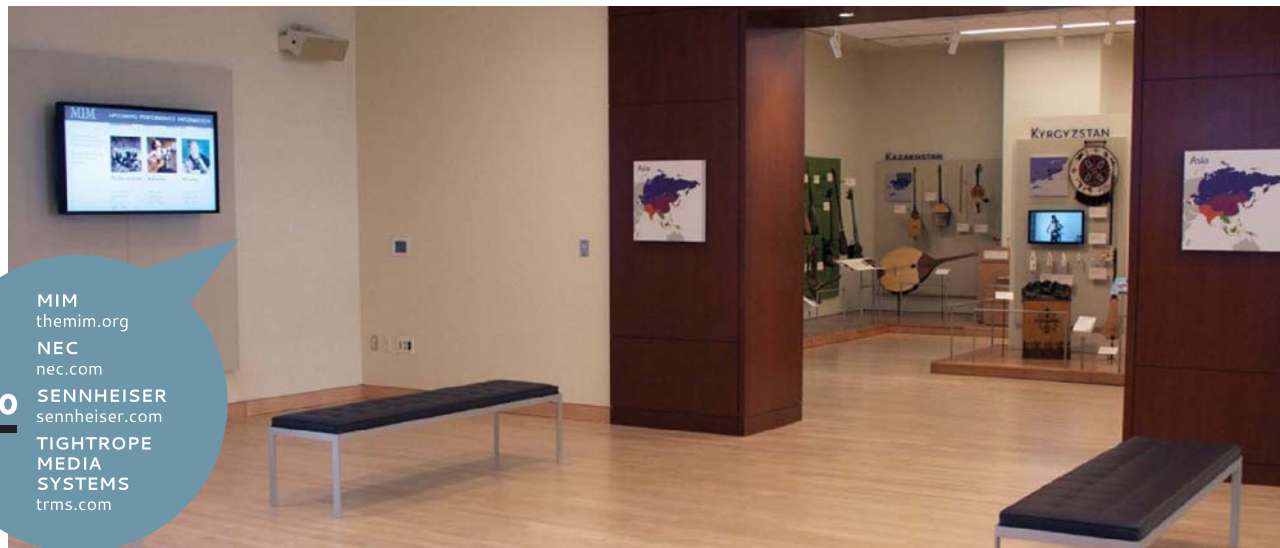
Opened last April, the facility is the world's first museum of musical instruments, with over 14,000 instruments and related artifacts from every part of the world (3,000 on display). A musical instrument is not just something to look at. The museum includes a performing arts center and a digital audio/video system which together allow visitors to see and hear the instruments in use, both in live and prerecorded performances. An

extensive digital signage system informs visitors about various MIM events, teaches them about the work of instrument conservators, and provides a medium for performers and rental groups to communicate with their audiences during special events. Mark McCauley says that, of 300 exhibits in the museum, 248 now include prerecorded performances.

CULTURAL TREASURES

Visit the African Gallery and you'll see a collection of traditional instruments commissioned for MIM by curator Amanda Villepastour. She not only traveled to Nairobi to purchase a set of drums, for example, but she brought a film crew to record the local people playing them. In another part of the museum, you can see the Steinway John Lennon used to compose "Imagine" and the guitar Eric Clapton used to write "Layla" — and watch a video of each of them performing these works.

Navigating these videos is very simple for the visitor. Every guest picks up a Sennheiser GuidePORT headset at the entrance, which keeps track of its own location and switches radio frequencies automatically. Walk into an exhibit and the headset tunes itself to the video playing on an NEC high definition display. "We used relatively simple, solid-state video players from CE Labs," says Ryan Baumann, project manager for AV integrator Sound Image of Phoenix. "We also have all of the videos available on a network server, so if there should be a problem, they can download the clip to a



info

MIM
themim.org
NEC
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replacement player immediately."

"We take an off-the-shelf approach to maintenance, with extra systems configured and ready to roll into place," says McCauley. "If we notice an issue with one of the players, we can typically have it diagnosed, troubleshot and fixed in about 15 minutes."

The signage system, from Tightrope Media Systems, is the most sophisticated digital system at MIM. "We could have used a Tightrope server for the exhibits as well as the signage, but it would have been overkill," says McCauley. "The exhibits change once a year or less, but we change the signage content daily. It had to be extremely easy to use as well as reliable."

McCauley says MIM uses digital signage in four ways. The first is to post information about pricing and upcoming events in the guest services area—"just the normal things you'd see in a ticketing office." But Sound Image also installed players and monitors in what McCauley calls transition areas. "These are spaces between galleries that visitors can use to sit down and relax. They are also ad hoc presentation and performance spaces that we use for special events and when we rent the museum to outside groups." During regular hours, MIM uses the signage system to announce what's coming up, and during a special event, a performer can use it to post information about the event.

ADDING MORE VALUE TO THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

MIM also has Tightrope players and NEC displays in its Orientation Gallery, the first gallery guests see on entering the museum. They carry

information about current events and, again, are available to renters and performers during special events.

Finally, MIM includes a Conservation Lab, where guests can watch conservators clean, repair and preserve instruments. "We included signage in the Lab's visitor area, to give our conservation staff an easy way to post photos and videos of interesting instruments they've worked on," McCauley explains.

The key to the MIM signage system is less in the hardware than the Carousel software which drives it. "We suggested Carousel because we really like the user interface," says Baumann. "This organization needed a simple interface that anyone could use without the extensive training that a lot of the other platforms require."

"We wanted a rich feature set, with the ability to serve multiple zones on each screen with text, graphics, RSS feeds and video, but also have a system that non-technical people could use," McCauley adds.

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With innovative architecture, spacious seating, and state-of-the-art acoustics, Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) provides an intimate concert-going experience and educational forum. Watch this CBS Video the MIM on avtechnologyonline.com/feb11

