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Digital Signage As Art

Digital signage for the Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago.

PROJECT: The new 264,000-square-foot Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago

ARCHITECT: Renzo Piano

INTEGRATORS: Pentegra Systems, Chicago, IL (www.pentagrasystems.com)

AV CONSULTANT: David Injeski, Talaske (www.talaske.com)

FACILITY NOTES: The Modern Wing is composed of two three-story pavilions, one on each side of the two-story Griffin Court, which serves as the building's "main street." As with any main street, effective signage is necessary so that visitors can get directions about where they are and where they want to go. But, unlike the street signs in your hometown, the Art Institute needed modern signage to fit with the collections of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art housed in the Modern Wing.

MONITORS: Pentegra Systems installed two portrait-mode 65-inch Sharp LCD monitors to carry pertinent information in Griffin Court. Talaske specified an installation that would make these signs appear to float on the wall, much like the rest of the artwork exhibited there. "Every element in the Modern Wing was scrutinized and approved by Renzo Piano's architectural team. The placement and visual imagery of these digital signs had to meet his exacting standards," says Greg Dieckhaus, project manager for Pentegra Systems. One of these LCD's is dedicated to rotating the posters that have been designed for each of the current exhibitions. The other is currently formatted with two, three or four zones to display an RSS feed of current exhibitions as well as an iCal feed of the featured events.



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Pentegra installed two additional Sharp 65-inch LCDs above the ticket counter at the museum's new Millennium Park entrance to give general information on ticketing, events and membership. A fifth LCD was installed above the audio tour counter.

After the opening of the Modern Wing, digital signage was added to the museum's original entrance on Michigan Avenue. Pentegra installed two portrait 52-inch LCDs to mirror the information provided by the displays in Griffin Court plus a third LCD above the ticket counter to provide general information. **SOFTWARE:** Elizabeth Neely, director of museum information systems, says, "We needed a digital signage package that was straightforward and easy to use with out-of-the-box functionality." After viewing several software alternatives, the institution selected Carousel from Tighrope Media Systems (www.trms.com).

“After our first demo of the Carousel software, we could visualize how we could set up and



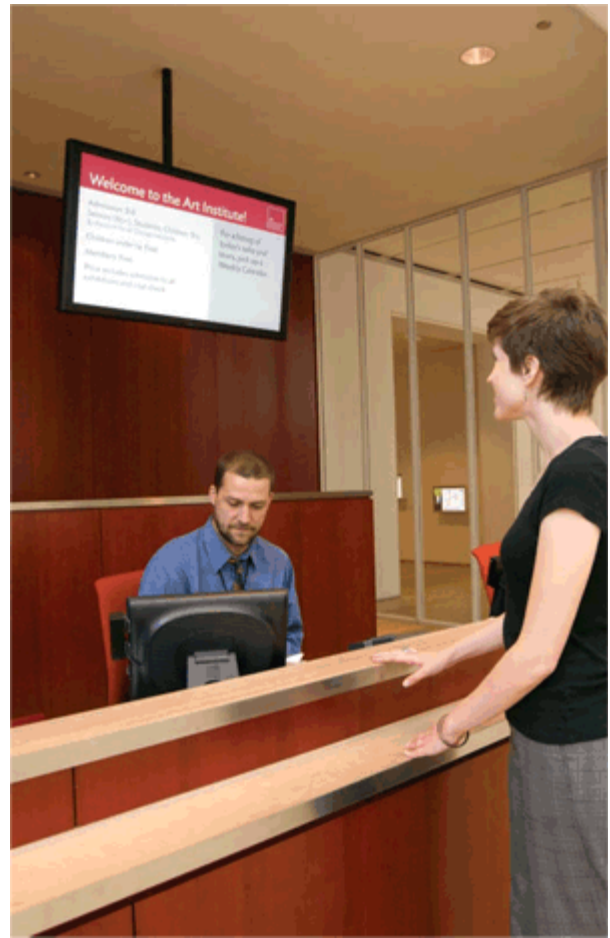
accomplish the workflow,” Neely explains. “Luckily, the system was as easy to use as we expected and has seamlessly fit into our workflow. Our graphic designer has quickly learned the system and has related how easy it is to work with. We are very happy with the system.”

Salvador Cruz, graphic designer at the Institute, mentioned that one of the challenges for the digital signage system was the implementation of a customized font that was specifically designed for the Art Institute. He reported that the font was initially causing problems with the graphics on the messages, but the support staff at Tighrope were able to quickly solve the problem.

Dieckhaus adds that one of the main reasons for choosing Tighrope was that it could run on the existing IP network in the older part of the museum. “The original museum has a lot of Cat-3 cable installed that limits the bandwidth. For digital signage to be installed there, we needed a software package that would not constantly stream video and bog down the network. We also liked that Tighrope offers a wireless option which might be necessary in the 116-year-old limestone and granite building.”

Cruz concludes by saying, “It’s nice to walk through Griffin Court and see the posters that we have designed electronically displayed side-by-side with the other art in the museum.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION: The Art Institute of Chicago, www.artic.edu



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