Digital Signage Gets an A+ in College

Virginia's Roanoke College partnered with Tightrope Media Systems for a hands-off dynamic display communication system

By Richard Slawsky
Digital Signage Today

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—David Mulford, media technology director at Roanoke College.

The players

Tightrope Media Systems develops Web-based digital signage and broadcast systems designed to be very easy to use while providing a high degree of functionality. The Minnesota-based company's communications tools incorporate the latest technological capabilities along with reliability to assist organizations in a variety of fields, from education to healthcare to retail.

Roanoke College is a private four-year liberal-arts college located near Roanoke City, Va., with 2,100 students from more than 40 states and 25 countries. In 2012 the guide ranked Roanoke's campus as the 18th most beautiful in the nation. U.S. News and World Report ranked the college 4th on its 2013 list of Up-and-Coming National Liberal Arts Colleges.
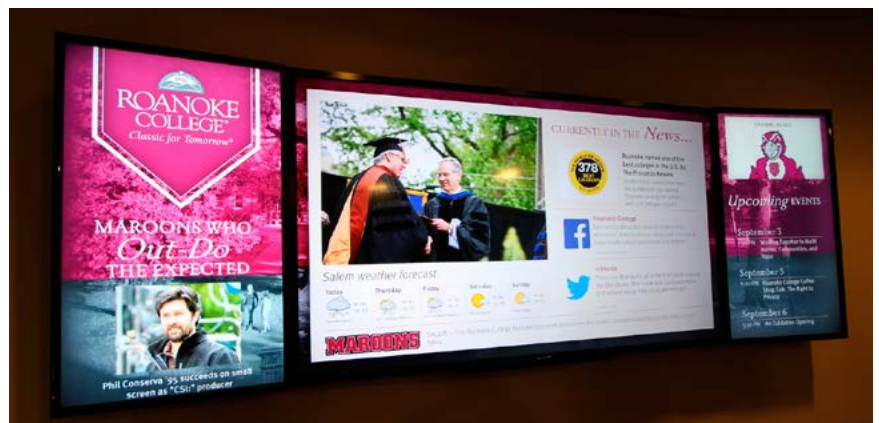
The challenge

The Colket Campus Center and Sutton Commons is Roanoke College's state-of-the-art, multipurpose meeting and dining facility. It services faculty, staff and students of the college as well as off-campus guests.

"The Commons is one of our largest gathering places, and it's a place visitors tend to come through when they're on campus, and students pass

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through coming and going for meals," said David Mulford, media technology director at Roanoke College.

Because the Commons is a focal point for campus activity, college officials believed it would an ideal venue where to broadly communicate college messages. Officials just needed an effective way to do that.

"We wanted a way to better communicate with those guests and students about our academic reputation and quality as well as things that were happening on campus," Mulford said. "Digital signage was an attractive medium by which we could accomplish those goals."

The college had a wealth of content that was available via the school's website, Facebook page, Twitter feed and other sources, and wanted to be able to leverage that information, but with a caveat.

"The idea for digital signage that we would be able to use is to find a software product that would allow the automation of the content with very little extra work in terms of staff," Mulford said.

The solution

After looking at a number of systems, Roanoke officials opted for a Carousel digital signage package from Tightrope Media Systems.

"We were doing some research on different signage companies and my chief information officer was familiar with Tightrope from his work at a previous institution," Mulford said. "So we looked at that as well as some other alternatives, and comparing the systems it seemed like the Tightrope product had the right combination of price and performance as well as the features we were looking for."

The system, which went live in August 2013, consists of a Carousel server and three media players driving three displays: a 60-inch monitor in the center in landscape mode flanked by two 32-inch screens in portrait mode. The center display features marketing-based content while the two outside displays host a number of zones, identical on each screen, displaying content from RSS feeds of the school's Facebook page and Twitter account as well as feeds for weather, news, on-campus happenings and local sporting events.

"When we began working with the people at Roanoke they said 'can we have you create some channels that consist only of dynamic data feeds?' and we told them that was possible and all we needed to do was to decide

what they wanted to show," said Chad Gartner, project manager with Tightrope Media Systems. "They had a developer on site who created all of the RSS feeds to pass along into Carousel for each of these different zones."

The results

So far, the Tightrope installation has been a successful project in terms of the faculty, staff and students who walk by and actually watch the screens, Mulford said.

In addition, the college is able to tap into some of the content displayed on the screens and repurpose it for use on the campus television channel. That information is then available for display on TVs in dorm rooms and other buildings.

Long-term plans for the system include possibly tying it in to the campus' existing Maroon Alerts emergency notification service, which allows college officials to contact faculty, staff and students via text messages and email in the event of an emergency or severe weather conditions. Those messages could be displayed on the Tightrope system as well.

Near-term plans call for the school's Business department to get their own Tightrope channel as well.

Overall, Mulford said, Roanoke officials were pleased with Tightrope's efforts in making the deployment a success.

"The people at Tightrope were fantastic in terms of working with us," Mulford said. "They were able to take a design we created and make all the elements that we needed to fit work together. They did a fantastic job."