

British Columbia Ferry Services Inc.

BC Ferries Uses Digital Menu Boards to Reach Hungry Cafe Visitors

With more than 22 million passengers a year aboard its network of 38 ships, British Columbia Ferry Services Inc. (BC Ferries) is one of the largest ferry companies in the world. Its three largest routes operate between Vancouver Island and the Mainland. In the last few years the company has invested more than 1.4 billion Canadian dollars (about \$1.13 U.S. billion) in terminal and vessel upgrades, including seven brand new ferries.

Three of these ships, known as Coastal-class vessels, are the largest double-ended ferries in the world, with the ability to carry 370 vehicles and 1600 passengers. Besides being high-tech and fuel-efficient, they are adorned with Olympic regalia in honor of the approaching Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Even with all the decor and amenities, BC Ferries' operations staff had another feature on their list to add to the Coastal Renaissance, Coastal Inspiration and Coastal Celebration: digital signage.

The Surge to the Coastal Cafe

With an average of 700 passengers onboard the ferries for a ride lasting about 1 hour and 40 minutes, each vessel's main eatery, the Coastal Cafe, proves to be a very popular destination, especially within the first 20 minutes of the journey. Passengers line up from both port and starboard sides of the ship, feeding into the cafe. The cafe is cafeteria-style, so menu selections change regularly. Previously, passengers were unable to see information about their food options while waiting in line because menu boards were only visible from inside the cafe. BC Ferries wanted a

way to inform passengers of menu options and keep them engaged while in line.

"From the moment that passengers board our ships, they are inundated with a great deal of information in terms of wayfinding and commercial signage," said Andrea Timlick, BC Ferries' Marketing Manager for Food and Retail Operations. "We wanted to educate them about food options before they reach the service counter."

In her role, Timlick oversees the promotion and enhancement of onboard amenities including signage. Timlick was eager to inform customers of menu options sooner during their wait so that once they reached the cafe they could make their selections faster.

Timlick looked to restaurants for inspiration. After seeing successful electronic signage at key chains in Canada, particularly Tim Hortons, she realized it would be a quick, effective and controlled solution for the Coastal fleet. The digital signs allowed the ships to avoid clutter, and they



British Columbia Ferry Services Inc.

also gave BC Ferries a chance to educate customers on food options much sooner. Additionally, the three new ships had very good accessibility to wiring, so the network could be installed easily.

Digital Signage Afloat

Timlick began trialing two screens with built-in players, but after several months she decided that the program wasn't flexible enough for her team's needs. She felt that the interface was unusual, and she didn't like that it required a USB thumb drive to update content or change its scheduling. In the fall of 2008, BC Ferries turned to The Data Works Inc., a British Columbia-based digital signage company, to develop a digital signage program for the new vessels.



The Data Works had helped BC Ferries install a digital signage network in its terminals four years earlier, so Richard Hyde, President of The Data Works, combined his experience with that network and Timlick's feedback to recommend that BC Ferries trial Scala digital signage software. He felt that Scala would give her the flexibility she was looking for and that the interface would be more user-friendly.

"Scala gave us an amazing system in the sense that we can pre-program everything from our computers at our desks," said Timlick, "From a marketing perspective, it gives us the ability to be much more creative and flexible with content."

Currently, Scala software drives six 40-inch screens on the three Coastal ships. In addition to menu options, the signs help cross-promote other amenities on the ship. Eventually, Timlick hopes to minimize paper signage in the main cafeterias of all ships with digital menu boards. BC Ferries plans to extend the digital menu boards to its other vessels, beginning with those on its highest-volume routes.

In the future, a fourth new vessel, the Northern Expedition, will feature informational screens throughout the ship in addition to the digital menu boards. Passengers aboard the 15-hour journey from Prince Rupert to Port Hardy will be able to view virtual maps indicating the ship's position via GPS feed and content triggered by the vessel's location or destination.

"Aboard the ferries, you have a captive audience," said Hyde. "Because of the mini-cruise environment on the Northern Expedition, BC Ferries will have an opportunity to fully utilize digital signage. The ships sail through picturesque scenery, and passengers want to know what they are seeing. Digital signs can display that information and more, and with Scala, BC Ferries can control content easily."