

U.K. Hardware

In-Store Signage Informs Customers, Trains Staff

IPSWICH, SUFFOLK – Savvy retailers are beginning to catch on to dynamic signage for advertising their latest products in a cost-effective and eye-catching manner. Only a select few, such as premier hardware stores in the UK, are doubling their deployment's cost effectiveness by using the same system to train employees as well as advertise to customers. The chain's content provider can now deliver both thanks to authoring, scheduling, and distribution offered by Scala's InfoChannel® software platform and satellite communications provided by Scala partner Hughes Network Systems Europe (HSNE).

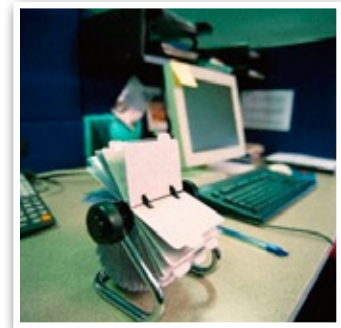
Before installing the Scala InfoChannel system, now one of the largest Dynamic Signage networks in the UK, the chain relied on monthly VHS tapes mailed to every store, generating a heavy recurring cost of production, shipping, and lost productivity. Besides being expensive to produce the content, by the time store managers got the new content, it was usually a week out-of-date.

Yet replacing tape decks in so many stores was not a task to be undertaken lightly, and not just any retail signage solution would do. Very few software platforms in the field today can claim the field-proven ability to scale to so many remote

sites, each requiring two independent channels and unattended 24/7 operation. This led their content provider to decide upon Scala's end-to-end InfoChannel software platform. Now updates are beamed instantaneously all across the UK via satellite multicast thanks to Scala's InfoChannel Broadcast Server and HNSE's DIRECWAY® satellite service.

Each of the more than 550 hardware stores has two screens: one that is "customer facing", and one that is "employee facing", each providing unique and independent content to address both those in-store audiences. Each of these screens is controlled by Scala's InfoChannel Player software allowing the same network infrastructure to deliver unique targeted content to both audiences.

"Store customers are now able to get the latest information regarding products and price promotions," said the content developer's co-founder, "while employees are trained via a 'virtual notice board.'" In fact, they have found that many of the vendors now want to book time on the "employee facing" channel (at a fee of course!) so that they can increase awareness and knowledge of their products amongst the store employees, who in turn will be more likely to recommend products about which



they feel more informed and trained.

The content provider's managing director welcomed the ability to show vendors' products with the impact of television at the most influential location: the point-of-sale. Updating promotions at the click of a few buttons saves time as well as money on print production and logistics. "Scala's InfoChannel software allows us to produce an extremely cost-effective in-store information channel, even allowing us to offer local regional advertising to local vendors, who find it an invaluable and affordable medium to advertise their services only in the specific areas where they are active."

"If we or a customer think of something we want to do, the Scala InfoChannel platform is flexible enough for us to do it immediately – in hours – not days, as before," their co-founder added.

Best of all, the entire network is centrally managed from the studio,

U.K. Hardware

In-Store Signage Informs Customers, Trains Staff

so the hardware stores can let their content providers focus on what they do best, i.e. create and sell advertising which makes the entire network self-funding. Network administrators can schedule everything from content updates to system maintenance without ever having to go on-site. "Once installed, these Scala Players really do run unattended 24/7 – we have been amazed at the reliability and stability of the InfoChannel platform over the past for two years."

Scala's store-and-forward design allows every Player to automatically load on startup should the power go out. If an emergency should ever arise temporarily making the making the content creation and distribution pieces of the system unavailable, the remote sites will continue showing the last updates that were broadcast via satellite and are unaffected as no constant communication is required between the remote sites and the distribution server. In essence, even though the network is centrally controlled, every store's system runs independently of one another - a big advantage over streaming video and many other error-prone solutions out there.

Interspersed with segments of full-screen video, playback is usually divided into three regions (see above for screenshot). The major section shows the traditional

adverts and customer information, while the right side contains store branding as well as the current date and time. At the bottom is a news ticker updated throughout the day.

As the source of the news ticker is merely text, thankfully InfoChannel's intelligent file transfer only sends the media (e.g.: textual elements) that has changed since the last update to the Players. As a result, the



chain's dynamic signage network is updated faster while saving money on bandwidth... because content never has to be exported to video as in other "MPEG playlist" oriented solutions or appliances. In fact, content is rendered on-the-fly by the InfoChannel Player at each point-of-playback, allowing localized dynamic content insertion such as newsfeeds and weather forecasts to be inserted on the fly and played back in DVD-quality, completely automated and unattended.

The content developers appreciate not being tied to proprietary hardware and are happy the InfoChannel software platform runs

on industry standard computers. They also have the peace of mind of being backed by Scala software, the world's foremost visual communication solution, having evolved for over a decade with an unequalled record of reliability. "The flexibility of satellite and the ability to have a service that is infinitely upgradeable means that the future can only bring great things."

About Scala

Founded in 1987, Scala pioneered the cable TV industry with software and services to allow users to create localized channels inexpensively. Today, Scala has grown to lead the corporate communications, retail dynamic signage, and interactive kiosk industries as well. With an unrivaled software suite to handle authoring, networking, monitoring, and logged playback, Scala has been the choice of tens of thousands of customers worldwide. Built on reliable and flexible network architecture, Scala software can support nearly any existing infrastructure from dial-up to LAN to Wi-Fi to satellite and terrestrial-based multicast networks. Scala's powerful and efficient store-and-forward design allows the control of unique content on a single cable headend or thousands of remote displays or kiosks from a single desktop PC without the constraints of streaming video.