Case Study

La Roche College

Project: New digital signage system
Major challenge: Short timeline for implementation
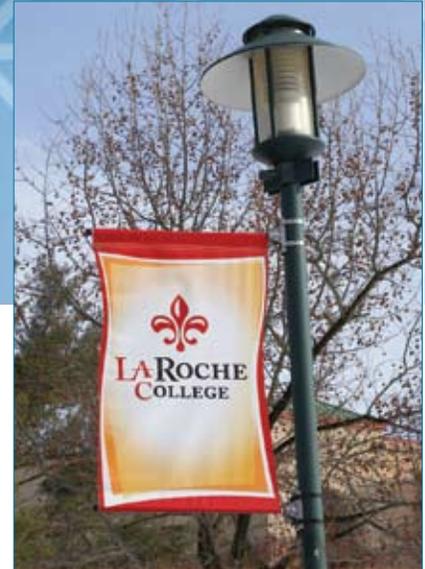
The background

Named one of the "Best Northeastern Colleges" by the Princeton Review for six consecutive years, La Roche College in suburban Pittsburgh has taken pride in offering students a cutting-edge education and individualized attention combined with technology.

Carrying these student-focused technology initiatives forward, the private Catholic college of 1350 students wanted to enhance and centralize campus communications with digital signage. The renovation of its John J. Wright Library and updating of its technology made it an ideal time to consider the installation of campus signage.

When it came time to choose a system for the management of signage content, the college had specific objectives in mind. "Our goal was to use the system for communication with students, wayfinding information, emergency notifications, and central management of information flow," said Terri Ballard, Director of Information Technology for La Roche College.

The college's public relations, food service management, and athletics management departments would, at least initially, share the responsibility of uploading information and ensuring that content is accurate, fresh, timely, and interesting.

The solution

La Roche College ended up choosing Black Box's iCOMPEL™, an integrated hardware/software platform loaded with features often found only on higher-priced systems.

Ballard cited several reasons for choosing Black Box's solution. "We found Black Box pricing was very competitive," she said. "Of equal importance was that Black Box provided all of the features we were looking for."

These features included iCOMPEL support for the central management of content, the ability to override content for emergency notifications, and its ease of use.

"This Black Box system also addressed our plan to centralize management of campus-wide dissemination of information," Ballard said.
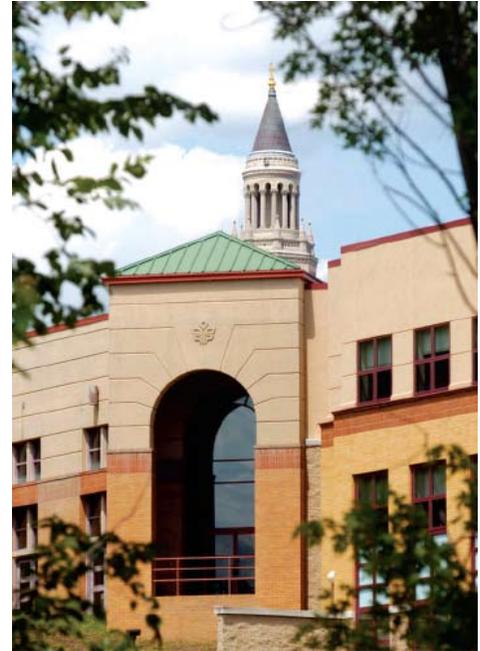
"We found Black Box pricing was very competitive. Of equal importance was that Black Box provided all of the features we were looking for."

Terri Ballard, Director of Information Technology, La Roche College

◇® **BLACK BOX**®
NETWORK SERVICES

724-746-5500 | blackbox.com

iCOMPEL based digital signage system

Eye-catching signage at the entrance of the college's John J. Wright Library, near the new Providence World Café.

A closeup of the new ICOMPEL driven signage at the library entrance.

A small-form-factor ICOMPEL subscriber unit, shown mounted on the wall behind the NEC screen near the entrance to the campus dining hall, receives multimedia content via a network connection from an iCOMPEL publisher unit in a central data closet.

How it was installed

The first phase of the project began in Fall 2010. Black Box handled the site survey, system design, and installation of the iCOMPEL units, the displays, and their mounts. Because the installation coincided with the ongoing renovation of the library when the walls were just frames, wiring and mounting screens was an easier task then normal. La Roche College staff installed the cabling and provided power and network connectivity to each display and to each ICOMPEL subscriber unit.

Specifically, the installation included:

- Two 40" NEC screens in the campus center, including one at the entrance to the dining hall, as well as two iCOMPEL players to provide multimedia signals to the displays.
- Two 40" NEC commercial LCD screens mounted in the fitness center, with one screen at the entrance to the college's athletic department. Content is distributed to these screens through an ICOMPEL subscriber unit mounted on the wall behind one of the LCDs.
- An iCOMPEL subscriber unit to feed content to a large 46" NEC sign on a wall at the entrance to the library. This wall separates the library from the college's brand-new Providence World Café, an area where students can relax in a coffee house atmosphere while enjoying the library's resources and watch scrolling news on the digital screen.

All subscriber players receive VGA signals over network cabling from an iCOMPEL HD Digital Signage Appliance (ICOMP-VID) located in a central data closet. This appliance acts as a server for content streamed to the players.

iCOMPEL based digital signage system

The digital sign installed outside the campus dining hall.

Signage at the entrance to the college athletic department.

How it's used

La Roche College staff simply log on to the iCOMPEL system to access and upload videos, images, and other signage content. The players regularly ping the publisher appliance for any changes and update the screens as needed.

Public relations is responsible for general content of screens not managed by food service and athletics. "This list is expected to grow as more signs are added to the system," Ballard explained. "This offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of timeliness. College academic deadlines, sports scores, weather cancellations, and other up-to-the-minute news items can be uploaded and relayed quickly throughout the campus."

The college did face some challenges going into the project. "Mastering the technology to manage the signs was an initial hurdle, in part, because we changed personnel in the middle of the implementation," Ballard said. "Our own short timelines made the learning curve more of a challenge. Black Box technical support was very helpful and everyone learned from the experience."

The results

The digital screens are ubiquitous and well integrated in campus buildings at prime locations, Ballard said. Students, faculty, and other staff have come to expect them and rely on them for the latest information, "so much so that college departments and student groups are beginning to submit their relevant information to be posted on the signs," she said. "We hear complaints when they are turned off."

Ballard also said the digital signs have turned into an asset to the college in that they are now used to support various academic programs, college athletics, and other events. "Black Box management was very supportive in our implementation," she added.

What's next

The next phase of La Roche College's digital signage project will involve the installation of a 32" NEC commercial display in the college's information center.

Because the iCOMPEL platform is highly scalable, the system is more than capable of supporting La Roche College in all subsequent phases. The already-installed publisher unit will be able to manage and provide content to many additional screens, no matter where they're situated on campus. All La Roche College will need is a subscriber unit and cabling for each additional sign.