Signs of the Times: Digital Signage Is Reconfiguring College Campuses

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The core mission of colleges and universities is to equip men and women with the knowledge and tools to pursue a specialized field of endeavor for the advancement and benefit of the individual and society.

While the mission has stood the test of time, much about the journey has changed. We can certainly all agree there is one major change having tremendous impact on today's modern campuses.

Technology.

More than any other improvement, innovation, discovery or policy, technology has made an impact on all students, educators and administrators—regardless of their geography, background, budget or class.

Consider: the students occupying seats in college classrooms today have never known a time without personal technology in their lives. For these digital natives, touch screens and digital devices determine how they learn, communicate and interact.

More critically, perhaps, students not only *want* their schools to have up-to-date technology applications and solutions, they *expect* it. Colleges and universities ignore this truth at their peril. Outdated technology might not be the deciding factor in whether a student enrolls at your school, but it does play an outsized role in their decision about where to attend. No one wants to go to a place that is "behind the times."

Indeed, colleges risk a competitive advantage in their standing and a loss of tuition dollars if they don't meet these expectations—and not just students'. Alumni members may be reluctant to send their hard-earned dollars to an alma mater that doesn't stay up-to-date.

Interestingly, one of the smartest and most economical ways to "spruce up" your campus is digital signage.

Digital signage, you say? Seriously?

Absolutely. In fact, digital signage could generate one of the highest returns on investment that you ever make. As this paper will show, digital signage—and the displays that support it—can help your school better serve its students, the overall college community and the future viability of your institution.

Digital Signage For Every Purpose

Colleges and universities are embracing digital signage in growing numbers. According to a 2016 article on the news site *Digital Signage Today*, around 70 percent of colleges were using digital signage[1], while a 2019 report from Networld Media Group found 87 percent of surveyed schools did[2].

How are these institutions putting digital signage to work? Let's see:

- **Keeping students informed.** With screens placed at strategic locations throughout campus, students have ready access to news, information, alerts and messages from the administration when and where they're needed.

- **Adding content easily.** Unlike static signs that need to be physically taken down and replaced, digital signage lets schools update and change information as needed, usually from a remote location for even greater convenience. New messaging can be sent campus-wide quickly and efficiently.

- **Recruiting students.** Few things make a bigger impression—sometimes called the WOW factor—on prospective students and visiting parents than sharp, clear, campus-wide digital screens. Ellucian, an ed tech provider, reports that 87 percent of students surveyed "said it was important to them that the institutions they applied for were technologically savvy."[3]

1. "6 Ways to Use Digital Signage in Higher Education," by Irfan Khan. *Digital Signage Today*. July 15, 2016.
   https://www.digitalsignagetoday.com/articles/6-ways-to-use-digital-signage-in-higher-education/

2. *Digital Signage Future Trends 2019*. Networld Media Group.
   https://www.necdisplay.com/documents/MediaCoverage/010419_FutureTrends2019_DigitalSignageToday.pdf

3. "Nearly All Prospective Students Want a Tech-Savvy Institution," by Joshua Bolkan. *Campus Technology*. November 1, 2017.
   https://campustechnology.com/articles/2017/11/01/nearly-all-prospective-students-want-a-tech-savvy-institution.aspx

- **Promoting healthy eating**. Digital menu boards in dining halls, cafeterias and campus food courts facilitate food choices, reduce wait times and show nutritional information so students can make wise eating choices.

- **Supporting classroom learning.** Students can stay on top of class schedules and assignments in their learning spaces, but digital signage also fosters active or collaborative learning by giving both students and educators more freedom to present, discuss and engage with the course material.

- **Reinforcing campus security.** Campus security personnel use digital signage to communicate with students almost instantly—such as emergency notifications, weather notices, security efforts, safety warnings, active shooter situations and lockdowns—for increased student safety and better outcomes.

- **Helping lost visitors find their way.** As a wayfinding tool, digital signage relieves the anxiety and frustration of campus guests or new students who get lost by giving clear, easy-to-follow directions, traffic reports and visitor information.

Schools leverage the practical applications of digital signage throughout their campuses in myriad ways. Now, let's look below the surface to see some unexpected benefits they also offer.

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The Hidden Benefits of Digital Signage

Some may argue that digital signage is *nice to have* but not necessarily a must have for colleges and universities. The traditional ways of getting the word out may not be exciting, they say, but they still work.

While their position is understandable, it overlooks the many *added* benefits that digital signage provides over past messaging. For example:

- **Cost-effectiveness.** Because digital signage reduces (or eliminates, really) the need for paper, ink, plastic and other consumables, operating costs are slashed.

- **Builds goodwill.** Turning digital signage into recognition walls to honor alumni members nurtures key relationships that can lead to more donations.

- **Spurs fundraising.** Digital signage can drive fundraising through selling the naming rights on digital displays to members of the alumni.

- **Brings in advertising dollars.** Schools can charge commercial establishments prime rates to advertise on digital screens and gain a new, steady income stream.

- **Strengthens branding.** Schools can promote themselves in dramatic new ways with digital signage that reinforces their branding and image. Sounds, visuals, spoken words, music and special effects give schools more creative freedom and control to convey their "value proposition."

- **Supports learning**. Educators can bring the content alive, respond to students' responses on the screen and get more done because they can save and copy everything. Students can engage with the material in interactive ways and respond in real-time to comments from the teacher and fellow students.

- **User-friendliness.** Even faculty members who have little or no experience with digital screens will find them easy to use—and even easier to integrate in their classroom lessons.

As more schools adopt digital signage, the question of which displays to use will necessarily come up for discussion. Let's examine that question now.

Digital signage—and the displays that support it— can help your school better serve its students, the overall college community and the future viability of your institution

Why NEC Displays?

Some may ask: why not buy an inexpensive consumer grade off-the-shelf display? After all, they argue, displays are all the same. One is just as good as another, right?

In a word, no.

Yes, NEC displays may cost more than off-the-shelf models, but there's a valid reason. NEC commercial grade displays give your school more features that support your digital signage efforts:

- *more* control

- *more* flexibility

- *more* years of warranty

- *more* solutions

- *more* support

Consider:

- **A display for every purpose.** NEC offers large format screens from 32 to 98 inches. Our sales specialists will work with you to find the correct size display for every situation you need.

- **Bold display choices.** In addition to the displays referenced above, NEC gives you bold configuration choices for a high WOW factor. For example: The NEC Direct View LED Digital Poster is designed for attention-grabbing, high contrast images at nearly any viewing distance that can run 24/7 and last 100,000 hours. Or, turn a whole wall into one giant screen with the Indoor/Outdoor dvLED Video Wall that features a variety of pixel pitch sizes and end-to-end hardware and services.

- **Greater panel integrity.** Unlike cheap TV-grade screens, NEC displays are sturdily built with extra heat retention layers in the glass that allow for extended run times without damaging the unit.

- **Built to run.** NEC offers displays that are designed to run 24/7 for extended run times, giving you the flexibility and freedom to post information and messages around the clock without problem.

- **Higher brightness.** Unlike typical LCD displays that provide around 250 nits of brightness, most NEC displays generate 400 to 500 nits for greater luminance and optimal viewing.

- **Anti-glare feature.** At NEC, we ensure glare is minimized with our high haze panels. Instead of reflecting incidental light, they'll scatter it—allowing your content on the screen to be readable in any ambient or incidental light situation.
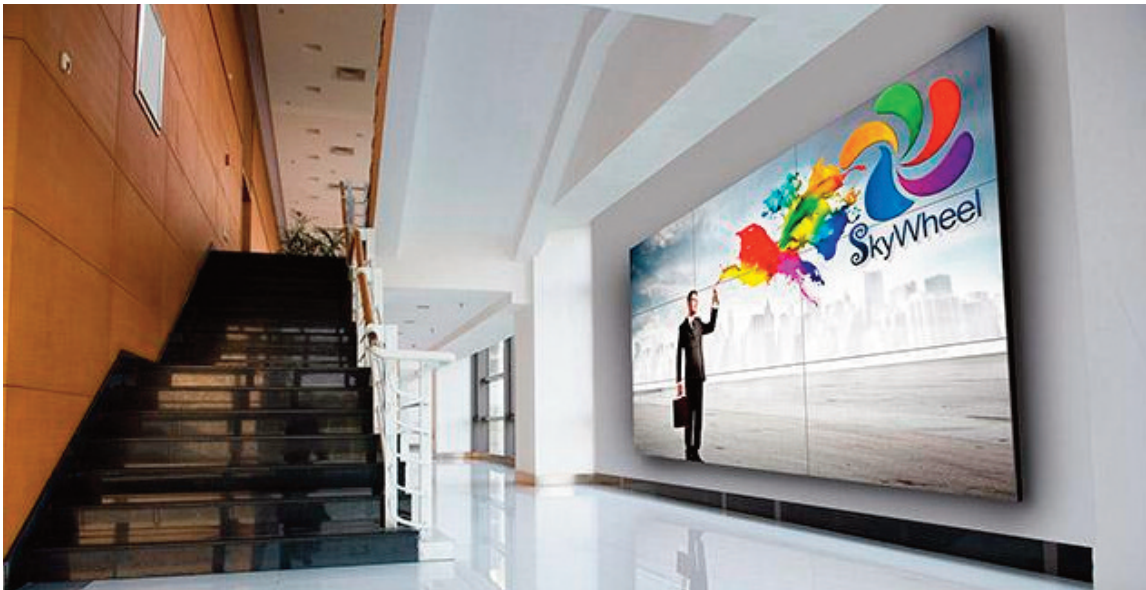
- **Full external control.** NEC displays let school personnel update information and content on any display at any time from a centralized remote location—quickly, easily and simply. Displays can also be polled to ensure that they are operating properly with the correct content on-screen.

- **Tamper-proof controls.** NEC displays are built with a security lock that prevents unauthorized parties from adjusting or changing the display, the buttons or even the IR. (So, if mischievous students somehow get their hands on an NEC remote, they could not make any changes unless it was unlocked, which can only be done from a remote location via that external control.)

- **Greater scheduling choices.** NEC displays let you set up to 30 different schedules within the unit to turn on/off at certain times, resulting in a greener initiative and reduced power consumption.

- **More solutions and apps.** NEC partners with several digital signage media players and applications—such as Raspberry Pi, BrightSign, Rise Vision, Visix, Industry Weapon, Four Winds Interactive and Tightrope Media—giving you almost unlimited solutions and uses for our displays.

- **Longer warranty.** Unlike off-the-shelf displays that come with short-term assurances, many NEC displays come with a long, 4-year warranty. Instead of a mere purchase, each NEC display is an investment in your school's future.

It should be clear by now that NEC displays offer colleges and universities a raft of features and benefits. But perhaps the best way to gauge the superiority and versatility of NEC displays is to see them in action at schools around the country. Let's look at the experience of two higher ed institutions now.

Otterbein University: "Quite Impactful"

Serving approximately 3,000 enrolled students, Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, tested displays from different manufacturers before settling on NEC and making it the university standard. In so doing, the displays have become an integral part of campus life.

For example, in the school's 62,000-square foot STEAM Innovation Center, visitors are greeted by a video wall made up of nine 65-inch NEC displays. Otterbein uses them to market campus initiatives and ongoing programs, and also to run advertisements on behalf of community business partners. "[The wall] is kind of a flagship of the building when you enter. It's very present, hard not to notice and is quite impactful," says Willie Franklin, senior technology specialist at Otterbein.

Visitors can also find their way easily through the building (wayfinding) by interacting with a touch-enabled 55-inch NEC panel mounted at the kiosk. A second vertical video wall further in the building also runs video content and JPEG images like the main video wall, such as school branding messages.

At Otterbein's stadium, a passive NEC display runs information about the school's athletic program, including images of the stadium's renovation. The athletic field house contains three interactive panels for its Hall of Champions display—allowing anyone to research the athletic history of the university, look up scores, team rosters, milestone moments, and more. "That's been a really fantastic piece for recruitment and for retention," Franklin says.

Of the school's 120 classrooms, approximately 110 are equipped with NEC displays, allowing students and faculty to get the same user experience and to stay connected from room to room.

"Students truly live by their mobile devices. Seeing screens with content and a flash of information is almost an expected norm. They don't have to race to keep up with what's happening on campus—knowing that as they walk through those learning spaces, they can get an update of what's happening within their space," Franklin says.

The quality and sturdiness of NEC displays also cut down on the time and effort to handle any servicing issues—a huge advantage, according to Franklin:

"On the rare occasions when a unit does go down and we have to hot-swap a device out, it's easy to put that new NEC machine in place because you know what to expect from performance, from calibration, from alignment—and it makes doing what we have to do on a daily basis very easy."

Cape Fear Community College: "The WOW Factor They like"

Like Otterbein University, Wilmington, North Carolina-based Cape Fear Community College experimented with different displays before choosing NEC as their preferred brand for their 23,000 students.

In the new gymnasium, for example, two 55-inch NEC displays show schedules of upcoming games, as well as highlights from sports such as basketball and volleyball. (The locker room also has three 75-inch touchscreen displays that enable coaches and players to review past games and "draw" on the screen.)

The Wilson Center, the school's renowned performing arts facility, uses NEC displays for a variety of purposes, such as promoting their current programs or showing trailers of upcoming events. When the center was rented out for a recent nursing conference, event information was displayed on the displays as well.

"When you go to our new buildings where you have most of the TVs, they look good and they look nice because it's a huge screen showing different events that we do with nice graphics on it," says Antonio Arteaga, media technician at Cape Fear. "I think it's the WOW factor they like."

Ready To "Sign" Up?

As industry reports show, the growth in displays and screens for digital signage applications at colleges and universities has exploded—and with good reason:

- Students *expect* to see this contemporary technology and are geared to engage with it.

- Schools can control, change and manage the content quickly, easily and simply.

- Digital signage reinforces the school's brand and messaging.

- Digital signage provides new sources of revenue for schools from community advertising, naming rights and alumni recognition walls.

- Digital signage is more environmentally responsible than older ways of messaging, slashing the cost of consumable items.

Choosing the right displays to help you fulfill responsibilities to your students, visitors, guests, alumni, business partners and the academic community at large on your campus can give you a high return on your investment.

To that end, consider the advantages of NEC displays.

To get more information about how NEC can help your school come up with a custom solution for your digital signage needs, contact NEC at 866.771.0266.

About NEC

NEC Display Solutions of America, Inc., a leading designer and provider of innovative displays, offers the widest range of products on the market, such as commercial and professional-grade large-screen LCD displays, desktop LCD monitors, direct-view LED displays, a diverse line of multimedia and digital cinema projectors, and integrated display solutions. Benefitting from the technologies of NEC Corporation and its own research and development, NEC produces leading-edge visual technology and customer-focused solutions for a wide variety of markets, including education, retail, transportation, broadcast, enterprise, health care, houses of worship, and many more. NEC is orchestrating a brighter world with the quality and reliability of its products and outstanding customer service.

To learn more about NEC solutions that foster creative and collaborative problem solving in schools, go to https://www.necdisplay.com/.

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