Case Study

I Hotel and Conference Center

Project:

» Upgraded digital signage for an exclusive hotel and conference center

Major challenge:

» 23 displays with content such as live conference video and Twitter feeds

An exclusive venue demands the best

Located in Research Park, the center of entrepreneurship and innovation at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, I Hotel and Conference Center is an exclusive, convention-class hotel featuring 120 rooms and suites catering to businesspeople, academics, wedding parties, and others who desire an ultra-contemporary, guest-focused experience.

Detail is the hallmark of I Hotel, from the custom-designed furnishings in the guest rooms to the hot stone massages available at the in-hotel Spa. So when I Operations LLC, the company managing I Hotel, sought to upgrade the performance of the digital signage in its hallways and meeting room foyers, it looked for the very best in both equipment and installation. Its first step was to contact C.V. Lloyde, a local vendor and one of the Midwest's premier commercial audio-video equipment providers.

Numerous high-profile displays

"I Hotel has a total of 23 video displays—four 'wayfinder' boards at various points for directions and schedules, and 19 'room marquee' screens mounted outside conference rooms. It was looking for greater flexibility and reliability from all the devices," said Stephen Morris, President of C.V. Lloyde. "The screens themselves performed well, but the CMS software offered limited functionality and the media players were failing at an inordinate rate for such a young system."

C.V. Lloyde believed that a best-in-class Content Management System (CMS) for I Hotel would provide not only performance improvements, but also new opportunities to delight guests and even increase revenue. Its search led it to the Black Box® iCOMPEL™ digital signage media player.

"iCOMPEL is an extremely innovative device. It offers ease of use, reliability and content flexibility," said Morris. "Best of all, it combines hardware and software in one unit. As a dealer, that's one of the most appealing benefits we can offer because it gives our clients one manufacturer to work with for both pre- and post-sale support."

A complete, one-box solution

As a complete CMS for Digital Out of Home (DOOH) displays, iCOMPEL (http://www.blackbox.com/go/iCOMPEL) dramatically lowers the cost of content generation and control. Despite its modest one-time investment, iCOMPEL can power one, ten, or a thousand video displays. What's more, iCOMPEL is ready to use out of the box. The unit is controlled by a standard Web browser, making it easy for non-technical users in a variety of deployment situations.

iCOMPEL can combine video or live TV with scrolling text, photos, Flash, and Web content to create dynamic, multipurpose displays that serve multiple needs. "We realized that the I Hotel staff could significantly increase the value of its displays using iCOMPEL," noted Morris. "In addition to news feeds, weather widgets, conference agendas, and such, conferences could broadcast meeting activity

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outside their meeting rooms, and wedding parties could run photo montages. At the more tech-savvy events, the hotel could even set up scrolling chats and Twitter feeds from attendees."

C.V. Lloyde proposed a redesign of I Hotel's digital display system that would replace the existing 23 media player units with 23 iCOMPEL subscribers (ICOMP02-H) and one iCOMPEL publisher (ICOMP), all located in a central management suite. Located behind each display, a Black Box HD receiver (AC3003A) gets its signal via CAT6 from a corresponding rackmounted Black Box HD View™ transmitter (AC3016A) and iCOMPEL subscriber located in the management suite.

Installation without downtime

Once the I Operations team approved the proposal, installation took about a week. "The centralized, rackmounted configuration keeps all future troubleshooting out of the public areas of the hotel," said Morris. "Throughout the install, we never had a screen out of service—an important issue for a conference center."

Morris also pointed out the advantages of the integrated iCOMPEL hardware and software. "iCOMPEL simplifies deployment as well as training," he stated. "We made sure that every hotel technician had individual instruction on how to use the iCOMPEL system."

In addition to the zoned layout in iCOMPEL that can be programmed with its own playlist, users can also locally update screen content to instantly add text messages, issue alerts, or select content for specific audiences. Customized layouts are possible by resizing, repositioning, or layering zones with a simple click-and-drag. As Morris pointed out, iCOMPEL also makes it easy for I Operations staff to schedule content whether a week out or on-the-fly.

"Now there is all sorts of flexibility in the system. The ad-hoc feature allows quick and easy changes to text. It also supports last-minute changes, like room changes, new conference schedules, and such, to be deployed in seconds," he said. "These are all features which were previously unavailable."

New opportunities emerge

Since the new system was installed, performance and functionality have both improved. Hotel executives have cited the sleek front-end design presented by iCOMPEL; even more, the capabilities of iCOMPEL have allowed the hotel to explore the possibility of using the system as an ad vehicle for local businesses, creating a new source of revenue.

"The ability of iCOMPEL to provide extra services to our customers is a real plus," noted Lynn Curylo, Conference Services Director for I Operations. "We see a lot of opportunity for creative and innovative applications in the digital display system provided for us by C.V. Lloyde and Black Box."

"Being able to add new guest services to its display system further positions I Hotel as a progressive, proactive conference facility," Morris stated. "We're excited to be able to offer a solution that is so reliable and versatile."

To learn more about iCOMPEL, call Black Box at 724-873-6553 or visit http://www.blackbox.com/go/iCOMPEL.