

CAPITA

Case Study - Signposting the way for the future at Xaverian College

Xaverian College, Manchester, commissioned a campus-wide digital signage system at the end of August 2008, using iMeRGe and a number of television screens. This enabled the College to broadcast and update information around the site very easily. The system is being developed to include pages generated automatically by Capita's UNIT-e solution, which is used by the College as part of its administrative system.

The background

Xaverian College is a Catholic sixth form college in Rusholme, Manchester, with 1,750 full-time students aged 16-19. A further 75 students from the University of Manchester are taking a Foundation Year in Medicine, Dentistry or Science. Resources are arranged across eight buildings on a university style campus.

In January 2008, Xaverian College was one of 10 providers to be awarded the Technology Exemplar Network status. The Network, sponsored by BECTA and the LSC, gathers together best users of technology in the Further Education sector across the UK. The Award recognises best practice in the application of their virtual learning environment (VLE) which supports the College's administration, course management, student support and learning programmes. During 2008-2009, Xaverian College will act as mentor and share its successes with other colleges in the North West region.

The challenges

One of the targets for the introduction of new technology was a campus-wide digital signage system. Xaverian College focused on the enhancement of college-wide communication. To satisfy their core requirements the system needed to achieve the following:

- Broadcast information to designated areas
- Share key information with students and staff
- Welcome visitors
- Display examples of student work
- Generate dynamic and interesting pages quickly
- Have instant messaging capabilities
- Be simple to set up
- Be very easy to use (to assist with the rapid release of staff back to their normal roles)
- Utilise existing screens in the Learning Resource Centre
- Be able to link to their College Information System in the longer term.

The solution

The system was commissioned at the end of August 2008 to coincide with the start of the new academic year. iMeRGe, a web solution, can be accessed from any PC on the College's network, so there is no software installation needed. Through managed password authentication, the user simply opens their favoured browser and selects the iMeRGe server from their favourites.

The Xaverian College network infrastructure has several areas operating within virtual private networks, but as an IP based system, the College were able to configure this easily in advance of commissioning. Alan Goodall, Finance Director at Xaverian College said,

"We found the staff at MRG to be most flexible in configuring the iMeRGe system to meet our needs ensuring it worked across our network configuration. The Company worked in close partnership with the College to ensure that delivery and installation met the College's schedule, guaranteeing the system would be installed and working in time for the start of term".



Key features of the Xaverian College system:

Screens and controllers

The system consists of seven screens each with an iMeRGe controller. The first of these is a Sharp Aquos 37" TV, stand and controller unit in the reception area foyer. This welcomes visitors, displays examples of students' work and acts as a focal point whilst visitors wait to be seen.

The second screen, a Sharp Aquos 46" TV has been positioned in a highly visible location in the foyer of the Ryken Centre, their new arts centre building. The content consists mainly of art project work and has added a totally new dynamic to the display of student work. Again, this was supplied with a stand and a PC controller unit to give maximum flexibility with regard to its repositioning and use when the College holds events for external visitors throughout the year.

TV content

The students' common room now has two Samsung 52" screens mounted high on the walls of the impressive old building. College news and general information are displayed during the day. Both PC controller units have TV tuner cards installed allowing any Freeview TV channel to be broadcast to the audience. iMeRGe has a scheduler that enables the College to define the on and off times, carousels and TV broadcasts allowing them maximum flexibility to define their own programming. The chosen channel may be displayed full screen or any size within a page containing Xaverian content.

Pre-owned

Three further controller units drive existing screens in the Learning Resource Centre. The function of these screens was already well defined by the College but with the addition of a simple T-switch, tutors are now able to increase the utilisation of the same TVs by displaying iMeRGe pages. Xaverian have found it useful to display brief instructions for students' reference before they settle down to the task in hand.

User authentication

Initially, access to iMeRGe has been restricted by the College to a small number of users. This will spread to other departments in due course. In future, through the user management interface, they may allow responsible members of the student body to create pages for display in the common room.

Post-install support

Naturally successful project implementation is reliant on good forward planning as well as good execution. Attention to detail extends into the post-install support arena as well. Alan Goodall says,

"MRG have been very responsive to our requests for help during the initial few weeks following the installation. They understand the need for close contact during the period of time from installation when you start to use the software and the controllers to ensure any tweaks required can be implemented quickly".

Continued development

Links to management systems

The next phase of development includes pages automatically generated by the Capita UNIT-e solution. In trials conducted with the assistance of Capita Further and Higher Education (FHE), we have now developed a very simple method of including key data. This comprises the results of reports, formatted within UNIT-e, to produce a final version that is displayed on screen. The display of this information is simplicity itself because a reference to the URL in the page is all that is required. Examples include student timetable information for courses, exams or room usage and it is expected to see further examples running live at Xaverian College soon. This obviates the need to enter the same data twice.

In order to generate pages of information automatically through iMeRGe, there appear to be no restrictions in linking iMeRGe to any administrative system capable of generating a standard format output.. Alan Goodall comments,

"Our staff have found the iMeRGe system easy to use and very flexible. It takes no time at all to make a new carousel available for display. The development of dynamic links with our MI System (Capita's UNIT-e) will improve the flexibility of the system particularly during enrolment and examination periods".

