



College Achieves New Level of Student Service with Extron TouchLink-Based Control Systems

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Gregg Heimer
Montgomery County Community College
Manager of Media Services

Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, recently upgraded its primary student services building, College Hall. School officials wanted to use AV technology to streamline student services for all students. With help from Fitch Electronics, the school selected Extron equipment for key functions and performed the entire installation on their own.

Client Needs

The school's goal was to create a series of help and information stations that were “one-stop service desks” for students seeking help with payments, transcripts, photo IDs, and other school-related issues. The right control system was key to achieving this goal. According to Gregg Heimer, Manager of Media Services for the college, “We needed a control system that could automate the process of powering on devices and switching inputs without the use of remote controls.”

Station Configuration

School officials wanted each station to have a mounted still camera to take ID card photos, overhead signage to indicate which service the station is offering, a PC and a “student view” monitor facing the student, with display mirroring to show selected screen images. The student view monitor is used whenever an employee wants to show the student something related to his or her account.

The school also wanted a ceiling mounted Station Availability sign to hang in the open that indicated both visually and audibly which stations were “Busy” and which were “Open.” Individual stations also had to have a way to describe what services are offered at each location.



Extron Electronics
INTERFACING, SWITCHING AND CONTROL



Extron TLP 350MV TouchLink Touchpanel showing signage options.



The Station Availability sign shows images from the GSS 100 Graphic Still Store.

Signal Routing and Control

An Extron MMX 32 VGA A switcher mounted beneath each station's desk routes images from an Extron GSS 100 Graphic Still Store to the student view monitor. Source signals are routed to the switcher over twisted pair cable using Extron VT Series transmitter/receivers and an MTP DA8 distribution amplifier. "The Extron GSS 100 is an improvement over the old digital signage system," Heimer says. "We rarely switch sources for the overhead display anymore, since it's easier to recall graphics from the GSS 100."

A TLP 350MV 3.5" TouchLink Touchpanel provides simple user interface and control of the entire system. "The TouchLink-based control system offers a clean-looking touchscreen user interface," Heimer says. "We don't need a handheld remote control or advanced knowledge of AV systems."

Station Availability Sign

According to Heimer, "The station availability sign was the most interesting part of the installation." Two videoconferencing rooms elsewhere in the building were using IPL T SFI244 IP Link Control Processors from a previous installation. Heimer used the IPL T SFI244's available digital I/O ports along with a software program developed by one of the college's students. The software polls the digital I/O state from the embedded Web server on the IPL T SFI244.

When a station employee presses a button on the TLP 350MV, a command is sent to change the state of the digital I/O port on the IPL T SFI244. The system sends a pre-made graphic, either a red "Busy"

or a green "Open," from the PC to the Station Availability sign. An audio alert is played that states, "Station X is now available."

GlobalViewer® Enterprise - GVE

GlobalViewer Enterprise, Extron's server-based AV resource management software, also plays a part in making the new system a success. "Remote management from our technical help desk is a key factor in providing support for the stations," Heimer says. "We couldn't have accomplished that without GlobalViewer Enterprise software."

The school's use of GVE isn't limited to the Student Services stations. "Our entire help desk staff, along with other members of our IT department, uses GVE via the Web on a daily basis," Heimer explains, referring to Extron's iGVE mobile AV resource management app. "GVE is used across two campuses that are 40 miles apart. We manage roughly 350 devices through GVE." IT personnel make extensive use of GVE's monitors and schedules. "We have schedules set up for all devices to turn off at 11pm daily, plus individual schedules that control each one of our three videowalls, digital signage systems, and digital menu boards, each programmed differently depending on the space and their hours of operation," says Heimer.

Results

The school was able to better serve their students by tapping into the additional functionality of previously installed Extron equipment, by using GVE to monitor and schedule events both locally and at remote campuses, and by controlling it all with Extron's TouchLink-based control systems.

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