

## Digital Signage and Emergency Messaging on Campus

Digital signage can play a vital role in delivering real-time emergency messaging. But it's important that the signage system be able to effectively communicate daily and emergency content on both a departmental and campus-wide level as needed.

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**O**n today's college campuses, communication is key.

Universities may have an event occur that threatens the safety of students and staff. In such cases, including a fire, severe weather or hostile situation, a "breaking news" alert for the entire campus is critical to transmit important, time-sensitive and potentially life-saving information.

As schools and universities modernize their campuses and infrastructures, they are looking at digital signage as a mainstream messaging system to communicate with students, faculty and staff. The challenge is integrating such a system with a comprehensive campus communications network that functions on both a departmental level and on a campus-wide level.

### The genesis

For many universities, the need for an emergency messaging system became apparent in the wake of the 2007 shootings on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic

Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va.

The incident made many universities re-evaluate their emergency communication plans and look for better and quicker ways to share critical news with students.

But while gunmen on school campuses certainly make headlines, many emergency situations involve more everyday occurrences, such as severe thunderstorms or tornado alerts. In fact, those types of situations may be where digital signage is most effective.



*When severe weather strikes, digital signage can provide crucial information to students and staff.*

***“A good campus-based digital signage messaging system must do two things: On a local level it must function to allow individual departments the ability to provide an ongoing stream of departmental messages as desired, and under certain conditions, it must be able to communicate globally to the entire campus with simultaneous messages distributed to all departments at the same time.”***

— Blake Reeves, North American channel manager, Capital Networks

“Typically, a weather alert is something where you have a little bit of notice time, so you can catch people as they are walking past,” said Blake Reeves, North American channel manager for Markham, Ont.-based Capital Networks, a provider of digital signage solutions.

“And these are the types of situations that occur most frequently on a college campus,” Reeves said. “Students and staff often are unaware of ever changing and potentially dangerous weather conditions moving in. Digital signage is an excellent way to deliver that message.”

### Dual communications

Although nearly everyone agrees in principle that the idea of using a school’s digital signage network for emergency communication is an excellent idea, putting that idea into practice can be a bit more difficult.

In many campus environments, the acquisition of a digital signage system has traditionally been done on a departmental level instead of on a campus-wide level, Reeves says.

So while the business school may have purchased a system from one company, the engineering school purchased its system from a completely different company. And because those systems often are

incompatible and independent of each other, they are unable to accept a campus-wide emergency messaging alert.

“Many campus administrations who have these independent digital signage systems are realizing that despite the basic advantage of departmental communications to specific local populations, they cannot easily communicate to the overall university population on a campus-wide level,” Reeves said.

“Thus, while the campus may have an overall capable digital messaging system, it may not be as effective as desired,” he said. “A good campus-based digital signage messaging system must do two things: On a local level it must function to allow individual departments the



*For emergency messaging, such as in case of fire, a digital signage system must work system-wide, not just departmentally.*

ability to provide an ongoing stream of departmental messages as desired, and under certain conditions, be able to communicate globally to the entire campus with simultaneous messages distributed to all departments at the same time.”

A critical element for schools looking to upgrade their current digital signage media system is that it be done without incurring the overall cost of replacing the entire existing infrastructure. Audience Campus, the digital signage software solution developed by Capital Networks, was designed with this very scenario in mind. An open system that integrates easily with contemporary PC hardware, Audience Campus also provides schools the ability to communicate on both a departmental and campus-wide level as needed.

“Switching to a solution such as Audience

Campus may be the most efficient way for universities that have already invested in digital signage to unify their campus into a single network, without the cost of replacing all the hardware they already own,” Reeves said. “They can make the most of their investment and make the campus a safer place in the process.”

***About the sponsor:** Capital Networks Limited, established in 1991, offers digital signage technology to various industry segments in six continents. The company, which has its roots in the broadcasting and cable television industries, provides content management services, production and creative services and technical support. Capital Networks also developed the Audience platform that runs on contemporary PC hardware and graphics cards and is used in a wide range of industry segments.*