

# NEC Digital Signage Makes Promotions Pop at Carmike Cinemas' Concessions Stands

## Facility:

- Carmike Cinemas

## Vertical:

- Theater

## Location:

- 280 theaters across the U.S.; headquarters in Columbus, GA

## Challenges:

- Increase per user spending by upgrading concession stands to digital menu boards at all locations. Sought an efficient way to communicate promotions to customers across 45 different menu layouts

## Solution:

- 42" NEC V423 and 46" NEC V463

## Result:

- Elevated the theater's look and feel as well as their reputation

## Date:

- Phase one: July-December 2013; phase two: January-July 2014



Buying popcorn at the movies is just a given for many people—and over the years, concession sales have become the lifeblood for many theaters.

Carmike Cinemas, the fourth largest movie theater chain in the U.S., boosts snack sales at its concession stands through a number of noteworthy promotions, including its famed refillable popcorn bucket. With 280 locations, however, Carmike needed an efficient way to market new offerings that aligned with its reputation as a leader in digital cinema.

## The Challenge

Carmike needed to quickly and consistently roll out promotions in concession stands located in lobbies across all 280 sites while maintaining the flexibility to adapt offerings for a specific region. It also wanted the option to effortlessly modify prices or highlight specific items—say, a special on ice cream during an unexpected heat wave.

The chain relied on paper counter cards and table tents to advertise new items and special promotions, which were a hassle to get into every theater.

“Any promotion would take weeks to put together, print and mail out to all of the theaters,” said Rob Lehman, Carmike’s vice president of food and beverage. It was also impossible to ensure that every individual theater manager would put out the promotional materials on the same day for a coordinated, nationwide effort.

Among its hundreds of theaters, Carmike has about 45 different concession stand layouts, which require an adaptable solution. Several theaters finished construction this summer, while some inhabit buildings that date back to the 1970s or earlier. Some locations are dimmer than others, while a handful of them include higher end cafes alongside traditional counters.

## The Solution

Systems integrator Cinema Scene Marketing recommended NEC Display Solutions digital signage for menu boards that would enable Carmike to consistently and vibrantly roll out promotions across all of its locations. Cinema Scene installed more than 1,700 42-inch NEC V423 displays in multiple configurations based on the unique layouts of each Carmike theater.

“NEC consistently rates as the highest quality digital signage provider,” said John Crick, vice president of network technologies at Cinema Scene. “The displays are reliable, the performance is great, and the service is top notch.”



The crisp, vivid picture quality on the commercial grade, high-definition V423 and V463 displays make it easy for theater patrons to read menu items and prices. Bright, saturated colors add to the visual appeal of food and drink imagery, including effervescent animated sodas that zoom across the three screens.

Cinema Scene surveyed each location and created a portfolio of layouts so that the team could quickly assess the hardware requirements for each site. The installation started with a test run in April 2013, followed by a roll-out of nearly 225 location installations between July and September 2013. Phase two was completed during the first and second quarters of 2014. Cinema Scene continues to provide digital signage services as Carmike constructs new theaters and acquires additional locations.

Thin bezels deliver a sleek, cohesive picture so images that run through more than one screen appear seamless. Carmike leveraged Cinema Scene's graphics and content management teams to strategize on the most effective layout for the menu items and merchandizing videos. Cinema Scene implemented different strategies depending on the configuration of the boards in each theater.

Carmike has quickly integrated interruptive marketing spots into its digital signage strategy. Interruptive marketing spots allow for menu board displays to be taken over, or interrupted, by a special promotional message that can span across multiple displays. The message may promote a monthly deal, key menu item or even a special event.

Most theaters use a single multi-channel media player running Cinema Scene's digital signage software solution. The software is administered by a single content manager who can easily control all pricing and promotions for the entire circuit. Cinema Scene's software seamlessly integrated with the Carmike's point of sale system to allow for ease in managing price changes.

As a turnkey integrator, Cinema Scene does more than site surveys and installation. They manage nearly every aspect of the client's digital signage strategy, including graphics, content management, software and technical support.

"We always preach that we're going to be best friends with clients very quickly because we're going to fully assess everything about the installation," Crick said. "We worked with Carmike hand in hand diligently for weeks before we even put the technology in the theaters."

Even though it was a complicated installation over a short timeframe, Crick said that NEC's complete solution streamlined the process.

"NEC was great to work with," Crick said. "They came to the table with all the hardware, so it was one-stop shopping for us, and they were able to manage the logistics of getting all that hardware from the distribution center to each site. They were a fantastic partner." The solution NEC delivered included not only the displays but mounts, cables, computers and more.

The displays have had an immediate impact on Carmike's ability to run promotions. One person can update the content, and the screens will display the new information in mere seconds, making it simple to adjust a price or run a temporary marketing campaign. Carmike can run a short promotional tie-in during the week before a big movie's release, for example, without much effort or investment.

Just as easily, Carmike can alter the content in just one theater for a special event or regional promotion. The signs also make it easy to test a product or promotion in a small group of theaters before rolling it out nationwide.

The sleek displays update the appearance of the concession areas and eliminate clutter that paper tents created on the counters. Carmike also expects the total cost of ownership on the signs will ultimately be less than designing, printing and mailing thousands of paper promotional materials each year.

Feedback from both customers and staff has been outstanding, Lehman said. Patrons value the menu boards' readability, while employees appreciate how they simplify customer service. While Carmike's doesn't yet have statistics on how the menu boards have impacted sales, Lehman is confident they will boost concession profits while also elevating the theater's reputation. "The menu boards make our theaters look up to date and modern," he said. "NEC is a leader. We're very pleased with its products."



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