University of Central Florida encourages student collaboration with NEC displays

Facility:
- University of Central Florida

Vertical:
- Higher Education

Location:
- Orlando, Florida

Challenges:
- Provide relevant news, wayfinding and computer lab availability to visitors of the newly renovated Tech Commons

Solution:
- 32" NEC V321-2, 46" P462, 55" P551 and 65" V651

Result:
- A technology space designed to adapt to emerging technologies and the changing needs of students

Date:
- January 2012

Located just outside downtown Orlando, the University of Central Florida (UCF) is a dynamic university offering more than 200 degree programs on a 1415-acre campus. UCF has embarked on a bold venture to become a university that provides leadership and service that cultivates an engaging attitude of awareness, innovation, courage and agile responsiveness in its members.

Its Tech Commons is a welcoming, convenient place for all students to gather, communicate, interact, study and receive technical support. Divided into 10 regions, the Tech Commons offers an all-inclusive student learning area—from a podcast recording studio and editing suite to collaboration rooms and an outdoor technology patio.

The Challenge

As UCF faculty realized that learning has been redefined by technology and is no longer confined to the classroom, it recognized changes that needed to occur in order to provide a resource center that fulfills staff and students' technological needs.

UCF's Tech Commons is located within the Computer Center I (CC1) and Computer Center II (CC2) buildings and is governed by the Computer Services & Telecommunications (CS&T) department. The outdated facility had become unsuitable for effective studying, so CS&T's Project & Performance Management Office (PPMO), an administrative office that defines and maintains the standards of process related to product management, began designing a complete renovation.

Funding for this multi-million dollar reconstruction was completed in 2009 through the Student Technology Fee each enrolled student pays. While the fee is minimal, it adds up quickly year after year with more than 58,000 students enrolled. The purpose of installing digital signage within the Tech Commons was to provide students with UCF news, a weather feed, wayfinding and entertainment with WUCF TV, the University's television station.

UCF's old computer center, located between the student union and library, needed to be transformed into a state-of-the-art facility, beginning with the entrance to the Tech Commons. PPMO wanted

to install a touch-capable large-screen display that would allow students to view available computers in each lab.

At the center of CC2 is the CORE, an acronym that stems from the facility's attributes during planning stages: Collaborative Original Reflective Experimental. The CORE offers a large open space with lockers, charging stations for laptops, diagnostic services, data recovery, battery recycling center and more. Administrators felt this space would benefit from a high-tech aesthetic that would welcome students as they gather before heading to different parts of the Tech Commons. Specifically, the CORE needed displays for entertainment purposes and to provide CS&T news.

CC2's collaboration lab was designed to be a multimedia computer lab with study rooms and a video editing lab. It would feature 14 Apple iMacs, 20 Dell Windows desktops, staffed assistance and printers. According to PPMO's plans, it would need large-screen displays to aid interactivity and learning amongst groups.

CC1's computer lab and training rooms all needed a facelift with large-screen displays to provide timely CS&T information to lab users. Seventy workstations and 214 seats would be included to guarantee ample space and access during high-traffic hours. Training rooms needed A/V support and furniture that could be set up in a variety of ways to accommodate meetings of different sizes.

The Technology Service Center includes a Student Support Desk for computer repairs to students and faculty. This area required three displays behind each staff member's seat at the desk, which would display the names of staff members, the Center phone number repair hours and targeted advertising.

Technology Product Center (TPC) allows students to view, test and purchase products from major brands affiliated with the UCF Computer Store. High-tech vending machines allow students to purchase office supplies and small technology items. The entrance to TPC required a large-screen display for welcome information, hours of operation and related information.

"We wanted the Tech Commons to be an inviting place for students to spend time outside of class to accomplish group work

and study individually, as well as act as an innovative hub with all the technological tools needed for collaboration and learning in the 21st century," said Aaron Streimish, manager of PPMO at UCF. "This was a high-profile project that gained the attention of a few manufacturers. We had a very long design and implementation process that included choosing a display provider to fit our needs of extended operation times, reliability and enhanced connectivity for a variety of content sources."

PPMO's design phase lasted 18 months, and time was of the essence when Streimish reached out to NEC for support.

"From the beginning of our partnership, NEC was punctual, cooperative and listened to our needs," said Alice Hansen, manager of technology sales, service and support at UCF. "They understood our vision and had a broad product line of large-screen displays from which to choose, ensuring our requirements were met."

The Solution

UCF purchased 24 NEC displays, varying in size from 32" to 65", for CC1 and CC2. The Tech Commons utilizes NEC's V and P Series, which offer commercial- and professional-grade panels to withstand extended use, an essential component for the higher education market.

Sixteen 46" P462 displays were installed throughout the Tech Commons, including three in the computer lab, two in training room #1, two in collaboration lab #2, three in the collaboration room, one at the Tech Support entrance and three at the Tech Support desk. PPMO's desire for interactive touch displays at the Tech Commons entrance was fulfilled by two P462s, which were integrated with a touch overlay from NEC solutions partner Tech Global.

Two 55" P551 displays were added in training room #2, while one 32" V321-2 was mounted at the TPC entrance.

Four 65" V651s were purchased as well. One unit was implemented in the CORE's lounge for entertainment purposes, another was added to collaboration lab #1, and two units act as a media wall in one of the collaboration labs.

"A benefit to purchasing through NEC was the solution sales approach, where everything we needed for each part of our student learning area was included in the purchase," said Streimish. "We only had to deal with one point of contact at NEC, and they handled the coordination of accessories directly. This saved a lot of effort on our part."

NEC regularly works with a variety of approved technology vendors to supply its solutions customers with proper accessories. In addition to the touch overlay, UCF used NEC's solution sales service to purchase three side-mounted speakers, 27 media players, 23 Tripp Lite surge suppressors, a Four Winds Interactive site license and all required cabling. Mounts used include a medium swing arm wall mount, two large portrait tilt wall mounts, four large micro-adjustable pull-out mounts and 15 swing arm wall mounts. Additionally, UCF purchased a 5-year On Site Next Day extended warranty for its NEC displays.

The installation phase began in April 2011 and was completed after nine months. UCF worked with installer Mediatech to set up and mount the displays. Products were purchased through distributors Dell and Ingram Micro. The CS&T department hosted a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony on January 10, 2012.

In addition to its labs, the Tech Commons includes a wireless "Bring Your Own Technology" lab for congregation with comfortable seating, free WiFi and built-in power outlet access. The wireless lab and the CORE are now viewed by students as
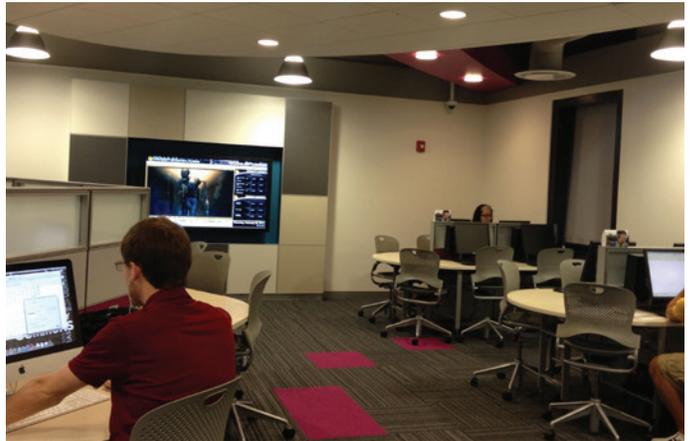
an ideal place for study breaks, as well as a centralized meeting place, complete with a café that includes snacks, refreshments and a Seattle's Best Coffee.

"We anticipate that the Technology Commons we celebrate today likely will be different in years to come," said President John C. Hitt at the Tech Commons ribbon cutting. "That's why this space is designed to adapt to emerging technologies and the changing needs of students."
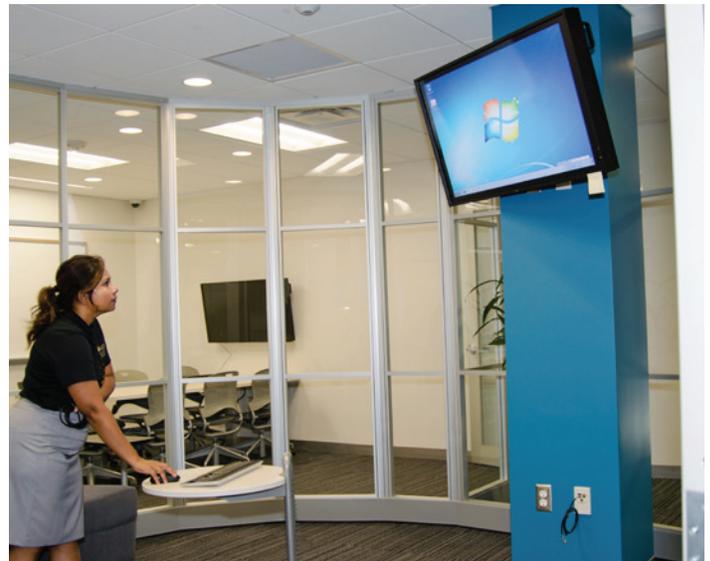
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