Vision West Notts

Finding new ways to showcase student talent

As part of their Vision West Notts rebranding exercise, West Nottinghamshire College launched a £5 million refurbishment of their Derby Road site. The new Create centre was designed to help students prepare for careers in broadcast, theatre, dance, radio and more. We set them up with Centrify management tools for their new Macs, and configured and installed a 12-screen software-driven video wall so that staff could showcase students' work in a more dynamic way.

Managing Mac suites

The college had been a long-term user of Apple hardware, but was having trouble getting their iMacs to work with their state-of-the-art Isilon shared storage system. After discussing their options with our server and storage engineer Tom Holbrook, they decided to use a combination of GroupLogic's ExtremeZ-IP to smooth out any integration issues and Centrify Suite to secure and manage their machines.

"We did a test with Centrify on about 20 Macs," said Learning Advisor Tim Warrener, "just to see how easily we could integrate using the Macs on the network with a personal login." Impressed with Centrify's ease of use, the college then rolled out the solution across the entire Create building. "It was quite daunting, but the team from Jigsaw24 were fantastic." Once a management solution had been decided, our engineers wrote custom scripts that would allow Vision West Notts' team to mount their drives properly.

As well as delivering a smoother, more productive user experience for students and staff, the new management system allows Vision West Notts' tech team to maintain tighter control over individual workstations, reducing the possibility of failure due to end user interference, and ensures students' work is saved securely and backed up on the Isilon straight away. Some staff were wary of the new login system this required at first but, as Tim explained, "they've warmed up now that they've got their own space."

Working with...

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In a nutshell...

What is Vision West Notts College?

Vision West Notts is an LSIS Beacon College that provides a range of GCSEs, A-Levels, vocational courses and apprenticeships for school leavers and adult learners alike.

What did they need?

Vision West Notts wanted a bold, eye-catching way to showcase their media department's work to staff, students and prospective employers.

How did we help?

We set them up with Centrify management tools for their new Macs, and configured and installed a 12-screen software-driven video wall so that staff could showcase students' work in a more dynamic way.

What were the benefits?

- A smoother, more productive Mac user experience for students and staff.
- Tighter control over individual workstations, reducing the possibility of failure due to end user interference.
- The ability showcase 3D and video work at full resolution, rather than relying on stills.

Showcasing student work

From the beginning of the refurbishment, staff at the college had known they wanted to include a video wall in one of the building's communal spaces. One of the college's key aims was to foster links with industry, and they wanted the screen to act as a bold, eye-catching introduction to the building for any visitors, as well as a platform for talented students to share their work. The screen would act as a showcase for multimedia projects, especially those involving video or 3D elements, as the college's existing display boards couldn't show this content at its best.

Designing the video wall

After hearing several pitches, the college decided to work with Jigsaw24. The main advantages of the solution Vision West Notts chose were its cost-effectiveness, the flexibility the Scala software offered in terms of what could be displayed, and the fact that, rather than taking a single output and stretching it across all the screens, the system could output a separate 720p image to each screen. This increases the wall's overall pixel count and reduces the risk of distorting or degrading the original image.

Expanding the solution

During the design process, Vision West Notts managed to free up some extra funding, and decided to expand the video wall from nine to twelve screens. "We weren't sure what we wanted [from the video wall]," explained Curriculum Manager Steve Gathercole. "There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, and one of the things that we were pleased about with Jigsaw24 was that we received a very fast response as we changed the criteria. Everything was put in a way that I could understand - I knew what I was paying for and how I could use it, and there was also an element of future proofing, so we could expand it, enlarge it, build on it, and that was what really made the difference."

Our team headed over to the college and, despite having to swap out the DUI transmitters for a newer model with better specs at the last minute, managed to get the whole setup up and running within a day. After a couple of weeks of smooth running, power to two of the screens cut out, but we were able to get them back on their feet in no time at all.

Jigsaw24's Anthony Hammond also provided a quick training session for key users. "I picked

it up quite quickly, due to the fact that I work in a multimedia environment," said Tim. "It's very similar to a lot of the software we use." Our design department then put together an animation based on the Vision West Notts logo, which served as an eyecatching placeholder while the Vision West Notts team created their own content.
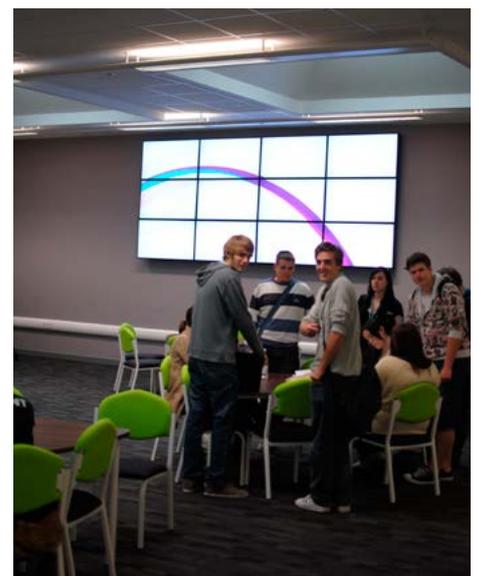
Looking forward...

"We've had amazing feedback on the video wall - we're adding new content all the time," Steve told us. Our design team have also given Vision West Notts some placeholder content based around an animated Vision West Notts logo, which Steve says "has elicited some brilliant responses."

The next stage of the plan is to load up the screen with students' creations in time for an upcoming open evening. "We wanted to showcase talent and show how great our students really are, and having this wall really does give that impact," explained Tim. After opening night, he plans to look into giving other machines on the network the ability to edit content on the wall, so that staff can keep the wall up to date with the latest images and information wherever they are.

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>
> Steve Gathercole, **Curriculum Manager, Vision West Notts.**

For more information about digital signage and Mac management in your school, get in touch on the details below.