An Investment In Communication

How Nucor Steel Increased Safety and Productivity with Digital Signage

This case study is brought to you by PC Connection, Inc., parent of the PC Connection family of companies, a collection of best-in-class information technology (IT) solutions providers. Its subsidiaries include PC Connection Sales Corporation, GovConnection, and MoreDirect, which service small- and medium-sized businesses, government, and enterprise markets, respectively.

With a capacity that exceeds 26 million tons, Nucor is the largest producer of steel in the U.S. and the world's foremost steel recycler. Nucor is also well known for its employee-centric culture. They believe that success is built on treating people well and this starts with ensuring employee safety. That's why when Nucor needed a new communication system to broadcast emergency weather alerts throughout their plant, they turned to PC Connection, a technology partner that they have trusted for over 10 years. PC Connection offered the internal and external resources needed to take Nucor's vision of modern, informative digital signage and make it a reality.

In Case of Emergency

Gene Butler, Systems Administrator, spearheaded a project to add digital signage at Nucor. Not only did the system need to display inventory-tracking information as products moved through their plant, but it also had to enable Nucor to broadcast emergency messages to their staff—a potentially life-saving feature in a region that is prone to outbreaks of severe weather.

"In April 2011, we had an F5 tornado hit within a couple hundred yards of our plant; obviously that scared everyone. We needed a way to quickly get emergency weather information to different parts of our mills," said Butler. "We had teammates that were in danger; we were not in contact with them. That single weather event really hit home—we needed to do something."

Butler engaged his Account Manager at PC Connection to begin the hunt for a signage system that could easily transmit information across a large 2,000-acre campus and to over 750 employees at once.

Can Signage Do More?

Butler started his search by considering different types of kiosks and digital signage. "The more we looked at kiosk-style solutions, the more we realized that digital signage would be a better choice—not only could it provide the weather broadcast we wanted, but it could also give us a solution for other needs," said Butler. "We have a lot of visitors to our mill—potential customers and vendors. We wanted a way to communicate greetings, information, and personalized messaging to them. We also have pulpits throughout the mill where we wanted to display production information. In addition to transmitting weather reports, digital signage provides a great avenue to accomplish all of our goals."

Ease the Burden on IT

Once Butler decided digital signage was right for Nucor, he assembled a team to help him evaluate systems. "I had a team working with me; there were four of us giving input, evaluating, and looking at solutions," said Butler. "We did a lot of homework and wanted to incorporate as much expansion capability as we could into the final decision."

One thing Nucor did not want was for the digital display to become a burden on the IT department. Butler recalls, "We tried several systems that did not do what we expected; as we got further into our research we decided that we did not want to create an IT ticket every time the screen needed to change. We needed to be able to give ownership of the display units to our team members. And, whatever his or her skill level may be, we needed a system that anyone could operate. We found a Black Box solution that absolutely provided that for us."

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Added Value Throughout the Process

Nucor worked with PC Connection and Black Box to evaluate and install an iCOMPEL Digital Signage solution. Nucor chose the system for its flexibility to support future growth. Because Black Box does not charge annual licensing fees, Nucor knew the total cost of their digital signage solution up front. PC Connection and Black Box offered extensive pre- and post-sales support and training to ensure a smooth implementation.

The initial rollout went very smoothly. Butler utilized an existing Virtual Private Network (VPN) at Nucor to route media from a server to an FTP site where users can access approved content. Butler said, "The majority of the learning curve was in deciding exactly what we expected from the system. Once we knew that, the rollout was very quick. Installation was simply a matter of setting up the unit, putting it on the VPN, and pointing it at the appropriate content in each area of the plant." Nucor installed approximately 15 display units and plans to grow that total to 30 within the year.

An end-user can choose what content to display on the signage, based on their location. "For example, potential customers enter at the front lobby of our administration building. When a clerk knows a team is coming in, she can quickly personalize the scrolling message at the top of our digital display. She can customize the message without changing our standard content—our stock prices, an RSS feed from CNN, weather radar, and company information. In another part of the mill, the clerk there can choose different messaging. Each location can have a custom use depending on their need," said Butler.

When asked about training, Butler said, "I designed training documents based on the screens that each clerk would use. For about 70% of the staff that was adequate. A couple of team members wanted one-on-one training. Once they understood the system, they got excited about it and wanted to learn more."

The Right Display Creates a Positive Impact

"All of the feedback has been very positive; I really feel like we hit a home run. This digital signage system has amazing growth potential. We use the displays to provide employees with content that will help them do their job better; when a user asks me 'Can we do this…?' I have yet to answer no. The displays allow staff to do their job well and rely on the signage for the valuable, dynamic information that is needed to help them work better," said Butler.

Butler recommends that others consider the big picture when evaluating a digital signage solution. "Don't go into the project with too narrow of a scope; make sure that when you decide on a solution that you ask: 'What are the possibilities?' We needed weather reports. Had I stopped at that and installed a television with a digital antenna on it, I would have accomplished my goal—and I would have missed the mark.

"PC Connection was very much involved early on. We needed someone to help ensure that we had all of the information needed to make the best decision for our employees—PC Connection did a wonderful job of that."

To learn more about digital display technology and the services that are available to support your next IT project, contact your Account Manager today.

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>
> —Gene Butler,
> Systems Administrator

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