

Branson Public Schools

Modernizing campus communications
with digital signage.



The Challenge



Across the country, schools are turning to digital signage to modernize campus communications and build a more connected, informed community. Static signs are no longer enough to keep up with everything happening on school campuses. These types of signs can only ever say one thing, and districts have had to manually update the signs or wait for a new budget cycle to create replacements. With digital signage, there's no more waiting. A single display can instantly shift from a schedule update to a safety alert to a celebration of a state championship. Thanks to the ability to share dynamic, real-time information, digital displays enable schools to build a positive school culture, boost community engagement, and improve campus security.

For Branson Public Schools—which serves over 4,600 students and employs over 700 employees across seven schools—real-time information is key.

The home of the Pirates is located in Branson, Missouri, a one-of-a-kind family vacation destination nestled in the Ozark Mountains. Known as the “Live Entertainment Capital of the World,” the city is currently undergoing a massive wave of development and expansion, driven by millions in investment in tourism, sports, and infrastructure.

This growing, vibrant region is home to 13,000

full-time residents, but more than 10 million visit annually to enjoy the area's attractions. It's known for turning “visitors into community,” and with so many eyes on the city, it's no wonder that Branson Public Schools was searching for a way to tell its story.

“We believe every communication channel serves a different purpose,” says Tori Palumbo, director of Communications at Branson Public Schools. “Our digital signs capture the attention of thousands of people driving by our campuses every day. They're often the first interaction someone has with one of our schools, so they're an important opportunity to showcase student success, promote upcoming events, and reinforce our district's brand.”

While Branson Public Schools had a few digital signs scattered across its seven campuses, they were outdated, different sizes, and low resolution. “The lower resolution made it difficult to display detailed graphics, photos, and branded content effectively, so we were often limited to simple text-based messages,” says Palumbo. “As a district that places a high value on communication and community engagement, we wanted our first impression to better reflect who we are today.”

The team at Branson Public Schools knew they needed to control the narrative of their story, and to do so, updated digital signage was crucial.

3 Goals



01 Higher Resolution

Branson Public Schools wanted signs that looked modern and complemented their campuses. A major part of that was the need for higher resolution displays so they could move from simple, text-based messages to more detailed graphics and photos of students and staff.

02 Standard Sizing

The existing signs were a variety of sizes, and Branson Public Schools wanted to create a standard size across the district. This standardization makes creating generalized content across signs easier, and it creates a set size for signage as the district expands and adds more displays in the future.

03 Improved Controls

Thanks to Optec's M.E. Cloud, a cloud-based software that gives users centralized control of the signs from anywhere, the district can now update and schedule content across campuses at the click of a button. The software also offers robust security features, including control over user roles and access.



Optec's Infinity Outdoor RGB Series displays in 6 mm pixel pitch are installed at four of Branson's school campuses.



Solution

The leadership at Branson, including the superintendent and the then-Director of Technology and Digital Learning Dr. Michelle Brenner, began researching digital signage options. They turned to Howard Technology Solutions, the district's technology partner, for help. Howard Technology Solutions, a division of Howard Industries, manufactures its own desktops, notebooks, and servers alongside partner brand products. The company also provides installation, procurement, and consulting services across several verticals, including education.

At the top of the list of needs was standardized sign sizing as well as a higher pixel pitch (resolution) that would allow for the sharing of student and staff photos.

"We wanted signs that looked modern and complemented our campuses, but the bigger goal was improving our ability to communicate," says Palumbo. "Our schools are incredibly active, and we wanted a platform that could quickly share information while also celebrating students, staff, and district accomplishments."

Howard recommended Optec Displays for its wide range of pixel pitches, best-in-class technology, and excellent customer service.

Through a series of renderings, Optec worked with the school district to determine the look and feel they wanted for their digital displays. They then brought their demo vehicle, which carries a four-by-eight digital display, to one of the school sites so that Branson could compare pixel pitches (6 mm and 10 mm). Optec shared school-related content on the truck's demo display and positioned it in the field so they could see the sign in its future location.

Thanks to seeing the demo display in the field, Branson decided to move forward with four of Optec's Infinity Outdoor RGB Series displays in 6 mm pixel pitch for better clarity and the chance to move beyond text-only messaging. The signs are a standard 5 feet, 6 inches-by-10 feet, 6 inches and 252 pixels-by-480 pixels resolution. This standardization makes creating generalized content across signs easier, and

it creates a standard for signage as the district expands and adds more displays in the future.

One of the signs is double-faced, while the other three are single-faced with graphics on the back featuring the Branson school logo. Adding graphics to the back of the sign cabinets helped to provide the school campuses with additional branding.



Graphics were added to the back of some of the cabinets. This was a unique aspect that helped further the branding on campus.

Project Management

A project of this size often involves many partners, and to prevent Branson from having to juggle multiple vendors, Optec took the lead and brought in local sign partner Ayres Sign Company to handle the removal of the old signs and fabrication and installation of the new. The sign company contracted directly with Howard.

"We facilitate connections with local vendors, bringing in a company like Ayres to handle the fabrication and installation," explains Shawn Klinger, executive vice president, Sales & Marketing at Optec Displays. "Ayres receives everything, puts it together, and installs it as a complete package."

Optec stayed involved throughout the process, making sure every partner delivered on its role, while managing everything related to the digital signs themselves — service, training, and warranty support.

All of this gave Branson a single point of contact for the technology, even as multiple partners worked together behind the scenes.



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Content & the Cloud

The new digital signs run on Optec's M.E. Cloud, a cloud-based software that gives users centralized control of the signs from anywhere, including the ability to update and schedule content across campuses at the click of a button. The software also offers robust security features, including control over user roles and access.

"We regularly update the content to keep it fresh and relevant," says Palumbo. "We have also designated one digital signs manager for each of our campuses, and they report to our digital communication specialist in our Communications Department."

The improved pixel pitch, standardized sizes, and increased controls have all changed the way Branson communicates with the community. "Because the signs are more visually engaging, we're using them much more intentionally than we did before," explains Palumbo. "We can highlight student achievements, recognize staff, promote performances and athletic events, share enrollment information, and communicate timely reminders in a way that's eye-catching and easy to understand."

Other types of content the district shares on its displays includes seasonal greetings and school spirit graphics, community engagement opportunities, and emergency or weather-related messaging (Optec's software can tie into IPAWS, FEMA's national system for local alerting).

The new content also includes photos of students and staff. "The improved resolution has opened up possibilities we simply didn't have before," says Palumbo. "Being able to feature students visually has been especially meaningful because it helps personalize our messaging and gives us another way to celebrate the incredible things happening across the district."



Branson regularly updates the content on its displays to keep it fresh and relevant. The improved pixel pitch even allows for photos of students and staff members.



Finding Your Own Solution

Branson Public Schools had a clear and defined purpose for their new Optec digital displays, which has allowed them to tell their story in a powerful way.

Tori Palumbo, director of Communications at Branson Public Schools, has some recommendations for other school districts looking to make the digital upgrade.



01

Think beyond replacing an old sign, and view digital signage as an extension of your overall communication strategy.

02

Invest in quality technology that will showcase your district well for years to come.

03

Develop a plan for regularly updating and posting content.

04

Use the signs to celebrate your people as much as to share information. The more intentional you are with the content, the more valuable the investment becomes.