

Alabama River Group

Live and On-Demand Video for Digital Signage



Organization

Alabama River Group

Industry

Paper

VBrick Products

- VBrick Single and Dual Channel
- Windows® Media Encoders
- VBrick Digital Signage

Applications

Digital signage, multicast television feeds and recorded training videos

It takes focus and teamwork to efficiently operate any production line twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Alabama River Group's employees operate not one, but two lines at that pace, cranking out 2,600 tons of hardwood and softwood pulp every day.

In fact, until recently, the only lack of focus and efficiency evident at the Perdue Hill facility was in the employee control rooms and break rooms distributed around the 827-acre campus.

This isn't as trivial as it sounds. Some 50 televisions located in those control and break rooms play an important role in maintaining the morale, focus and community culture of Alabama River Group's 550 employees. Programming ranges from local news and sporting events from a central satellite feed, to digital signage informing workers about upcoming company events, like 401K sign-ups, family days, and blood drives.

The Challenge

Broadcast digital signage and television feed via fiber network to fifty locations scattered across an 825+ acre campus

The inefficiency arose from two sources. First the digital signage operation was unnecessarily complicated by an unwieldy PC-based setup; and, second, the strength of the audio visual signal significantly declined toward the remote edges of the campus due to cumulative connector loss in the coaxial network.

One potential solution was to piggyback the audio-visual signals on the company's 1-GB Ethernet fiber backbone. The question was how to convert these signals to digital, and transmit them without interfering with the network's regular data and phone traffic.

The Solution

VBrick Single and Dual Channel Encoders to piggyback digital signage communications and satellite feeds over a fiber network

The most obvious choice was to approach the company that supplied Alabama River Group's Ethernet network. However, although the vendor's technology enabled streaming and on-demand video, it wasn't compatible with the digital signage program central to employee communications.

Plus, when told how much the vendor's solution would cost, IT Director Ron Oudenaarden said he "almost fell out of his chair."

Searching for an alternative, Oudenaarden learned about VBrick and arranged a meeting. Five minutes into the presentation, VBrick's rep already had the technology up and running. Ninety minutes later he had a new customer.

Alabama River Group ordered two VBrick Windows Media Encoders: one Dual Channel appliance for the company's two satellite television feeds, and a Single Channel appliance to output a new digital signage program from VBrick. The pulp-manufacturer also ordered set top boxes for each of its 50 break room televisions.

The Benefits

Crystal clear audio and video signal across Alabama River Group’s multi-acre campus, with zero impact on its fiber network’s regular data and phone traffic

Oudenaarden found VBrick’s two encoders easy to connect, and their web-based configuration process intuitive. Distributing and connecting the 50 set top boxes across the campus took a little more work. But once Alabama River Group rerouted its digital signage and television feeds through VBrick’s encoders the effect was immediately apparent - particularly at the most remote locations on campus. “Employees at every location said the video and audio were instantly perfect,” said Oudenaarden.

Plus, the feeds are now available to employees connected to Alabama River Group’s fiber network via PC. Computer users can also access an on-demand video library that the company has discussed developing.

“We now have so many more tools to communicate because of VBrick,” Oudenaarden said. “We’re constantly thinking about how can we use these tools to communicate better.”

For example, the pre-recorded videos the company is considering might include five-minute training videos that would air during break times, and might explain how to properly fill out a time card, fill a work order, or contact the company’s insurance provider. Oudenaarden also sees applications for improving the company’s already impressive safety record.

“If our Safety Department is seeing a rise in a certain type of hand injury, they can now record and broadcast a video during breaks about how to avoid these injuries,” he said. “Now that we have these tools available to us, I have ticklers to remind people to be constantly thinking how to take advantage of them.”

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Ron Oudenaarden
IT Director

System Integration

