Student-Centered Digital Signage
for Colleges and Universities

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER

Table of Contents

We're here to help! If you have any questions about your application or our products, please contact us at **800.572.4935** or **salesteam@visix.com**.

Training Tomorrow's Leaders

More and more modern workplaces are using digital signage to further engagement, gaining benefits like higher productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction; less turnover and absenteeism, and fewer safety incidents.

Part of your challenge is to prepare students for entering the increasingly competitive global marketplace, and give them a wide range of skills so they have a competitive edge. So it makes sense for your educational institution to emulate environments they will likely find themselves in after graduation.

You already know that digital signage can be much more than just top-down, one-way push communications. People today are used to interacting with information and digital environments, and no group more so than today's university students. As Gen Zers, they have a whole different set of expectations than previous generations that you need to meet. Engaging your audience is the whole point of digital signage – hook them, get them interested, and get them actively participating.

The Basics of Engagement

Your digital signs are competing with a lot of stimulus and daily distractions for your audience. In order to engage, your content has to stand out and grab attention. Not only that, but it has to have some way to connect with and motivate viewers to interact with the information in some way.

Uniqueness

People are more likely to notice something if it's out of the ordinary. Although you may want to incorporate brand standards to coordinate colors or templates for digital signage messages, you need to leave room for creativity and distinctiveness in communications. If you have a message that needs to stand out – make it do just that. Design a unique and stimulating visual or video so your audience will notice and remember it. However, keep in mind that if you do this for every announcement, your important messages will get lost in the crowd again.

Personalization

Although it's not practical to tailor messages to each viewer, you can reach out to viewer types or groups that you've classified for certain communications. If you're advertising student events, be sure to use keywords and visuals that appeal to that specific audience's age group and interests, or include popular social media content. You'll get more attention and retention if people connect on a personal or emotional level with your message.

Participation

Sometimes you may have more success telling part of the story than all of it. Audiences like to be part of the narrative. You can let them join in by delivering messages that prompt them to ask questions or seek out more information. Sometimes a teaser is better than a text-crowded announcement. Prompt people to go to a website or touch the screen – any call to action to get them to engage with the content and participate in the story.

Engaging Gen Z

Gen Zers are described as well-educated, entitled, confident and tech savvy. Oftentimes, the Boomers, Xers or millennials that are managing them have trouble connecting with and motivating them.

Use Tech

We're all used to checking screens in airports, restaurants, malls and other public spaces, so why not do the same on campus? TVs, computers and smartphones have trained us all to look at screens for information, so digital signage is a natural choice to reach modern students.

Understand that technology is king for this generation. Zers were born into the world of mobiles and social media, and if you want to communicate with them, you need to be doing so through technology. And they know tech - they might scoff at or not appreciate clunky desktops, fax machines and other outdated devices. However, they will be impressed by sleek digital signage, especially any screen that's interactive.

Therefore, employ this kind of technology around your campus. Zers are used to having their eyes constantly fixed on a screen – take advantage of this as you place digital displays in high traffic areas around your space. If there's a message you need them to know, put it up here. Email, bulletin boards and printed newsletters will not work.

Digital signage is also extremely versatile to help you engage different types of viewers. Just like with different learning styles, some students are visual, some are auditory-musical, while kinesthetic learners may prefer to physically interact with touchscreens. Digital signage does all these things, so it gets information across to all types of students.

And you're not limited to large displays. Any screen can be a digital sign. You can deliver messages and alerts to video walls, screens in cafés and lounges, computer lab monitors, websites and smartphones. This lets you reach your students across various digital platforms so you can maximize message saturation while letting them choose how they want to interact with your communications.

Be Efficient

Don't get stuck in the age-old saying, "It's always been done that way." This is the fastest way to lose the loyalty and motivation of your students. Instead, ask yourself and your staff, "What needs to be improved?"

It could be the way you're disseminating important information. Studies have shown that email is no longer used by the younger generation, and intranets are rarely used. Are you wasting your budget dollars on these efforts? Update your processes with digital signage software that's easy to manage and let's lots of people contribute to share the workload.

Good signage starts with good design. Keep text to a minimum, and use bright colors and motion to draw the eye. The faster your audience is moving, the less they'll see. So minimize what's on screen in places where people are passing quickly. You can always put more on screen in cafeterias or near elevator banks where students have more time to engage with screens.
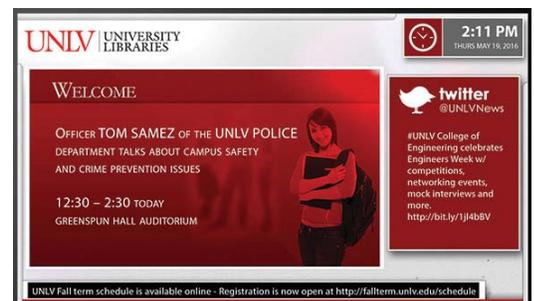
Do remember that the longer students have to spend reading information or determining how to use it, the quicker you'll lose their attention. Short and sweet is the way to go, so make your point and move on. A good way to stay relevant is to balance humor and need-to-knows. Show funny memes on your digital displays as well as important messages from admin. Once they're laughing with you, you'll have loyal students that continuously check the digital signs and share info with their peers.

Get Interactive

One of the key descriptors of this generation is that it likes to be heard. Social media platforms and parents acted as sounding boards in the past. Now, Zers also want to be heard at school and at work. And they don't just want their ideas heard, they want them applied. They want to be, and expect to be, active contributors, not just passive information consumers. Interactive touchscreens and kiosks are an easy way to get them immediately involved.

Today's students are used to touching screens to get what they need. They prefer experiential activities to one-way communications, and they're accustomed to seeking out information on their own versus asking others for it.

Students are used to having control over their experience with web, apps and social networks, so touchscreens give them that freedom. It involves them in the process of discovery, making it an active experience unlike passive reception of information. They can also pick and choose the content they want to look at.

There are many ways to include interactive solutions in your digital signage deployment. Basically, think of an interactive display as a large format tablet, with your content sort of like a website or app. You can embed any kind of information you want there, about anything your audience might need or want.

You can include built-in digital keyboards for easy searching, SMS triggers to send information to phones, or QR tags and short URLs for easy downloads. Navigation around the touchscreen should be intuitive and easy, with as many "pages" nested in the design as you like. Just make sure to include a back button on each page and an easy to navigate menu, preferably at the bottom of the screen for ADA compliance.

Interactivity doesn't just mean touchscreen displays. You don't only want your students to see your message, you want them to do something with that information – enroll for classes, attend a lecture, take a survey, watch a podcast or follow you on Twitter. Participation and engagement go hand in hand.

Just like in advertising, you need to include a clear call to action in your messages. Include a short URL or QR code, so students have an easy way to get more information about the subject or give feedback. Ask them to take a photo of a message for a discount at the bookstore, or include an SMS code so they can text a response to a question on screen.

Clear calls to action also let you measure the success of your communications. If you can measure the number of responses you get, you can adjust and improve your messages and scheduling strategy over time.

Go Social

It's been said that millennials and Zers seek validation and acceptance through social media. They value peer opinions and have a lot of their conversations online.

Showing social media on your digital signs puts students in their comfort zone. Since students are used to checking social networks frequently anyway, they'll be attracted to that content. You can also draw students to your social networks by highlighting their accomplishments, promoting their events, sharing photos and other good news and kudos.

Students can access multiple social networks on one touchscreen to see photos, posts or tweets in one place. If they don't follow your social networks off campus, the attraction of a touchscreen can draw attention to get them engaged.

Go Mobile

Effective communication involves not only the message itself, but also the medium that carries and delivers it. Digital signage doesn't just mean big screens in the lobby anymore.

Truly targeted messaging means publishing communications whenever and wherever your audience needs to receive them. The more precise yet flexible your delivery methods, the more likely you are to capture your viewers' attention and increase readership and interest.

Every student has a phone, tablet or laptop – they actually carry around interactive screens with them all day. Take advantage of this by delivering your communications in formats that are mobile-friendly.

Most digital signage systems let you export your message playlists as feeds that can go to your school app, website, desktop screensavers or mobile devices. This saves you time because you only have to create the message once, and students see the same message across all digital portals so they're more likely to notice it.

This is an easy add-on to existing systems – usually a software upgrade. No complicated, expensive digital signage or audiovisual integration investment is necessary.

Content Ideas

No matter what screens you're targeting, the content will decide the success of your communications. Here's some advice on designing engaging digital signage content for students.

The Basics

The first step to engagement is attracting attention. If your viewers don't look at the screens, you've missed an opportunity to engage them. Successful visual communications are a combination of great content, great design and showing your messages in the right place at the right time. Here are six important tips:

1. **Design beautiful content** - Good content means attractive, clear messages that grab attention, are easily understood, and motivate people to do something. Be fun and creative in your designs, and include motion whenever possible to catch the eye.

2. **Show something new** - We all ignore that poster from six months ago, and it's no different with digital signs. People will look for new information, and if they don't see it each time they tune in, they'll eventually tune out.

3. **Change layouts** - Moving things around on screen is a great way to catch the eye of passers-by. Even if your playlist isn't changing, moving it around on screen can "trick" viewers into believing they're seeing something new so they pay attention.

4. **Use visual hooks** - Show date and time, weather, breaking news and event schedules. As people rely on your digital signs for this information, they'll tune in more frequently to see these items, and see your other announcements as well.

5. **Limit playlists** - Since your audience is on the move, you can't expect them to see every item in a thirty-item playlist. Keep your playlists small and show messages more frequently so they get as much exposure as possible.

6. **Include a call to action** - You don't just want your audience to see messages, you want them to react to them in some way. Include clear directions in your messages, so they know how to get more info, take the next step or give feedback.

Campaigns

A sustained campaign will almost always be more engaging than a one-off message. When you're planning for events, promotions, or counting down to important dates, start advertising them early and use different message formats to communicate the information in new and creative ways.

You also need to consider where and when you publish your campaigns. You'll want to analyze traffic patterns and engage students in the right place at the right time. You don't want to advertise an event for first-year students in the senior lounge, and you don't want to hit engineering students with a lecture about accounting.

The thing to remember about campaigns is that it's a long-term strategy. You'll need to plan your campaign early, and start your messages at least two weeks before the event or deadline. The more often students are reminded, the more engaged they'll be.

Creating a character or theme to unify your campaign messages helps people follow the theme of your messages, and might even become a marketable element in and of itself.

Wayfinding

Most campuses are spread out, and helping people get around quickly and efficiently is a great use of your signs. Interactive maps on touchscreens and kiosks are a good first step. But you can make it all mobile by adding a downloadable app combined with proximity beacons – these send turn-by-turn directions right to a person's mobile device as they near a beacon, plus other contextual clues such as photos. Including a geofence – a virtual perimeter that interacts with a mobile device the moment it's crossed – means that people are prompted to download and use the app the moment they set foot on your property.

You can have interactive maps outside buildings for the whole campus, and in the lobby of each building for detailed wayfinding inside that property. Or your displays can switch back and forth between internal and external maps with just a single tap.

Directories

Touchscreen directories let you present a huge amount of information using very little real estate. Directories are often paired with wayfinding, so your audience looks up who they need to see, then gets directions on how to get there. They can also see additional information, such as consultation or opening hours. Including email addresses and other contact info can let people get in touch with who they need, possibly saving them a trip.

Events

You can easily pull in data from event calendars to promote upcoming events and provide detailed information on each. As you list events for various clubs, you can promote them on screen.

Display messages about upcoming tryouts for the football team or auditions for the new theatre production, telling where and when and what's needed. Include a short URL or QR tag to drive people to a dedicated webpage so they can sign up for a newsletter or event reminders, and so you can track how many people are interested.

Anything that happens on or near campus can be promoted this way – from movies to seminars, guest speakers and alumni events, to farmers' markets. And you can combine all your event listings with wayfinding to show students how to get there.

Shuttles

If your campus is large enough, it may have shuttles that take people around the area. Have interactive shuttle maps inside buildings near stops so people plan their routes, see current locations of shuttles, as well as predicted wait and travel times. This lets them wait inside for their ride in comfort and safety.

You can integrate these with public transportation information for your area, so people know how to get someplace in town, or beyond. Include phone numbers and links to taxi companies and other transport options. You can turn a single screen into a Transit Hub, making your students' lives easier.
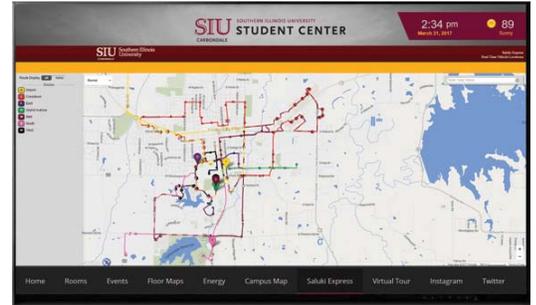

Menus

Your campus probably has a combination of catering, cafés and food vendors. Just like with the Transit Hub idea above, you can integrate all your current offerings into a single interactive digital space.

Show what's on special, how long wait times are and nutritional information. Consider allowing orders to be done right there at the screen, so things are ready when the student arrives at the counter.

You can even show information on local restaurants you know your students frequent, perhaps with digital discount coupons. This expands the relevance of your digital signage, and can also become a source of revenue for your school if you charge a small fee for offering this service.
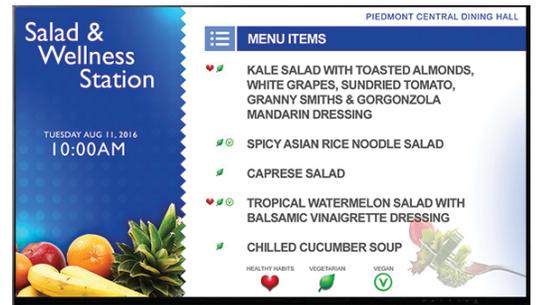

Donor Boards

Donor boards let you recognize people who've been generous in supporting your institution. Making these interactive allows you to tell more of their story with bios, photos, videos and more. Searchable indexes allow people to sift through a large volume of information easily and quickly. Recognize donors, present your mission and values, and promote ongoing donor recruitment programs using touchscreen designs – all on a single display.
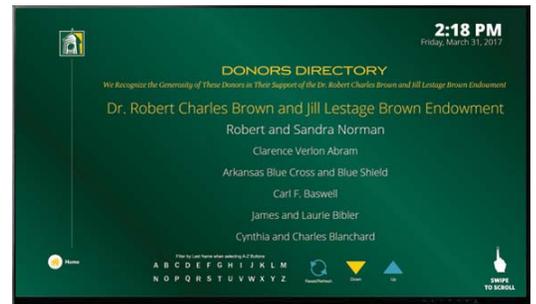
Energy Dashboards

Encourage green behavior by showing real-time energy usage stats on things like electricity and water. A touchscreen dashboard can let viewers choose between different buildings, floors or energy sources. Seeing current consumption, as well as trends over time, can help curb waste. You can even include a weekly or monthly goal, and see if the students respond by altering their behavior accordingly.
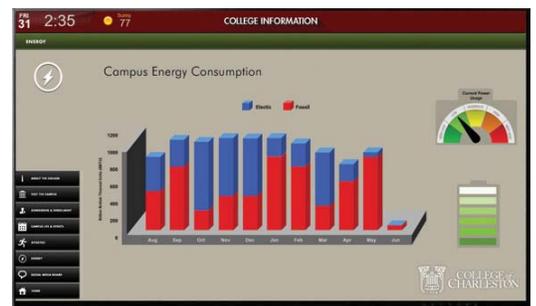
Room Booking

Allow students to book shared spaces themselves with interactive room booking kiosks. A map can show which areas are free, and integrating a room calendar from CollegeNet or other calendar app lets students reserve space right there on screen. This can be for meeting rooms, huddle spaces, photography dark rooms – anywhere students might need to reserve.

Computer Labs

Use touchscreens to show which desktop computers are available, or laptops to check out, and let people reserve their devices on their own to free up your staff for other duties. You can also display which computers are hooked up to printers, have USB drives, or are Macs or PCs, saving your audience time and frustration. And if you show this info alongside regular playlists, they'll also see your general messages.

Libraries

The audience here will mainly be students looking for something specific. Help them find what they need with maps of your shelves, or interactive wayfinding signage, to get them to what they need quickly.

Show available workstations, or add a reservation system that lets them claim an area for a certain amount of time. Displaying new acquisitions or special offers will help increase library usage, and reminding people of check out and return procedures will help make the entire process more efficient and stress free.

Info Boards

Any information you want to advertise can go on a touchscreen. You can display quick facts, admissions and enrollment information, faculty spotlights and academic programs. Show the history of your school with an interactive timeline that highlights key moments and achievements by the school and alumni. Use photo and video slideshows to highlight the athletics department or housing options.

Social Media

Social media meets all the criteria of engaging content: It's modern. It's social. It's real-time. It's auto-updating. Zers spend a lot of their free time on social networks, so why not encourage them to interact with your school online? Interactive social media boards allow everyone to see real-time posts and comments on pages from favorite sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Because your students are interested in social media, this is a great way to grab their attention and get them involved in your digital signage efforts. You can promote your pages to gain followers and prompt participation at the same time.

The easiest way to pull in social media is with a subscription service. The modules are auto-updating, so once you schedule them, you don't have to do anything else. They'll continue to pull in the latest posts at predetermined intervals in a layout you've already approved.

You can also pull in social media sites as a webpage message in a content block. If so, crop your webpage message to just show your feed and keep ads off of your screens. When you crop, make sure you include your cover photo and profile picture for branding. (We suggest you use your logo for your profile picture.) This ensures that viewers know whose social media page they're seeing on screen.

If you don't want to show your social media as a webpage message, you can pull posts from that page into a custom message template with a module from your digital signage provider. This lets you control how the posts show up on screen, and gives you more flexibility to match your current layouts and content blocks.

Custom modules are especially effective for showing social media on interactive screens. If you let people use all of the active links on a social media webpage on your touchscreen, your viewers can surf through hashtags and links and get lost far away from your own page. If you use a custom module, you can limit which areas of the screen are interactive.

No matter how you choose to display social networks, remember these important tips:

- Don't use a personal login. You'll want to create a specific login for a profile with no friends or contacts associated. This will keep you from getting notifications on the page.

- You'll want to use the auto-login feature ("keep me logged in"), so the player can always access the live page.

- On a modern, socially inclusive campus, it's important to guard against offensive content getting onto the screens. As in all organizational communications, you need to have published policies in place so people know what is and isn't acceptable to post.

Gamification

One of the newest and hottest buzzwords today is "gamification". Gamification is using things we normally associate with games – like a set of rules, competition and rewards – to get people interested. When people play games, they have fun. So, when people interact with your message or brand to reap the benefits (after all, you can't win if you don't play), it feels like their own idea and something they want to do.

Now, think of gamification for your digital signage. You've already created beautiful, well-crafted messages to inform and engage your audience, but how do you know if it's working? Because people must interact with your messages to "play", there's already built-in ROI. The more people participate, the more effective your message is. And Zers really respond to gamified solutions.

There are four basic steps to gamifying your digital signage messages:

1. Create your game – make sure it aligns with a goal

2. Advertise it on your digital signs, along with instructions and rules

3. Show progress on screens using easy-to-read graphics and data visualizations

4. Recognize winners, along with what they've won, encouraging others to participate in future games

The incentives need to be tangible and attractive. Things like prize drawings, free tickets to events and discounts at local or on-site venues are all things students might like. Some schools create a progressive system, with winners receiving points they can accumulate over time that can eventually be traded in at a virtual "shop" for real-world prizes and rewards.

Tips for Creating Gamified Solutions

- Before creating a gamified solution, think about the goal. Make sure the goal is something specific and tangible. "Be green" is too vague – make it something like "recycle 75% of all paper in a single week".

- Give points for each task that needs to be finished. This allows progress to be measured and gives you immediate ROI. It also gives you data to display as incentive along the way.

- Have clearly defined rewards, so people know what they can get if they win. Choose things that students can use in the real world.

- Don't delay rewards – hand out the prize as soon as possible once a game ends. If you dally, people won't feel the satisfaction and may not participate in future contests.

- If there are repetitive tasks involved, create a level system that gives the illusion of progress. Unlock rewards and bonuses for students who reach certain levels.

- Make sure that your gamified tasks aren't too easy, but also not too hard. Always think of your audience, and experiment, evaluate and adjust.

- Make it easy for people to participate – either by pressing buttons right there on an interactive screen, using their mobile device to go to a webpage, or send a text, or snap a photo.

Gamification Ideas

- Create a prize drawing for signing up to and downloading the school app. Each person who does this is entered in a raffle, with an enticing prize (such as a discount card for the café or the bookstore). This could be one time, or weekly until your target numbers are hit.

- Snapshot capture – take a picture with your phone of the school mascot and show it at the bookstore for a 5% discount. Limited time offer. It could be the mascot, or any other iconic image. The image could be hidden in different messages, or moving around the screen in a video.

- Have a school-wide scavenger hunt, with locations and clues in your digital signage messages. This is a great way for new students to get oriented on campus.

- Get your students actively using your social media sites by offering prizes or points to those who post and share relevant and interesting items on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networks your organization is using.

- Encourage conservation of resources by displaying current usage stats vs. goals for energy use and recycling.

- Increase participation in community activities and volunteerism like blood or food drives by showing current progress towards goals in easy-to-read graphs.

- Devices like FitBits already use gamification to encourage specific behavior. Have FitBit challenges for individuals and teams in the student body, with an appropriately healthy reward.

- Touchscreens or webpages can feature online nutrition quizzes, with the prize being a discounted or free healthy meal at the cafeteria – good for students, staff and visitors alike.

- Start training the students to be digital citizens by giving them hands-on experience creating and designing digital signage messages. Gamify it by having students vote for the best design.

- Show the schools ranking, as well as awards and accomplishment by students and student groups. Sometimes, the reward is simply knowing that you and your peers are doing well. Works great for athletics teams as well.

- Make sure students and visitors knows who's who by gamifying staff and student leader profiles.

GAMIFICATION TIPS

- Focus on the goal

- Publish clear rules and instructions

- Make it simple for people to participate

- Offer great prizes

- Generate buzz

- Show progress on your digital signs

- Reward levels of achievement

- Don't make it too easy OR too difficult

- Don't delay rewards

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a term that is everywhere these days in education. This is a way to promote educational achievement in students by using a set of strategies and materials that promote the contributions of different cultures to society, while encouraging inclusion, democracy, inquiry and critical thinking, skill acquisition and self-reflection.

Exposure to, and a deepening understanding of, another culture invariably leads to less prejudice towards that culture. The more students know about each other's backgrounds, the more open they are to different ways of looking at and doing things. The notion of "us and them" becomes one of "us and we". It is not enough to simply recognize the specifics unique to different groups – students must be encouraged to respect those differences and contributions as well.

If you think about what the ultimate aims of shifting to a more inclusive focus are, you can then see ways to leverage your digital signage to supports your school's multicultural program. As always when considering digital signage, you should think about what you want your audience to do, and then come up with ways to get them to take action.
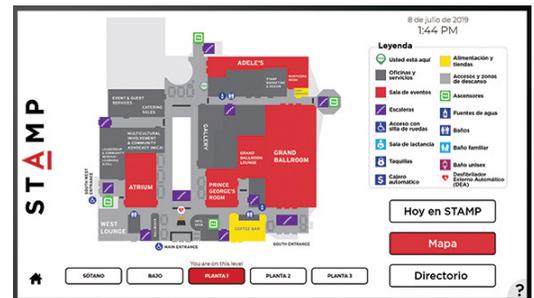
- Having digital signage messages in different languages also helps create a sense of welcome and inclusiveness that will be appreciated by everyone.

- Draw attention to specific calendar days that are significant for groups on your campus. If you have a sizable population of people from a South Korean background, you might put up messages celebrating National Foundation Day on October 3. Or mark and educate the students about the Buddha's Birthday, which is celebrated by many countries in Asia.

- Tailor the images you use when promoting sport events, theatrical productions and the like on digital signs. Show a mix of ethnicities – not just any for diversity's sake, but the actual ethnicities of people enrolled at your school. Or use real students in your pictures and videos. You can even get more students involved by getting photography students to take the pictures, or the AV Club to script and shoot the videos, all of which then go up on your digital displays and website.

- For the arts, encouraging student to use their own cultural backgrounds, or the backgrounds of other students, can also foster a sense of empowerment. Instead of another production of Arsenic and Old Lace or a performance of a Sousa piece, why not consider Fences or A Raisin in the Sun, or some work by Levi Celerio or Alberto Ginastera? Get the students involved – let them have a say on what gets performed next. Have an online voting webpage tied into your digital signage system, so they can see the voting as it occurs in real time, encouraging everyone to participate.

- Promote events that require different groups to work together towards a certain goal, with a reward for everyone if the goal is achieved (a competition not with each other, but with the rules of the activity).

- Show pictures and short bios of women who have contributed to Chemistry, or Athletics, in those departments and classrooms to reinforce gender equality.

- Display quiz questions about other cultures, commonly held misconceptions, urban legends, rumors and hoaxes.

- If you have wayfinding and directories on interactive touchscreens and kiosks, make sure the main language groups your students use (besides English) are included. Not just for them, but for their parents, potential donors and other visitors to your campus.

Each university is different, and each changes from year to year. To create a truly multicultural learning environment, you must always be researching, learning, adapting and adjusting. You already have your digital signage system that students and staff use for information on a daily basis, so think about ways you can add in elements that celebrate and support your diverse and dynamic student body.

Conclusion

Digital signage is an unprecedented way to reach the maximum numbers of students, engage them while informing them, and create an atmosphere of cooperation and fun.

Visitors and staff can also benefit from strategic use of your displays. And with technology constantly improving and changing, anything with a screen can become part of your digital signage deployment.

A modern campus needs to integrate technology to support and reinforce the organization's goals and prepare tech-savvy students for life in an increasingly information-rich digital world. With a bit of planning, even the most modest college can use digital signage to give these leaders of tomorrow a better chance in their post-graduation lives. That's a good investment.

Want to learn more? Contact us at **salesteam@visix.com**.