

Pei Wei flavors its restaurants with NEC digital menu boards

Quick Facts

Facility: Pei Wei Asian Diner

Location: Headquartered in Scottsdale, AZ

Challenge: Replace static signage with LCD displays for menu boards and promotional content

Solution: 46" NEC MultiSync® LCD4620-2-IT

Date: October 2009

When Pei Wei Asian Diner began its mission to update static menu boards with digital signage, it soon realized the variety of roles that would need to be filled. In order to create consistent, sleek messaging and a complete menu board system for more than 160 locations, it took a number of people in an array of areas to culminate a successful deployment.

Pei Wei Asian Diner is a more casual take on parent company P.F. Chang's China Bistro, with a menu that includes wok-seared, contemporary dishes from five Asian countries and a strong dedication to quality and attention to detail. Established in 2001, this rapidly expanding franchise has more than 150 locations in more than 15 states. In 2007, Pei Wei was named Sandelman & Associate's Highest Rated Fast Casual Chain, as well as Nation's Restaurant News Hot Concept in 2003.

The Challenge

Previous to its digital signage, Pei Wei utilized

printed menu panels that worked as one big static sheet to display menu items. Not only did it drain finances— adding new dishes resulted in expensive printing fees—the static signage sometimes took up to a month and a half before the restaurant would see a change.

"There were two major drivers for us to switch to digital technology," said Terry Haley, brand director for Pei Wei. "The first was to lower barriers to increasing menu innovation and pricing flexibility, including the expense and time required to print new menus. The second was to open up a channel to communicate with our guests in an environment where they are most open to Pei Wei messaging...our restaurants."

Additionally, Pei Wei wanted the ability to build awareness of general brand facts, announce national menu/concept initiatives relative to consumers and merchandise local activities. The ability to do these things in a timely matter was even more crucial for Pei Wei.



Pei Wei's implementation of digital signage using NEC's 46" MultiSync LCD4620-2-IT has significantly impacted the restaurant chain's need for quicker displaying of updates to its menu offerings, while eliminating the expense and paper waste of printing panels.

The Solution

Pei Wei wanted to work with a display company that offered three key components: durable products, high-definition screens and a network of partners to help build an integrated solution comprised of both hardware and software. Knowing that NEC is a leader in commercial-grade, large-format displays and has a variety of digital signage partners made the decision easy for Pei Wei.

"NEC built our confidence with this new endeavor because this is their specialty, and therefore we fully trusted them to make a solution that would truly work for Pei Wei," said Haley. "They really helped us get the project moving in the direction we needed it to go."

After two months of running demo tests in early 2009 with three NEC displays and a three-month pilot test in Arizona, Pei Wei went national with their digital signage in June and finished their deployment in October. Altogether, Pei Wei purchased 486 displays, three units at each of its 162 nationwide locations. The displays are installed in portrait mode near the entrance of the dine-in area of each restaurant.

Several departments were involved in the deployment of Pei Wei's new digital signage. Maria Johnson, director of facilities management for Pei Wei, handled the scheduling and coordination, shipping logistics and restaurant design, an incredibly crucial part to the installation puzzle. Not only did Pei Wei want consistency for the brand, they also had to make sure that each location had a smooth transition from static signage to digital menu boards.

"Designing a universal plan that suited every location became a huge task," said Johnson. "We discussed the challenges and came up with a concept for the demo. Using suggestions from that point on, we were able to create a long-term solution that allowed us to retrofit the existing cabinetry of all our locations. We also incorporated screen protection to secure the displays in the event



NEC's LCD displays, which retain their brightness and legibility despite the restaurant's heavy ambient lighting, use RiseVision software and allow Pei Wei associates to manage content and scheduling remotely.

customers mistake the menu boards for interactive signage."

Carrie Siegfried, user experience designer for Pei Wei, and Marjorie Mangone, the company's graphic designer, provided the creative services required to run the new digital signage content, which uses Flash files with RiseVision software, saving time and helping to lower costs. Siegfried built content for the trial digital menu boards during their initial testing in January and has continually made changes since

then. Mangone laid out the initial menu items for each display using merchandising zones, which are now created in Adobe After Effects.

"Initially, we worked solely with Flash animation, which was somewhat limiting, but since our demo testing we've had huge improvements in the content we are able to run," said Siegfried. "An advantage of NEC's displays that is incredibly beneficial for our purposes is their ability to let us manage everything remotely, which comes into play for me in scheduling content. I'm able to set up templates in a playlist and work on them while the displays are running."

"The digital menu boards allow us to customize to exactly what we need, whether it's a small initiative or a nationwide promotion, and we're able to do so without printing costs each time we make a change," said Haley. "NEC's displays provide us with a lot of flexibility, which we need for our operation. Working with them has simplified the process for us and enabled us to truly work to our full potential."