

Digital Signage On Track At TransLink

Lamar turned to Omnivex software to power its extensive communication and advertising network on British Columbia's TransLink public transportation system.

Founded in 1902, Lamar has over 70 transit franchises reaching audiences across the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico through conventional and digital billboards, bus shelters, benches and buses. The company operates over 150 outdoor advertising companies in more than 40 US states and Puerto Rico and is heralded as a leader in the highway logo sign business, with operations in 19 states and Canada.

In Vancouver, the company established Lamar Transit Advertising Canada to manage digital signage networks throughout the metro area. Vancouver British Columbia is one of the fastest growing regions in North America, featuring the extensive TransLink public transit system, officially recognised as the South Coast British Columbia Transportation Authority. This system includes ferries, buses, trains and subways, and is used by over 562,000 average combined weekly commuters.

Recently, Lamar Transit Advertising Canada signed a contract with TransLink that gives the company the rights to handle all transit advertising for TransLink buses, trains, Seabuses and SkyTrain stations until July 2015, with an option for an additional five year extension.

Project Scope

SkyTrain is already the longest automated rapid transit system in the world. In addition to the large number of residents in the metro Vancouver area who use the TransLink system on a daily basis, Vancouver hosted the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, adding a huge influx of passengers who used the system.

The TransLink public transit system was the main form of transportation for most visitors as it links the international airport to the city centre, local attractions, Olympic Village and sporting venues. The Games have been described as the ultimate test of a region's transportation planning and operations. More than 250,000 people, including athletes, officials, workers and spectators, were expected to attend the Olympics each day. Most of these people would ride the CanadaLine branch of the SkyTrain, which links downtown Vancouver with Richmond and Vancouver International Airport.

To meet the challenge, TransLink worked with all involved partner organisations to ensure an extraordinary transportation experience for residents and visitors during the Games. TransLink added the CanadaLine, 48 new SkyTrain cars, a third SeaBus, additional buses and many other improvements in anticipation of the increased traffic on its public transportation system. Part of the improvement plan included the addition of a digital signage system to help to efficiently move a large number of people from one point to another. It also set out to entertain passengers to reduce perceived wait times and also inform them by delivering news, weather, sports, and other helpful content to passengers. Importantly it also set out to provide access to real time transit rider information such as schedules or next arriving train, bus or ferry information.

The system also displays service announcements, security hazards and more information that on events could interrupt or delay travel. It immediately delivers messages to all commuters in the event of a security threat or emergency situation and fundamentally generates revenue through advertising to help offset the cost of the signage network.

The digital signage provides commuters with information and entertaining content to help give them the best possible experience while using the public transit systems. The network includes over 170, 46in LCDs in over 40 different stations. Screens are mounted in enclosures located in and outdoors, on platforms and in terminals.

Omnivex partner Conti, a full service AV system integrator, has been involved with the implementation of the network since it first began in 2007. Conti installed the digital signage hardware in the 16 new CanadaLine stations, as well as the retrofit to install digital signage in the 34 older stations on the Expo and Millennium SkyTrain lines. At completion, the digital signage system included 160 46in LCD screens.

"We were contacted by Lamar early on to provide a turnkey digital signage solution including hardware, software, system design, installation and services," comments Colby Harder, Conti's President. "We felt that Omnivex software was the only platform capable of meeting Lamar's needs associated with managing such a large advertising network."

Omnivex Solution

Lamar selected Omnivex software for its ability to easily manage a very large network of screens in remote locations. Network operators have the ability to easily and remotely manage large screen networks, with one unified content management system. Screens are divided into three segments in order to share all relevant information at the same time. Every screen in every station receives the same content from the head-end in Burnaby, BC.

"The transit authority uses it to make wide area broadcasts of information," Harder clarifies, adding that it's not broadcasting station specific information. "A separate LED lets commuters know expected arrival times for specific trains at that station. In addition to sharing news, sports, weather, transit information and advertising, the digital signage network also fulfills a very important function, one that those who built and run the system hope not to see in use very often. The network provides Amber Alerts and Red Alerts for abduction and security related situations, as needed. That was a big motivator for the transit authority to install the systems, and it was also a big motivator in terms of getting federal funding for the project."

Additionally, Omnivex software provides Lamar with the tools to generate proof of play logs for advertisers. A public FTP server is used so that advertising companies and other third parties can upload files to be displayed. These files are then vetted and moved to the Display Director servers and integrated into a layout. Lamar required a software platform that could prove when,



where and how often ads are shown on their network. An important part of managing an advertising network is the ability to show advertisers when and where their ads play. Omnivex software provides Lamar with this functionality through proof of play logs for its advertisers.

The system is built on an advertising model but using Omnivex, it is possible to include space on the screens allocated to other pertinent information related to travel. Lamar also has the ability to permission certain user groups to have access to post messages and alerts on certain parts of certain screens. The system also has real time emergency messaging capabilities to instantly notify passengers should a problem arise.

While Lamar manages the regularly scheduled content on the screens, various operational departments within the transit authority have the ability to post alerts and service announcements to desired screens. Using Omnivex software, different levels of notifications can be sent to any of the screens remotely by these groups, such as the police and fire departments, without Lamar's involvement.

Depending on the type of alert - blue, amber or red - either a part of the screen or the entire screen will display the emergency/security information. Specific individuals have the ability to instantly update select screens on the digital signage network with emergency messages and service alerts on the different transit lines. This meant that either those select individuals had to be able to access the designer console from anywhere to update the content, or some other content triggering mechanism was needed to update the content from anywhere and at any-

time. Lamar did not want various groups having access to potentially cause problems with their regularly scheduled content, so they looked to Omnivex for an alternative solution.

Using Omnivex WebPad, Lamar is able to provide specific user groups with restricted access to update content messages within the system. These messages can be deployed system-wide or to specific screens at specific stations, depending on the user's status within the system. A message can also pass through an approval process, being rejected or accepted by an intermediate staff member, who will ultimately decide what appears on the screen.

Omnivex software allows Lamar to utilize the built-in diagnostics of the hardware devices on the network to provide status feedback. Omnivex Control manages all available device functions for remote screens and computers from a central location with real time status information. Daily routines can be automated and the system can be configured to automatically react to any information received from any device. By using Omnivex Control software, the network operator is able to monitor the health of their entire digital signage system and be alerted should a failure occur with any of the related hardware. For example, if a screen were turned off by someone, the software would automatically turn the screen back on. But if it was unable to do so, it would send an alert to the network operator to make them aware of the problem.

Phase 1 of Lamar's Commuter Digital Network digital signage system has been in place since 2007. The final phase of the project was completed in August 2009, three months ahead of schedule, leaving more than enough time for test runs and troubleshooting before the Olympics began. The complete system will be in place with Lamar managing it for a minimum of 11 years.

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