



SUCCESS STORY

Axis Camera Makes the Grade at University of Minnesota

Ubiquitous Computing Environment Ideal for Network Camera

Mission

- With four geographically separate campuses, the University of Minnesota sought to establish a sense of community among its students, teaching staff and administration.

Solution

- Several years ago, Axis network cameras were set up at central locations on each of the University's four campuses: Minneapolis/St. Paul, Duluth, Morris and Crookston. At the University of Minnesota's McNamara Alumni Center on the Minneapolis campus, a set of four screens inlaid into the floor around the official seal of the University of Minnesota show live images from each location.

Result

- The use of the Axis network cameras achieved its desired result—i.e., to increase the awareness of and identification with the University system as a whole. The display consistently attracted a large audience of interested students, personnel and guests. As staff at the University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) became involved in the project, they began to think of additional applications for the network cameras.



The University of Minnesota and its coordinate campuses have been consistently ranked among the top 20 public universities in the US, based on sources such as the National Research Council, U.S. News & World Report and other prestigious ranking forums. In addition to excellent programs of study, faculty and research facilities, the University of Minnesota has also been widely recognized for its technological innovations.

So when faced with the question of how to engender a sense of community across all campuses of this sprawling university system, it's not surprising that the solution chosen was a technological one.

The strategy was to set up Axis network cameras aimed at central locations on each of the campuses. A special display showing the four different live campus views was then installed at the Gateway Center at the Minneapolis campus, enabling students to catch a glimpse of the day-to-day life of their fellow students. In general, passers-by enjoy watching the images and a good crowd can typically be found around the screens that are set into the floor around the University's official seal.

As Andrew Svec, the Director of Communications at the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) campus, became involved in this project, he found himself intrigued with the camera's potential. He decided to use it to tackle an issue on the Crookston campus that was becoming a problem.

UMC's Ubiquitous Computing Environment

In 1993, UMC distinguished itself by becoming one of the first universities to provide each student and faculty member with a notebook computer. Since then, classrooms, labs, libraries and residence halls have all been wired to the campus local area network (LAN), creating what the University refers to as an "ubiquitous computing environment." In fact, the Crookston campus was chosen Yahoo! Internet Life Online's "Most Wired College" award winner in 2000. As a result, UMC students and faculty tend to have their university-supplied computers with them at all times.

Crowd Control for the Help Desk

A consequence of this is that the University's Computer Help Desk—a support center for computer related issues—was pretty much swamped on a constant basis. To more effectively satisfy the crowds of students and staff wanting their computers repaired or questions answered, Svec installed an Axis network camera at the Help Desk. Using the campus intranet, students and staff can now bring up the view of the Help Desk from their classrooms, dorm rooms, offices or wherever they happen to be, and determine how long the line is before deciding whether or not to make the trip over.

This application has proved so successful that additional cameras have been installed at the library checkout counter and the Instructional Technology Center (ITC) – a faculty multi-media area – for the same purpose. Another Axis network camera has recently been installed to observe the progress on a construction and renovation of a building that will serve, in part, as the university's technology center.

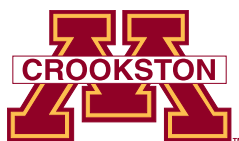
According to Svec, the consistently high volume of hits each of the cameras receives is a good indication that the application is working. Staff in the campus Computing Services offices say they find the cameras particularly useful when they are trying to contact other staff at the Help Desk or the ITC.

Students Put Their Own Spin on Applications for Camera

Students are quick to find personal uses for these cameras too. One student needed a quick digital photo of himself to send to a friend, so he went to the Help Desk and waved at the camera and then captured the image with his own notebook computer. In another instance, a staff member wanted to get new glasses but couldn't decide which frames to get. One of her close friends works on the University's Minneapolis campus, so the staff member gave her friend the URL of the camera and tried on two different frames in front of the camera. Her friend sent an e-mail message saying which frames she preferred.

Concludes Svec, "It's been interesting to see the range of responses to these cameras. When UMC students and staff first discover them on our website, they start thinking how they could use them within their own department. Since we have computer access basically everywhere on campus, the Axis network camera solutions really make sense for us. I'm sure we'll see more popping up over the next year. Our Natural Resources Department has even discussed the possibility of a 'UMC fish tank cam' that would focus on the different fish species in their aquarium."

At a university such as UMC, which fosters technological innovation and "out-of-the-box" thinking, the Axis network camera clearly makes the grade.



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