

Digital menu boards help New Orleans landmark grab attention

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Zoofari Café, part of the New Orleans Audubon Zoo, caught attention when it installed four 46-inch LCD screens. The café now uses the screens to display content and advertising that promote zoo's food offerings as well as highlight wildlife education.

After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, La., in August 2005, New Orleans' Audubon Zoo, like so many of the city's landmarks, had to begin rebuilding.

The zoo, founded at the turn of the 20th century, is part of the Audubon Nature Institute — a family of museums and parks dedicated to nature. Part of the institute's mission is to provide a guest experience of outstanding quality, to exhibit the diversity of wildlife, and to preserve native Louisiana habitats.

It was with that mission in mind that the zoo in February 2005 began renovating its main food-service building. Hoping to improve its food services, the building would change from a fast-food franchise to a "grab-and-go" café known as the Zoofari Café.

Terry Kenney, director of graphics for the zoo, said the zoo wanted a menu system that would be attractive, easy to maintain, and would fall in line with the updated structural design of the café.

Incorporating information that would get visitors excited about wildlife would help accomplish the zoo's educational aims, as well as another mission: weaving quality entertainment throughout the guest experience



IDS Menus helped New Orleans Audubon Zoo improve its café experience with dynamic digital menu boards.

To that end, the zoo signed on with Holbrook, N.Y.-based IDS Menus Inc., a certified partner of digital signage company Scala Inc., for the digital content creation and the installation of four 46-inch LCD screens.

The screens were installed on wall mounts in the zoo's eatery. Two are dedicated to lists of menu selections in the Zoofari Café. The other two screens display rotating content that includes animated promotions of snack items available in the café, alternating with animal videos and interesting facts about the zoo's wildlife.

Kenney says feedback from consumers and the staff has been overwhelmingly positive — so overwhelming that the institute has signed with IDS for a second project at its newest museum, the Audubon Insectarium, opening in June.

IDS has been contracted to install video monitors in the admissions lobby that will display admission pricing and fun insect facts for people in the queue.

"This was our first venture into electronic menus, and we were very pleased," Kenney said. "We were so happy that we decided to do a second project."

Kenney says visitors commented about the signage as soon as it was installed in the Zoofari Café.

"The cafe is new, but it's located in an old building," she said. "The issue always was figuring out a way to serve people quickly, because they don't want to miss any zoo-visiting time. With the new concept, our wait-times have improved; and if a line does form, the videos and factoids help to make the wait enjoyable."

Because the digital menu boards are readily visible and easy to read, customers are able to make order selections more quickly. And the menus have reduced the amount of time staff has to spend changing menu prices, schedules, etc., because it's all digital.

"But it's not just a menu of food and prices," Kenney said. "There is an entertainment value there, with the animal factoids that pop up, like 'Did you know ...?' It adds to the whole experience, even in the café."

For IDS, the project was an interesting one, says Larry Drago, marketing specialist for IDS Menus.

The zoo project was a different kind of project for the company, because it involved non-foodservice graphical elements combined with foodservice-focused content.

“Audubon presented us a challenge of creating digital content for not only their menu-board items, but also digital content about various animal facts they wanted to highlight,” Drago said. “Our creative designers took on the project and were able to showcase the animal facts along with video. Audubon was extremely pleased with the overall look and feel when completed.”

IDS had to approach the venture with a different frame of mind, creating a new kind of design challenge.

“IDS is a turnkey provider of digital -menu Boards,” Drago said. “We provide the Scala software, the digital creative content, LCD screens — the whole package. This makes it easier for our customers to deal with one vendor instead of many. And we pride ourselves on customer service, something the institute really appreciated. We worked with them, and it was a learning and fun experience for both parties. Now it looks great, and it’s added a lot to the overall experience within the café”

About the Sponsor: IDS Menus is a division of International Display Systems Inc., a full-service manufacturer of high-quality digital menu displays for the foodservice and related industries. The company is based in Holbrook, N.Y., and is a certified partner of Scala Inc., creator of the largest-deployed digital signage software in the world.