University of Hull improve campus-wide communication with the Stone NUC

Background

The University of Hull is an institution with a long heritage of academic excellence and is rich in tradition. Established in 1927 as England’s fourteenth university, it received a Royal Charter in 1954.

The University of Hull features some of the most inspirational figures of modern times, and has an illustrious history which includes pioneering developments in science and engineering, health, business, humanities and social sciences as well as the performing arts.

The University today is a vibrant and future-oriented institution, recognised for excellence in learning and teaching as well as a commitment to research, enterprise and engagement. The University is known for its friendliness and high student satisfaction as well as the employability of its graduates.

Situation

As part of the University’s commitment to providing the best facilities and resources, Hull strive to deliver university-specific information and updates to students and staff.

In order to communicate university-wide messages, Hull were displaying information on screens using PowerPoint presentations put together on outdated hardware, which was proving admin intensive to the University.

Because of this, the ICT department felt the need to update the approach they were taking with the display of information and how this was managed across campus. A project to source a digital signage solution was commissioned and Hull set out to find a vendor who could best meet their needs.

Solution

In order to secure best value, the University of Hull procure their IT hardware through the National Desktop and Notebook Agreement (NDNA) framework. It offers a compliant, competitive procurement route and means Hull can find a vendor who can supply them with the hardware they need in a cost-effective and efficient way.

The relationship between the University and Stone spans over 12 years and is a partnership that has continued to evolve since Stone’s emergence on the NDNA framework nearly 10 years ago. So much so, that Stone are now the main supplier to Hull for the provision of IT hardware.
this, Kev Sach, Field Services Manager at the University of Hull, explains: “Our partnership with Stone dates back to well before they were on the NDNA framework, but since they were appointed as a supplier on the contract, our relationship has just evolved. To the point now where, through the latest tender process, we took the decision to make them our sole supplier for our desktop PCs. This is a first in the history of our use of NDNA and it’s a decision we’re exceptionally happy that we made. We needed a supplier who could meet our specific needs with a quick turnaround and Stone fit that bill perfectly.”

With a project in place and a supplier appointed, Stone consulted with the University of Hull to help select the most suitable device to match their requirements. Speaking about this further, Sach comments: “We like to have the flexibility of having standard PCs that can be custom built to our exact requirements and this is another reason why Stone has been our preferred supplier for so long. We generally have a standard specification that we use for our desktops and then have the occasional ad hoc requirements too. Stone’s ability to customise PCs to what we need works really well for us, and makes it a lot easier to manage across the estate by standardising what we want.

“When I first joined the University, my role was based around AV. The first time I saw the digital signage platform that we had in place, I knew straight away this needed updating to something much more manageable. We were using PowerPoint to communicate university-wide information with absolutely no central management and constantly needed to keep editing presentations every time we had to update content. My initial plan was to use old hardware. We work on a five year cyclic refresh for our hardware, and so I was tempted to utilise our older machines that were coming to the end of their economic life for us. That was until I saw the Stone NUC.”

The NUC has proven to be a common choice of hardware for many digital signage projects. The dual video port it encases means it can support up to three displays simultaneously, and the superior quality HD graphics and processing features make it more reliable for the delivery of clear and concise information to the screens – making content far more visible. With 75% less energy than standard PCs, the NUC is also an exceptionally energy efficient device making it a practical solution for managing sustainability – particularly where displays are in constant use all day every day.

Commenting on the decision to select the Stone NUC, Sach explains: “I first saw the Stone NUC at BETT and immediately knew that this could be the perfect solution for us to overcome our issues with the digital signage and help to provide more modern facilities for our students. After the show, I spoke to Stone who sent me an evaluation unit. Straight away it fit into place perfectly with our digital signage.”

With the budget in place, the University saw this as an opportunity to extend the digital signage service across the campus and went ahead with the procurement of 23 NUCs. “The NUC has been the perfect solution for us,” Sach comments, “some of the digital signage installations around the
campus aren’t very aesthetically pleasing to the eye, installing the Stone NUC has really helped to alleviate this issue and tidy up these areas.

“The size and neatness of the device means that we can VESA mount them securely behind the screens to provide a clean set up. Had we not opted for the NUC, we would have had to place PCs remotely and spend a lot more money on technology to be able to send video signals via Cat5 cables to the signage screens or use ultra small form factor PCs in the roof. This really wasn’t an option I wanted to take and the NUC has given us an ideal solution. I just can’t fault them – they are exactly what we needed for the job.

“As well as the aesthetics though, there are plenty of other great benefits to using the Stone NUC to project our digital signage content onto the screens around campus. We can centrally manage the digital signage from site and owing to the Acquire Digital cloud management solution, we can log in remotely and control the content. It’s really helped to alleviate the admin burden we were experiencing with our previous platform. The price point and warranty is also another bonus for us and further helped us to make our decision to choose the NUC. With a 3 year warranty as standard – it was kind of a no brainer!”

The Stone NUC has provided a pivotal change for the delivery of information around the University, and whilst it may not be introduced as a standard student desktop machine right now, it is not something that Hull are ruling out for the future. Sach explains: “Everyone is very impressed with the Stone NUC – from its tiny small form factor size right through to its powerful functionality and performance. While the NUC isn’t a standard student PC for us at the minute, it’s most definitely something we’re considering for the future. There’s already been a trial of nine or ten units in the Language Learning Centre as a standard student desktop machine and the Business School has also brought around 20 for their campus too. We definitely made the right choice with the device and supplier.”

Testimonial

Kev Sach, Field Services Manager, University of Hull:

“There are a number of reasons why we always go back to Stone. The support and account management is fantastic and largely helped us make the decision about going sole supply for the desktops with them.

“The service we receive is also excellent; I can ring up at any time and get a part delivered the next day. We’re a self-maintenance site so don’t really see a lot of engineers, but I know that if I need them they will be out the very next day to help fix a problem. This level of service works really well with what we want and to be honest we very rarely have any problems with our equipment. We keep buffer stock on-site should we ever experience any issues, which means we can try and fix it straight away. We can’t afford to experience any downtime so this is ideal for us.
“I cannot fault our experience with Stone. It’s a long-standing relationship and one we hope to continue well into the future.”