

New England Institute of Technology

HP reliability, manageability, performance win over demanding tech school



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HP customer case study

Tech-oriented school leverages HP digital signage solution to deliver campus communications

Industry

Higher education

“We needed to be able to trust in a digital signage solution that we have on throughout the day, that is easy to run, and looks good in a variety of environments.”

—Tom Thibodeau, assistant provost,
New England Institute of Technology, Warwick, RI

Objective

Provide reliable, high-performance PCs, workstations and digital signage to support undergraduate technology education

Approach

New England Institute of Technology standardized on HP PCs, upgraded its student labs to HP Workstations, and deployed an HP digital signage solution

IT improvements

- Standardization simplifies PC and workstation support, enabling a staff of eight to support 1200 computers on campus
- Digital signage management software enables staff to schedule and manage all signs from a single management console

Business benefits

- Fewer crashes and faster performance eliminate end-of-term bottlenecks for students attempting to render and compile large gaming and simulation projects
- Reliability of HP Workstations enables NEIT to open computer labs for a 24-hour duty cycle
- Imaging and installation services from HP Partner Computopia enables rapid technology deployment during short inter-term academic breaks



At the New England Institute of Technology (NEIT), technology performance matters. Students and faculty need powerful, reliable technology to do their work, particularly in fields that demand high-performance tools, such as architecture and gaming. Technology is also key to the image NEIT projects to visitors and prospective students.

To meet all its needs, NEIT has standardized on HP products ranging from PCs and workstations to digital signage systems.

“We’ve been able to meet all our needs with the HP product line and it has worked out very well,” says Tom Thibodeau, assistant provost at NEIT. “The diversity of HP’s product line means it has a solution to every need. HP products also deliver the reliability and manageability we require. We have eight people managing 1,200 computers on campus; it’s an amazing ratio, but with HP products, we make it happen.”

NEIT is a 70-year-old technical college that is highly career-oriented. Students who follow the recommended sequence can earn an associate degree in as little as 18 months, or a Bachelor of Arts degree in as little as 36 months. The school offers some 40 different degree programs including building, surgical technology, automotive technology, nursing, architecture, and more.

Digital signage sets tone for new campus

When NEIT needed a digital signage solution for a brand new main campus building, the school turned to HP. Thibodeau says the building's architects envisioned a highly technical environment, with displays and digital signs throughout the building serving up a variety of information.

Thibodeau surveyed the marketplace, looking for a solution that would be easy to manage, even with as many as 50 monitors. "We needed a solution that would let us create a sign quickly—perhaps just to welcome a VIP guest or group of prospective students—and then serve other information on that display a half hour later," he says.

He chose a solution integrated and deployed by HP Partner Computopia, using HP LD4210 42-inch Digital Signage Displays, CoolSign digital signage software, and the HP SignagePlayer mp8000.

Working through Computopia on a solution using exclusively HP hardware, Thibodeau was confident the digital signage solution would offer seamless integration. The three-year standard, business class replacement warranty for HP displays and media players gave him extra assurance of the solution's long-term viability.

The digital signage solution, which streams live high-definition television signals over IP, provides emergency announcements, temporary signs including custom greetings, building maps and directions, and event calendars.

"It turned out to be very easy to deploy and remains easy to manage," Thibodeau says. "It must be easy. At one point I had to step in three months after I had last used the system, and I posted several signs with no trouble."

The system enables NEIT's IT staff to schedule and manage all the signs from a single management console. As the digital signage solution expands to other NEIT

campuses, staff will even be able to manage signage at those other locations using the same console.

The first phase of the digital signage includes 22 monitors on the first floor, receiving high-definition signage 24 hours a day. A second phase will be added soon. All the monitors are wall-mounted, and each is paired with its own HP SignagePlayer mp8000 to facilitate the streaming video.

Thibodeau is happy that, even with HDTV video over IP, the system does not tax the network heavily. He is even happier with the system's simplicity and reliability.

"We needed to be able to trust in a digital signage solution that we have on throughout the day, that is easy to run, and looks good in a variety of environments," he says. "Our HP displays look good even near the building's entrance, in fairly bright sunlight."

Hands-on education requires powerful, reliable technology

"We're a very hands-on institution. Students may spend half of their time in a computer lab. What we offer in the labs is an essential part of what we offer as a school," says Thibodeau. "Labs are open from 7:45 a.m. to 11 p.m., and we run four quarters a year, so there's very little time for maintenance. We need computers to be very reliable and easy to manage."

"We were asking ourselves, 'How can we improve the experience in our computer labs?' Having computers we could count on hour after hour, day after day, was a huge part of that."

Tom Thibodeau, assistant provost,
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A few years ago, the campus was riddled with desktop computers from another PC maker that simply didn't deliver. "There were 600 architecture students using standard PCs and they were not happy," Thibodeau recalls. "The PCs were slow, rendering was painful, and there was a terrible bottleneck at the end of every quarter as students tried to render and plot their projects. The work just wasn't getting done."

HP recommends Windows.

NEIT programs teach a variety of media applications, from graphic design to video production and architectural animation walk-throughs to action games.

“Our students need to see the fruits of their labor quickly in order to assess the quality of their work and move on to the next thing,” Thibodeau says. “If they have to wait too long for the computer to render or have trouble playing back a completed section, then the entire process slows down and learning suffers.”

“The performance of HP Workstations enables student game designers to work quickly, without the frequent crashes they would have on PCs in the past, and to complete their projects on time.”

Tom Thibodeau, assistant provost,
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NEIT had a limited number of HP PCs on campus, and was pleased with their performance and reliability. So when Computopia, the HP partner that provides HP products and support to NEIT, spent time with Thibodeau and his team outlining the HP product universe and future product path, it planted the seeds of change.

“We looked at various alternatives. As we did, the HP product portfolio stood out for its ability to give us the full line of offerings we need to serve everyone—including premium quality workstations—without having to pay a premium price for high-end performance,” recalls Thibodeau. “That’s important when you’re buying hundreds of computers.”

The concept of a 24-hour duty cycle for the school’s labs was particularly intriguing. “Reliability was so important to us going forward,” he says. “We were asking ourselves, ‘How can we improve the experience in our computer labs?’ Having computers we could count on hour after hour, day after day, was a huge part of that.”

The school chose to standardize on HP offerings across the board. For its computer labs, it began a transformation to using HP Z-series Workstations in order to provide students greater performance and eliminate the end-of-term bottlenecks. In the library, it standardized on HP All-in-One PCs, chosen for their large displays and ease of deployment on library work tables. Faculty and administrative users receive HP EliteBook notebook PCs. And for the automotive lab, NEIT chose HP ProBook notebook PCs, which Thibodeau says offer business-rugged features.

Computopia images and installs all the HP hardware at NEIT. Thibodeau says NEIT depends on Computopia because the academic calendar allows limited time for major deployments. “When you have to install 300 computers in a short window of time, you need all the help you can get.”

He says NEIT’s move to standardize on HP PCs and Workstations has been highly successful. “Uptime on our HP systems has been terrific. Students no longer point to technology limitations as an obstacle to project completion. Everything is working as we need it to.”

Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

Undergraduate technology education

Primary hardware

- HP All-in-One Pro PCs
- HP EliteBook Notebook PCs
- HP ProBook Notebook PCs
- HP Z200 Workstations
- HP Z800 Workstations
- HP LD4210 42-inch Digital Signage Displays
- HP SignagePlayer mp8000

Primary software

- Genuine Windows® 7 Professional
- CoolSign digital signage software

HP recommends Windows.

HP Gaming Lab showcases Workstation technology

One of NEIT's most impressive facilities is the HP Gaming Lab. Teams of students in the gaming curriculum use industry standard game design and simulation program, running on HP Workstations, to develop games as their final senior projects.

"We envisioned a gaming lab that would enable students to work in teams using state-of-the-art hardware and software, just as we hope they will when they graduate," Thibodeau says. The lab features four kiosks, with four HP Workstations per kiosk, for multiple teams.

Each kiosk has three HP Z200 Workstations used by team members for design of game components, and a single HP Z800 Workstation for rendering and compiling the final game.

"The performance of HP Workstations enables student game designers to work quickly, without the frequent crashes they would have on PCs in the past, and to complete their projects on time," Thibodeau says. "HP workstation technology is a huge improvement over what we were able to offer in the past."

HP, Computopia deliver "easy"

For Thibodeau, the move to a standardized HP environment has not only solved problems for users, but for the technology staff as well.

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"I want 'easy,'" he says. "I want a company that I can rely on to give me quick response and reliable products. One that will provide a comprehensive technology solution throughout the campus to reflect well on NEIT. HP and Computopia have worked together to deliver what we need each time we've asked."



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4AA4-2936ENW, Created September 2012; Updated October 2012, Rev. 1

