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MUSEUM'S DIGITAL INVITATION DIGITAL-SIGNAGE PROJECT SETS OFF WALKER ART CENTER.



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ECLECTIC AUDIO FROM OPERA TO JAZZ GATES CONCERT HALL'S 'PERMANENTLY PORTABLE' SOUND.



Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN,
with 55'x9' digital video wall.

A photograph of the Walker Art Center at night. The building's facade is illuminated, and a large digital video wall on the right side displays the word "WALKER" in large, glowing letters. The sky is dark, and the building's lights create a strong contrast.

DIGITAL INVITATION FOR MODERN ART MUSEUM

Massive digital-signage project sets off Walker Art Center.

BY WENDY MEINCKE

The Walker Art Center wants to share its treasures in a big way. Whether you're driving by in the wee hours of the morning or the dusk of the evening rush, it's hard to miss the Walker or the 9'x11' scrolling image that beckons you to come in and see what the center has to offer.

Digital signage on this grand a scale seems fitting for this museum. The Walker is a modern art icon that's been bringing the *avant garde* to Minneapolis MN for 80 years, always reaching out in unique ways to draw people into its world. That's never been more true than in the past year, since the completion of a massive expansion that literally doubled the size

of the Walker and spread its influence far beyond its 17-acre urban campus.

Not Typical Install

For SPL Integrated Solutions, the Walker signage system was anything but a typical AV installation. The rear-projection system that supplies the scrolling message consists of five Sharp XG-V10WU-R projectors placed about six feet apart inside a long, hollow inner wall space that runs parallel to an outside wall of the building. The wall, which faces Hennepin Avenue, a heavily traveled street in Minneapolis, consists of very large etched glass windows covered with a special rear-projection film.

The original idea called for the projectors to be mounted on the back wall of this inner space, projecting their image through openings in the hallway wall and onto the glass windows opposite. Unfortunately, the wall wasn't built to hold heavy projector and mirror assemblies, so SPL asked the Walker Center's carpenters to construct platforms to hold the assemblies about 10 feet off the floor.

"We had to get ladders in there and turn them a certain way to get up to the platforms," said Ryan Ford, project manager/engineer for SPL. "Each projector and mirror assembly has its own platform and the platforms are far enough apart that you had to be like

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The Walker Art Center demonstrates usage of digital signage on a grand scale.

Inside the long hall that has openings for four of the five projectors used for the digital signage.

One of the projectors with mirror assembly inside the wall.



Spider-Man to get from one to the next." The 4700 lumen Sharp projector was specified for the project. "According to the consultant, it was the only projector that had the lenses and the brightness to make the required 20-foot throw," said Ford. When first installed, it was possible to see the projectors from outside on Hennepin Avenue, so SPL asked for construction of a housing for each projector, which leaves only the lens visible when the image is off.

To create the final image, output from each of the five projectors is blended by a software program, WATCHOUT, created by Dataton of Sweden, and distributed and programmed by Show Sage, of Fenton MI. SPL installed five computers, one for each projector, in three equipment racks in the Walker's production room, and then ran cabling to the projectors.

While the software blends the images, an AMX control system recommended by SPL operates all the hardware. "The touchpanel has a timer so all the projectors turn on at a certain time at night and then turn off at a certain time in the morning," said Ford. "There's also a manual way for them to turn the projectors on from the touchpanel if they have a special event outside that time frame." During full daylight hours, the projectors normally are off to save lamp life and allow for maintenance.

SPL engineers ran into an additional problem in that the design of the building allowed room for only four of the projectors within the inner wall space. SPL technicians ceiling mounted the fifth projector to a 1½" pipe hanging from the ceiling just outside the inner wall space, but still in line with the other projectors. "If you drew a line connecting the lenses of all five of the projectors, the fifth projector outside the wall is on that same line," said Ford. In fact, the outer hallway itself is wider at one end than the other, because the wall behind which the projectors are mounted slants away from the windows as you walk down the hall.

"Because we could ceiling-mount this projector, we were able to get it far enough back so as not to require the mirror assembly," said Ford. "It's a straight-on image." These details do not affect what passersby see from the outside: a scrolling image more than nine feet tall and 55 feet long, announcing current exhibits or programs or displaying the museum's website, www.walkerart.org.

"There really wasn't much typical about the Walker building," said Ford. "Any museum is a departure from our typical corporate conference room work, and this is a museum of modern art. We often joked that there are no straight lines in this building."

Whatever angles SPL worked with inside the museum, there's no mistaking the result for anything but what it is: a clear and enticing invitation to explore the world of modern art. ■