Case Study

South Essex College innovates with Audio Visual technologies, Furniture and Print Solutions from Sharp.

Located across three main campus sites in Basildon, Southend-on-Sea and Grays in Essex, South Essex College provide further and higher education courses to over 11,000 students annually. When it came to finding a partner for audio visual, furniture and managed print services for its new purpose-built Centre for Digital Technologies in Basildon, the college was looking for a state-of-the-art solution that would modernise the site and drive efficiencies - whilst being cost-effective.

south essex college

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The challenge
Cost, innovation, and complexity

A challenge for South Essex College (SEC) was cost. Rhys Hughes, Head of Learning Facilities at SEC says: "We're funded per learner, and that figure hasn't increased for about 7 years. We had a few expensive print devices that were draining the limited budget available to us, they were also poor when it came to speed and quality, which when you have lots of students or staff needing access to print can really cause problems."

Secondly, "It's difficult to remain ahead of emerging technologies", says Rhys. "When we were selecting devices for our Basildon Campus we wanted to showcase the very latest technology, whilst also helping teaching and learning. The classroom technology from our previous supplier hasn't lasted either, which isn't good when it comes to deciding how to spend your budget, so we wanted something that would stand the test of time. I also like standardisation. I wanted to place consistent devices across sites so students and staff would be instantly familiar with them and able to use them at any campus."

Another challenge for SEC is adding extra value for students. Ruby Chittenden, Communications Manager at South Essex College says: "We've undertaken a lot of project work to understand the types of environments that work best for learners and teachers. When it came to furniture for our Centre for Digital Technologies, we looked to add extra value for students to get them connected with employers, or with the types of spaces they'll encounter in the world of work."

Ruby concludes: "Previously, we end up sourcing from various suppliers due to the scale of our requirements, which involved multiple rigorous tender processes, hectic deadlines, lots of contacts and complex billing. It's always a challenge finding a solution that ticks the full list."
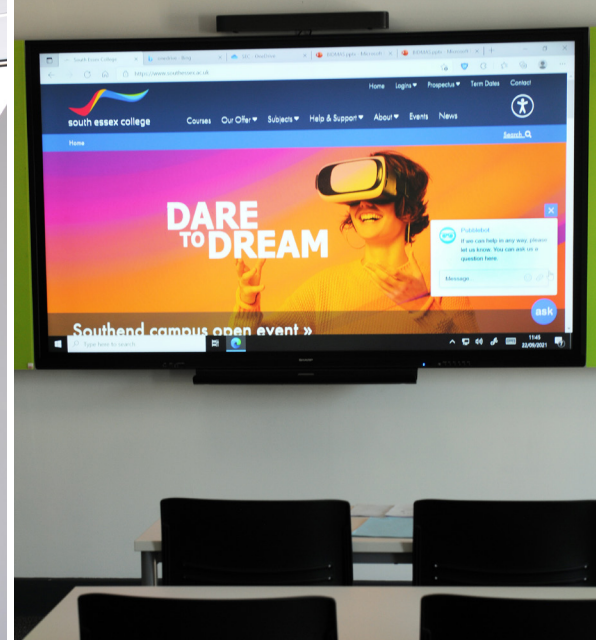
The challenge

- Investing in technology with a stretched budget.
- Standardising devices for ease of use.
- Various suppliers making things complicated.
- Adding extra value for students.

The solution

- Multifunction printers with cost-cutting software.
- Simple audio-visual technology that works the same way.
- A single supplier for a full furniture installation.
- Technology that prepares students for the real world.

The result

- Print cost savings and quality improved.
- Audio Visual technology that aids learning and comms.
- Impressive furniture designed to maximise each space.
- Pre and post-sales service that puts the customer first.

The solution
Simplified with a single provider

Firstly, to ensure simplicity and less complication, Sharp tendered for all of SEC's requirements. By choosing a single provider for furniture, print, classroom and building technology, there would be a single point of contact, as well as simplified billing and procedures.

Sharp also proposed multifunction print devices in centralised zones. These quality print devices operate at high speed and would ensure both staff and students were able to print everything they need, when they need it, and at the desired quality. Furthermore, PaperCut print management software would be installed onto the devices to allow staff to monitor and reduce waste, costs, and restrict irresponsible print behaviour. Proactive maintenance visits built into Sharp's managed print service would also ensure the machines were operational 24/7, all year round.

Next, to help the college remain ahead with technologies that would both last and be easy to use, Sharp suggested installing 22 screens at the campus. Sharp BIG PAD interactive displays would be placed in classrooms to make learning and lessons more engaging, and to innovate internal and external comms Digital Signage screens were to be installed in centralised zones, outward facing at the front of the building, in reception, meeting rooms, and areas with high footfall. Drag and drop functionality within the Digital Signage Software would also make the Signage screens easy to control and centrally managed - all via the internet.

Lastly, to compliment the new sleek design of the Centre for Digital Technologies, Sharp proposed furniture solutions for the whole site. In addition to canteen, classroom, and office furniture, Sharp created breakout areas, meeting spaces, and booths for people to gather for group or private work, and students would gain extra value with state-of-the-art facilities like a green room and game design suite.

"I put Sharp through their paces to ensure everything was right for the college, and our Account Manager did everything they possibly could to keep refining the solution until everything was spot on, I can't praise them highly enough."

Rhys Hughes, Head of Learning Facilities, South Essex College

"Sharp's furniture division took the necessary time to understand what we were looking for. This made the entire process much easier, and the installation service was smooth and efficient."

Rhys Hughes, Head of Learning Facilities, South Essex College

The result
A solution that works

Ruby says: "The printers are used for general office printing, marketing materials, contracts or work sheets, and students can print hard copies of their assignments. We use something called FollowMe Print within the PaperCut software to print to a single queue and then release it at any device with your ID badge, which everyone has at the college. The devices themselves are a lot lower cost for us than the previous brand, and better quality."

When talking about the BIG PADs, Rhys says: "You can touch the screen and use it very easily which takes away any anxieties, and that can be the difference between people engaging in a lesson and making use of a resource or not. With our previous supplier I'd walk through the building and no one would be using the audio visual equipment, whereas Sharp's devices are on all the time. They get used for traditional PowerPoints, videos, animation, game development, or as Microsoft whiteboards." Ruby adds: "The Digital Signage screens are great, the marketing team use them daily for student, staff, and event notices, and the signage software is very easy, we can update it from a laptop when we like, it's much more efficient than sticking posters up."

Rhys continues: "We're very satisfied with the furniture solutions from Sharp. I sent photographs of the pieces that we liked and their team found perfect matches that work for us. The Furniture is strong and durable and Sharp worked alongside us to really understand our vision and what we were trying to achieve. As a Centre for Digital Technologies, it was important to capture a modern and quirky look as part of the interior design, including the furniture, and that's what we got."

Rhys concludes: "From enquiring and ordering through to after sales service and care, Sharp's service has been fantastic. Everything was very simple, and we now have a solution in place that just works."

"Our Centre of Digital Technologies is state-of-the-art. The Sharp technology and furniture are second to none, everybody that visits is wowed by the building and facilities available."

Rhys Hughes, Head of Learning Facilities, South Essex College

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