

IAdea and Concierge Displays take room booking to the next level at Monash University's new Learning & Teaching Building

Opened in March 2018, Monash University's new Learning & Teaching Building is a world class education hub located in the university's Clayton campus in Melbourne. The four-level building features striking architecture, a student-focused design, and state-of-the-art audiovisual systems. Just like a restaurant needs to carefully manage its table bookings, so a university needs to keep close tabs on the use of its lecture and meeting rooms. The Learning & Teaching Building has over 130 rooms used by both staff and students. Monash University utilizes both Syllabus Plus timetabling software and Google Calendar to allow staff and students to schedule bookings of these rooms. As part of a large-scale AV fitout, Monash approached Melbourne-based company Concierge Displays to implement a room booking display system to manage the use of all meeting and faculty rooms within the Learning & Teaching Building.

KEY CRITERIA

Integration with both Google Calendar and Syllabus Plus was a crucial factor in Monash University's decision to go with Concierge. In-depth Google Calendar integration was already part of the Concierge product, however Syllabus Plus was new territory. "We required Google Calendar and Syllabus Plus integration because those are the two primary booking platforms that Monash uses," explains Zane Johnston, Audiovisual Engineer at Monash University. "We discussed the integration of Syllabus Plus with Concierge and, while they didn't offer it at the time, they agreed to develop the required integration within the project timeline." Satisfying client expectations, Concierge software developers came up with an API integration specifically for Monash University which allows the room booking system to connect harmoniously with Syllabus Plus. Whenever a room booking is made — via Syllabus Plus or Google Calendar — Concierge updates the display outside the appropriate room in a matter of seconds, thanks to the integration. Syllabus Plus compatibility is now available as standard with Concierge room booking solutions. "Monash was the pilot site for the Syllabus Plus integration," says Damien Vanslambrouck, Director of Marketing & Sales at Concierge Displays. "But now it's a part of the feature set of the Concierge product. Anybody who buys it has the ability to connect to a Syllabus Plus calendar."

HOW IT WORKS

"Concierge is a standalone product," says Damien. "It pulls the information it requires from the client's existing resource calendar, be it Exchange, Office 365, Google Calendar, or Syllabus Plus. The panel then polls the booking resource and collects the information it needs and displays the information on the screen." The display itself (IAdea XDS-1078) is a 10-inch wall-mounted unit which sits outside each room in the precinct. All upcoming bookings for a room are listed on the display, while its colour dictates the current status of the room: red means the room is in use, green for 'available'. Blue-lit displays indicate rooms which are connected to Syllabus Plus. The display's GUI is customizable and features the Monash University logo in the top right hand corner. Monash faculty members and students have adopted the intuitive room booking method well. Students can conveniently view the availability of meeting rooms and schedule bookings from their Google Calendar smartphone app or a browser. For those in the building, using a room's touch-screen is straightforward. "The panels help people ensure they've come to the right meeting," says Zane. "And if someone is looking for an available meeting room they can visually identify one by the occupied/unoccupied colours, then walk down and book it via the panel."

ANALYTICAL COMPANION

The real brain of the Concierge system is its cloud-based analytics and reporting tool called Companion. With remote IP configuration and monitoring functionality, it's a big value-add for university campuses as large as Monash. "At Monash, the AV team is probably a 20-minute walk from the Learning & Teaching Building," explains Damien. "But they can sit at their desk and see whether the panels are online or offline, and pull up a screenshot from any panel. Companion even allows you to connect directly to the configuration screen of each device, so if there's an issue you can see what's on the screen live from the other side of the campus." Another factor that attracted Monash to Concierge was the in-depth Companion analytics. The software can generate reports based on metrics such as who is using a room, how long they were there for, which rooms are not being utilised, who has shown up late to a booking, and so on. Damien acknowledges the real power of the Concierge product lies in the analytics. "It's really important when you're trying to work out how well a space is being used. Companion gives you real live data to back that up. It may show that people are focusing on a certain style of meeting room, perhaps with videoconferencing facilities. This might then inform the nature of future room deployments. It's all about space management, and that's where you get your return on investment in a room booking product."

LOOKING AHEAD

Monash is already looking to the future for how Companion's data can be used to improve the efficient utilization of its rooms. "We're looking to make use of the occupancy sensor which is part of the AV system in the majority of the spaces," says Zane. "If the occupancy sensor doesn't detect activity or movement in a room within a period of time in a booking, it's safe to say the room is unoccupied. It can then send a message to the Concierge system telling it to cancel the booking and thus free up the space for someone else to use. This is something Concierge can implement quickly with their firmware." Another future move is to incorporate larger displays to give students an at-a-glance view of a room's schedule. "At the moment, students will arrive at the room's door and review the panel to check whether their tutorial or meeting is happening in that space. Having a larger format display, say, above the entrance to a lecture theatre, will enable that to happen at a greater viewing distance and for a larger number of students at once." Implementing this is easy, using either the HDMI output of the wall-mount Concierge touch display or through Concierge's separate Media Player product.

HOME GROWN EXPERTISE

The Monash University Learning & Teaching Building represents the largest deployment of Concierge displays to date, so it was serendipitous the two organizations were only a short drive from each other. Hiccups during the installation phase were resolved within hours simply by sending staff to the site. "Being a small local company meant Concierge had the agility to meet the key requirement of integration with Syllabus Plus," says Zane. "Some of the other competitors we reviewed couldn't offer that guarantee in that timeline, whereas Concierge was confident they could, and they did."

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