



INTERVIEWED

- ▶ **David Dickert**
USM Esports Coordinator

INDUSTRY

- ▶ Education

CHALLENGE

- ▶ Update outdated space to create a modern esports/gaming center
- ▶ Equip program with state-of-the-art technology to support competition, connection, and learning

University Esports Program Supports Community and Competition with ViewSonic ViewBoard Interactive Display, Gaming Monitors, and Digital Signage

SCHOOL

Founded in 1910, the University of Southern Mississippi (aka “Southern Miss” or USM) is a public D1 sports and R1 classified research university with a total undergraduate enrollment of 10,258. The university’s main campus is in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, which is supplemented by a complex in Long Beach known as Southern Miss Gulf Coast. Southern Miss offers approximately 189 programs leading to baccalaureate, masters, specialist, and doctorate degrees, serving undergraduates from public schools across the southern United States and around the globe. The university is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and its programs are accredited by 30 state and national agencies.

CHALLENGE

When USM Esports Coordinator David Dickert began in Spring 2022, the fledgling program operated out of an outdated space that received periodic technology updates, where 15 students valiantly competed from non-esports-ready equipment.

“It used to be a big lounge area that hadn’t seen major updates for a long time,” said Dickert. “The university was getting ready to invest in a robust competitive esports program in 2019, but COVID set fire to those plans until the global pandemic was under control. The 15 students involved were piecemealing it the best they could with very little equipment or funding.”

“The ViewBoard is an outstanding interactive resource for any type of learning because it’s so intuitive to use and it really draws students in. They absolutely love it. They’ll come in wanting to use it the moment we open the doors for the day and the competitive team is constantly scheduling time with it.”

— David Dickert, USM Esports Coordinator



SOLUTION



▶ ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP7550 75" interactive display



▶ ViewSonic XG2431 24" 1080p IPS gaming monitors



▶ ViewSonic CDE6512 65" commercial display

When Dickert came on board it was immediately clear that revamping the space was a top priority. During the summer preceding the 2023-24 school year, Dickert and the Union worked with a local painting company to tear down the wall carpet, refinish the floors, paint, and bring in new furnishings – transforming it into a modern gaming wonderland.

A parallel priority was to outfit the new gaming stations with state-of-the-art equipment. When it came to monitors, Dickert wanted to make a clean break from what the team was currently using.

“The specs on the existing monitors were pretty decent, but we had a lot of quality control issues,” he said. “I was having to retire monitors because they had dead pixels, or pixels would pop in and out randomly. I have some horror stories about students being in the middle of a game and the screen dying. I absolutely needed to find a new brand for us to rely on.”

A former educator who had enjoyed using a ViewSonic ViewBoard interactive display in his classroom, Dickert looked at what the company was doing in the esports space, and was impressed.

“My budget was very finite so I was looking to build long-term partnerships with companies that had a similar vision for the ways in which esports can benefit students,” said Dickert. “For me, esports is about more than winning. It’s about building connections between students and contributing to their physical and emotional well-being. It was clear that ViewSonic operated from a similar values standpoint regarding education and esports, so they were a natural fit.”

Before he had a chance to reach out, he was approached by ViewSonic representatives visiting the campus.

“I shared our vision of what we were going to do, how we planned to help students in the space,” said Dickert. “We were very aligned and from there our partnership was born.”

SOLUTION

The new esports and gaming facilities consist of two sections separated by a hallway. The Official Southern Miss Esports Arena hosts the University’s National Championship competition teams. The adjacent casual gaming space is open to all students interested in gaming (plus billiards, shuffleboard, and table tennis). Both feature gaming stations equipped with ViewSonic® XG2431 24” 240Hz gaming monitors.

Distinct areas within the competitive gaming space include the main stage, equipped with five ViewSonic XG2431 gaming monitors; the practice stage, which supports scrimmages and practices with six XG2431 monitors; and a production space equipped with one ViewSonic XG2431 monitor where students learn how to broadcast events, edit video, and more. Another 12 XG2431 monitors are deployed in the casual gaming center, enabling those in the general student population to experience gaming with top-of-the-line equipment.

To further support the program’s mission to develop learning-focused, connected, and healthy individuals through competition, community, and esports experiences, Dickert added a cart-mounted ViewSonic ViewBoard® IFP7550 75” interactive display to a conference-style setup perpendicular to the main stage.

RESULTS

- ▶ The updated space is modern, vibrant, and inviting
- ▶ Participation has grown from 15 to 700
- ▶ The ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP7550 interactive display is used extensively by student athletes and others to enhance competitive advantage, collaboration, and learning
- ▶ ViewSonic XG2431 gaming displays deliver fast, smooth gameplay
- ▶ The ViewSonic CDE6512 commercial display used as digital signage dynamically promotes the program

“The ViewSonic ViewBoard I used as a high school teacher was the best thing ever,” he said. “The ability to display content, click the side of screen to bring up the pen function and draw on the board to enhance the information was incredible and, along with the ability for students to intuitively work at the board, it changed the way I taught. I knew I wanted that for the esports students.”

Finally, to promote the program, Dickert stationed a ViewSonic CDE6512 65” commercial display outside the doorway to the Arena.



RESULTS

It may come as a surprise that both the program lead and the players love the ViewSonic ViewBoard interactive display almost more than the lightning-fast ViewSonic gaming monitors.

“It’s hands down my favorite place in the arena,” said Dickert, “I could gush about this ViewBoard all day.”

For students the 75” interactive display serves a dual purpose, said Dickert, supporting both their competitive and educational goals. Seated together around a conference-table setup facing the ViewBoard display, student athletes can review and mark up gameplay. Similarly, all program participants can use the display to work collaboratively on schoolwork and projects.

“The ViewBoard is an outstanding interactive resource for any type of learning because it’s so intuitive to use and it really draws students in. They absolutely love it. They’ll come in wanting to use it the moment we open the doors for the day and the competitive team is constantly scheduling time with it,” Dickert said, audibly turning to look out his doorway and adding, “Yep, they’re using it right now.”

For Dickert, the ViewBoard interactive display was a game-changer that has helped him meet his core goals as program lead.

“For me this program is about helping students make connections and gain skills that will help them throughout their lives,” he said. “The ViewBoard display absolutely fosters that type of connection, problem solving, and learning.”

Foremost among the many ViewBoard features that Dickert appreciates is the display's ease of use, whether it's connected to a PC, or not.



“It’s nice not having to have a PC hooked up to it, that it’s optional. It may be a bit more intuitive when used with PC functionalities, but when it’s alone it still functions incredibly well using Google Chrome and myViewBoard,” he said. “The user interface is very approachable, and everything is easy to navigate. I haven’t had to teach anyone how to use it.”

The ViewSonic XG2431 gaming monitors were equally easy to use, right out of the box – a pleasant surprise that helped get the program up and running more quickly than Dickert anticipated.

“In my experience monitors don’t have good factory settings right out of the box; usually I have to tweak them a bit,” he said. “With these ViewSonic gaming monitors it was a seamless, seamless plug-and-play experience. The images looked great, and we got them set up in a very short amount of time.”

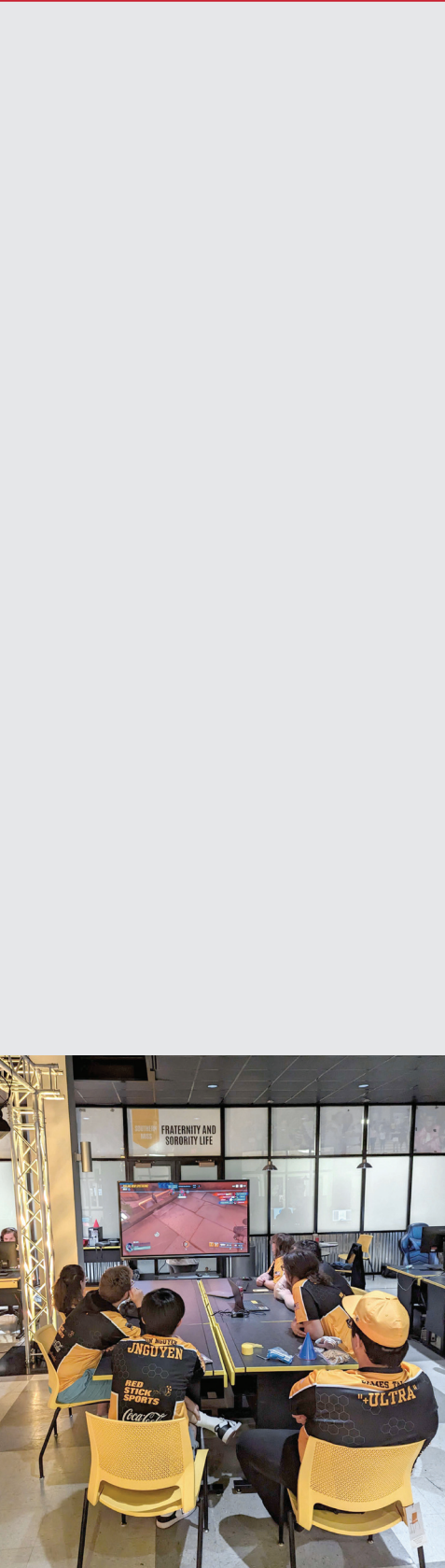
Students of all gaming abilities have been thrilled with the fast response time and refresh rate.

“They care about the snappiness of the tech, and that’s one reason the students really like these monitors,” said Dickert. “They’re very responsive at .5ms – you almost can’t get better than that at an affordable price.”

Most of them, he added are used to playing with screens that max out at a refresh rate of 60Hz to 120Hz, and immediately comment that the gaming with the ViewSonic monitors is a much smoother experience than they’re used to. ViewSonic XG2431 gaming monitors, for example, are capable of achieving a refresh rate of 240Hz.

“ViewSonic is becoming well-known for their gaming monitors and their support for the educational aspects of esports in education,” said Dickert.





“I anticipated that these monitors would be outstanding, and they absolutely are.”

The Fall 2023 season has been the most successful to date for the Southern Miss Esports Program. Participation has grown to a total of 85 competitive players on 15 different teams. Nearly 700 total students – almost seven percent of the total undergraduate enrollment – use the casual gaming stations. All three of the program’s Fortnite teams have qualified for the Fortnite Split 1 NACE National Championship using the ViewSonic monitors. The program has seen similar success from each of its other teams.

“I’m able to get these numbers because our single sign on system tracks who uses the computers, and I’m thrilled with the growth of the program.” said Dickert. “For me, the student experience is the big component of student life at Southern Miss. I celebrate when we win and motivate and encourage harder work when we lose, but I care the most about the connections and that students feel a sense of belonging when they come into the gaming space.”

That goal has been achieved, it is clear, when Dickert notes that the arena and game room have become ‘the living room’ of campus. With no membership fees, and room for all, the program attracts students to all three tiers of the program: signed student athletes who compete in official conferences; Academy Team students who compete in official conferences as developing teams; and Gaming Club participants, a community open for all to experience fun events, conventions, and multi-club collaborations with a gaming twist. Of course, those with an even more casual interest in gaming – or hanging out with gamers – are also welcome in this inviting space.

“When it comes to clubs, we believe in student leadership,” said Dickert. “The gaming club is student-run and includes pretty much everything gaming. They visit conventions together and hold game nights – in fact they had one last night. It’s exactly the type of community activities we had hoped to encourage.”

Next on the agenda for this growing program is a Spring 2024 launch of an Intro to Esports course in partnership with the School of Business.

“It will be a survey-style course where students broadly learn the history and business aspects of esports,” said Dickert. “A core class objective will be to give students hands on experience with esports using the arena space and ViewSonic monitors.”

By then, the ViewSonic CDE6512 65-inch commercial display will be mounted above the doorway to the Arena, drawing in new participants and educating others about the program as they stroll through the USM Student Union and Thad Cochran Center.

“It’s great where it is now,” said Dickert. “But when it’s mounted above the doorway it will deliver an even bigger ‘wow factor.’”