

Final Four Broadcast Part of a Campus-Wide Event for The University of the South

Challenge

Each year, the NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Championship, also referred to as "March Madness" and "The Big Dance," captivates much of the nation, including college campuses of all sizes. The administration at the University of the South, a private liberal arts college located in Sewanee, TN with a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately 1,500 students, wanted to find a way to broadcast the tournament's climactic 2013 Final Four weekend to the entire student body, so they turned to Z-Band, Inc. to provide the video distribution solution.

Solution

As it is with many educational institutions these days, the University of the South's administration was seeking a way to engage the students and the surrounding community during the Final Four weekend. The school decided to create a campus-wide event filled with a variety of basketball-related activities such as a three-on-three tournament between fraternities, and they wanted to provide the opportunity to view the tournament games on large televisions. The challenge was finding a way to effectively distribute the television feed of the event to a large number of students in

one location. The Z-Band video distribution system proved to be the perfect remedy.



Prior Knowledge Set the Stage for the Z-Band Test. The idea for implementing the Z-Band system originated with Geno Schlichting, a communications specialist at the University. Schlichting was aware that Digital Group, the University's cabling vendor, and Z-Band were already consulting with the schools administration regarding the possible installation of a video distribution system for a new on-campus hotel and conference center, and he thought that the Final Four project would serve well as a proof of concept to put the Z-Band system to the test.

Kelly Head, Vice President of Digital Group's Infrastructure Services Division, had become familiar with Z-Band's capabilities after witnessing a Z-Band system in action at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Children's Hospital, so he had recommended it for the hotel project. Digital Group and Z-Band are currently

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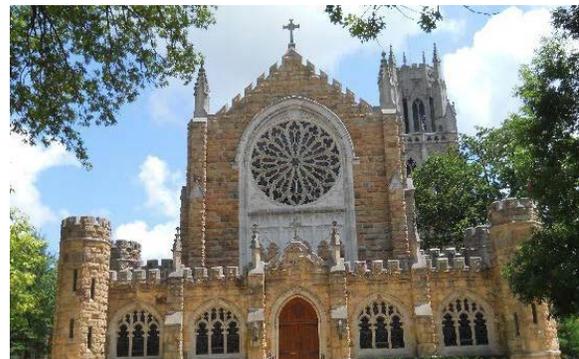
partnering on an installation at a psychiatric hospital that is being built on the University's main campus in Tuscaloosa, AL.

For the Final Four project, the University's McClurg Dining Hall was selected as the spot to stage the broadcast, as it offered ample space and a central location. A key challenge was finding a way to distribute the video signal from the head end, located in the Jesse Ball DuPont Library, to the dining hall without tearing out walls or creating a large tangle of cables that could cause a number of complications and potentially expose the University to liability issues.

The Z-Band team quickly understood that "Z-Band Light" would be the ideal product for the project, as it could easily convert the University's satellite service to fiber optics. "Z-Band Light" is the company's state-of-the-art single mode fiber optic system that includes fiber transmitters, receivers, and all the accessories needed to meet an organization's specific data transmission requirements. Z-Band created a mock head end for the project using the University's satellite television provider as the source of the TV signal.

Capitalizing on Existing Infrastructure to get the video feed from the head end in the library to the dining hall, the Z-Band staff took advantage of the existing

ANSI/TIA 568-C infrastructure that had previously been installed throughout the campus. The 568 defines standards for the design and implementation of structured cabling systems in commercial buildings and in a campus environment. Using the existing fiber infrastructure enabled the video feed to pass through four buildings before finally reaching the dining hall, without having to run cables from one building to the next. Z-Band installed its 24-port GigaBUD active video distribution hub in the dining hall's IDF communications closet and patched the video feed into the patch panel. Z-Band used GigaBOBs to feed each HDTV throughout the dining hall. The University's AV personnel were able to complete the setup by implementing a simple "plug-and-play" process.



"These buildings all had stone walls with mod jack outlets in them," said Bob Stine, Vice President, Operations and Engineering at Z-Band. "So, we simply took the 24-port

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video hub into the closet. We went to the patch panel right below it, and that patch panel goes out to all these outlets throughout the building. It was ‘snap-snap,’ and in the matter of a half-a-day, we lit ‘em up!”

Z-Band’s setup provided six HD channels, along with a video content package about the University and its history that was made available on the University’s internal television channel and generated a great deal of interest and excitement among the student body.

Design & Installation

Remarkably, Z-Band was able to finish the entire installation in about six hours, which is quite a feat when one considers that a traditional installation by the local cable company would have taken several weeks or even months to complete. No additional UTP cable was needed for the installation; the entire process was completed using the University’s existing fiber optics and cable.

Z-Band Passed the test with flying colors, the Z-Band installation proved to be an overwhelming success. Schlichting, who was present during the installation, came away very satisfied. “They had all the bases covered,” he said. “I was really impressed with the equipment and the ease with which

it was set up. They never had a hitch or glitch.” He termed the system’s flexibility, which allows for easy moves and adjustments, as a “winning selling point.” Schlichting also pointed out that the overwhelmingly positive feedback received from the Final Four broadcast is likely to lead to the University staging similar events in the future.” It met the goals of the administration of wanting to bring different groups of people together. It also met the goals of our technical side of the house.” Schlichting summed up the entire implementation process by saying, “It sure was easy!”

Schlichting referred to the Z-Band personnel he came into contact with during the entire process as “nice to work with and extremely knowledgeable. I was just impressed from the top down. Z-Band and Digital Group: A Winning Partnership According to Kelly Head, Digital Group has worked with the University of the South on a number of communications projects over a period of nine years. When the University contacted Head about its video distribution needs, he quickly recommended Z-Band. “They were looking for something that was easy to install and simple to administer and maintain, and the solutions that Z-Band has immediately came to mind. We looked at it

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as an opportunity to introduce Z-Band to the campus, with the intent that, eventually, the entire campus would go to a Z-Band solution.”

Jason Mittelstet, Operations Manager of Middle Tennessee at Digital Group and the project manager for the University of the South’s Final Four installation added, “Being able to distribute the video system over their existing single mode backbone we had just put in the summer before, was a good way to show (the University) that it was a fit and that it would work...and it worked flawlessly.”

He also pointed out how the automated functionality of the system has the effect of removing much of the engineering and labor making for a more simplified operation. “You’re not messing with amps, splitters, taps, signal streams, etc...it does it all automatically.”

Mittelstet indicated that other potential uses of the Z-Band system at the University include making classroom lectures available via the campus’s internal television network, as well as making major events such as graduation ceremonies available throughout the campus. He also said he intended to use the Z-Band solution for other Digital Group customers.

Head was pleased with the way Z-Band performed during the project from start to finish. “They really went the extra mile. We were very impressed, and the University was, too.”

In addition to serving a temporary or short-term need such as the Final Four broadcast, the Z-Band system can also provide the University of the South with a host of long-term benefits should it decide to go with a large-scale installation in the future. The system’s inherent scalability allows for simplified expansion as additional video hubs can be added by the easy plug-and-play process. The system is capable of providing clear, consistent picture quality, simultaneously, to thousands of TVs.

“I thought the video hubs might fail and what was I going to do if one failed, but I haven’t had a failed unit in seven years. As the Administrator, I don’t have to think about it.”
“The Z-Band installation proved to be an overwhelming success. They had all the bases covered. I was really impressed with the equipment and the ease with which it was set up. The system’s flexibility, which allows for easy moves and adjustments is a winning selling point.”

Geno Schlichting Communications
Specialist, Sewanee University

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The lack of maintenance and upkeep can be a significant cost saver, an important consideration in today's cost-conscious educational environment. In fact, the cost-saving aspect of the system could help any Z-Band customer recoup its initial investment in a relatively short period of time. The system's flexibility also offers the benefit of future-proofing, eliminating the need to replace the cabling infrastructure at some point due to obsolescence.