

Mystic Aquarium Case Study

Adding a new dimension for aquariums

Connecticut's Mystic Aquarium deploys Polycom ViewStation video systems at OpSail 2000, reaching hundreds of thousands of spectators at the largest event in the state's history.

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As it turns out, humans aren't the only species who are videoconferencing these days. Some of our flippers and feathered friends recently shared the broadband video spotlight before hundreds of thousands of bedazzled spectators. Stormy the dolphin, Kela the whale, and Fox the falcon, made their live video debut in July 2000 from Connecticut's Mystic Aquarium to a curious crowd at the largest event ever in the state's history.

Through Polycom's video communications systems and a high-speed T-1 line, the aquarium brought live, interactive marine and wildlife demonstrations to its booth at OpSail 2000, the historical tall ships parade that traveled to eight U.S. cities along the east coast in celebration of the new millennium.

In four days, 900,000 spectators attended the extravaganza at piers in New London and Groton, Connecticut, where 40 tall ships were on display, including the U.S. Coast Guard's Barque Eagle and the Freedom Schooner Amistad. During the event, 200,000 people visited the aquarium's booth, where they talked to aquarists, watched marine life and raptors feed and play, and learned more about each species through interactive video displays seen on two side-by-side monitors.

"As a non-profit organization, we were given a booth at the event and we saw it as a wonderful opportunity to promote the aquarium and educate people about marine life and birds of prey," said Deb Adamson, public relations director for the Mystic Aquarium. "We wanted to create an engaging

personal experience for families and kids. Video communications was the most realistic interactive medium to bring the aquarium right to the pier.”

The system was deployed in only a few days. A Polycom ViewStation system located at the aquarium fed various video and audio sources to another Polycom ViewStation installed at the booth. Replays looped between scheduled demonstrations and feedings. The entire series was broadcast live on the Internet for the entire four days.

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By all reports, the Mystic Aquarium’s booth was the most popular based on its non-stop flurry of visitors. Live video demonstrations such as dolphin feedings and question and answer sessions about birds of prey were compelling, but a critical factor for success was the crisp, clear video and audio quality of Polycom’s video communications system.

“The animals are constantly moving and they move quickly so we needed TV-quality video delivered at a T-1 rate,” said Corallo. “We had to have smooth, full-motion video without pixelation or it wouldn’t have been effective. That’s why we chose Polycom.”

The aquarium and its sister organization, the Institute for Exploration (IFE), considered OpSail 2000 a test for Polycom’s video communications systems. They were interested in finding a viable solution for future applications such as broadcasting Q&A sessions with other, similar facilities and for distance learning in public schools and universities around the country.

“We’ve proven that Polycom has the video quality we need,” said Corallo.

“We’re genuinely excited about the potential for using such high-quality, interactive video communications in the future to increase awareness, improve our productivity and provide efficient educational opportunities.” That’s a sentiment surely shared by Stormy the dolphin, Kela the whale and Fox the falcon.