

National Theatre Offers Thru-Window Experience

Visual Planet's ViP Interactive Foils now operate through security glass



Introduction

London's South Bank has been revitalised and the riverside walk is now very popular. The National Theatre, beside the Thames, wanted to extend its reach beyond the physical space it occupies and tempt passers-by to find out more about its productions.

It saw an opportunity to make its large windows interactive, but was concerned that its toughened glass would make this technically difficult.

Visual Planet's touch foil technology, which will work through up to 25mm of solid glass, was installed to provide an elegant solution, and a new semi-permanent optically clear fixing system was used to bypass issues arising from the shatter-proof material coating the glass.

The National Theatre is delighted with the results.

Issue

The National Theatre has always been a forward-looking, technologically savvy organisation. When they heard about Visual Planet's ViP interactive foils, they knew there must be a way to use them to bring the magic of the theatre to the public.

"We heard about Visual Planet's through-glass touch technology, and really liked the sound of it," says Toby Coffey, Senior Multimedia Designer in the Graphics Department of the National Theatre. "We are always looking for new ways to engage with the public and provide details about the theatre and schedules of shows. The Visual Planet touch foils seemed like a great way to do this.

"We had considered having an interactive digital element outside the building before, but other solutions relied on hardware being outside, at the mercy of the elements, and also liable to theft or vandalism."

Solution

Visual Planet positioned three foils in the National Theatre's external facing windows, providing interactivity with three 42-inch LCD screens showing a digital version of the current season's brochure.

Pedestrians passing the theatre can now use one of these touch screens, positioned in the theatre's windows, to obtain information and booking details about the current season's productions. The information is displayed round-the-clock, making show times and descriptions available even when the theatre is closed.

"Passers-by can use the screens to browse schedules and find out about shows and activities taking place in the theatre," says Toby.

"The LCD screens are positioned against the windows, and the interactive foil adheres to the inside surface of the glass. There are no components outside so it is very secure."

At present, flash files of the digital brochure run on three separate computers connected directly to the LCD screens. The computers will shortly be networked to facilitate faster updating of material, and to enable the display of very timely information.

“Once the screens are connected to the network we will be able to display short-term timely messages, such as ‘£10 tickets for tonight’s production of X’,” says Toby. “Networking will make it much easier to produce tailored information and change it rapidly to reflect what’s going on in the theatre.”

Installation of the interactive touch foils went well. “Our windows have a special security film coating,” explains Toby. “It was very reassuring that the foils will work through up to 2.5 cm thickness of material, so there was no issue with our extra-thick glass.”

Visual Planet employed a new fixing system that provided superior adhesion to the shatter-proof material coating the National Theatre’s windows. This semi-permanent optically clear fixing system has now become a standard feature of the touch foils.

“The guys from Visual Planet were very professional and attentive. They came and did the installation themselves to make sure it was done correctly, and they helped with set-up. Their customer service and after-sales is brilliant!” says Toby.

Mike Cole of Visual Planet was delighted to provide the touch-screens for the National Theatre. “Our interactive foils are perfect for creative solutions like this as they can be produced to bespoke size specifications and with a range of controller positions. The foils are unaffected by sunlight, so even in a south facing window they should work perfectly, and in winter, the interactivity is maintained even if passers-by are wearing gloves.”

Outcomes

Toby is pleased with the response to the screens.

“We have a 24-page digital brochure displayed on the screens that is updated every 2-3 months. As well as information about current and forthcoming shows and activities, it includes information about seating, ticket prices and the exhibitions and restaurants available in the theatre,” says Toby.

“People started using the screens straight away, even before we finished installing them! Although we're not currently tracking actual usage there are a lot of people coming over and having a go.

“We’ve had great feedback from the public,” Toby adds. “There have been lots of comments about the speed. The touch foils are very responsive, so there is a good sense of interaction, and people don’t have to wait for the screens to catch up with them – it’s instantaneous.

“We’ve also had a lot of comments from members of staff. I think they’ve been pleasantly surprised by the level of functionality.”

About ViP Interactive Foils

ViP Interactive Foils are probably the world’s most flexible touch screens. As well as being used in windows, they can be installed on curved surfaces to create eye-catching displays, or integrated with LCD screens.

Additionally, foils can also be used with rear projection technology to produce interactive table-tops, kiosks or information points. Visual Planet offers a range of permanent and removable fixing options, and a reusable version of the film is available.

The foils will fit in narrow bezel solutions and slim designed LCD screens.

There are no mechanical parts and the foils are not affected by water, dust or dirt. Interactivity works through any non-metallic material including glass, wood and plastic.

Screen sizes are available from 30 to 116 inches in 16:9 display format, and 30 to 84 inches in 4:3 display format. Bespoke sizes to fit all makes of LCD displays and special rear projection screen sizes are also available.

About Visual Planet

Visual Planet, based in Cambridge, develops, manufactures and distributes ViP Interactive Foils which are integrated into dynamic interactive displays by their global network of resellers.

The ViP Interactive Foil is developed and manufactured by the company making interactive technology more accessible to resellers, designers and multimedia companies.

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