

# Visual Factory Keeps Staff On Track

## Visual Planet's Digital Signage is a Factory Floor Hit



A pioneering “Visual Factory” project in Scotland has won praise from customers, visitors and staff. GRAM Advanced Materials Ltd (GRAM), a wholly owned subsidiary of RICOH, has successfully made good internal communication central to everyday business by dramatically increasing the extent and visibility of production information.

The overall aim of the project was to increase transparency about working processes and to engender greater cohesion among staff. Visual Factory provides the link between management teams,

administration and factory staff.

As a coherent approach to improve internal communications within the plant, Visual Factory marries traditional methods of communications such as team briefings with hi-tech solutions such as plasma screens.

“Our MD had a vision of a factory that displayed dynamic information for the benefit of all staff and visitors,” says Derek Smith of GRAM. “Now that we’ve done it, the system is really paying off.”

The screens allow workers to see real-time production figures from factory computers and machine controllers, providing tangible targets for manufacturing staff and instant updates for management. At its heart is a flexible and easy to use content management system licensed from digital communications company Visual Planet. Management and staff alike agree that the key to making the project a success will be the freshness of the information displayed.

“Making the system easy to update is vital to ensuring that it will be changed regularly, and that staff pay attention to it,” says Derek Smith of GRAM. “Allowing stagnation quickly draws criticism from staff, which is a road well-trodden with traditional notice boards and displays”.

GRAM uses the Visual Planet software alongside Crystal Reports and Access to display real-time production data from the manufacturing floor. For the communication of general information, an Excel spreadsheet is updated and agreed at the weekly management meeting. This file provides the content for a news ticker across the base of the screen in real time, helping to ensure commonality of information across departments.

GRAM, however, are now looking to extend the use of the Visual Planet software, and have been encouraged by the demand from staff.

“We really are just beginning to explore the power of the system”, says Derek. “We’re looking at developing it to produce more in-depth real time reports on labour cost recovery, continuous improvement activities and information from our safety and environmental action groups.”

“Having said that, we’re very open minded about other possible uses – at the moment we display daily trivia questions for a bit of fun and in future plan to post up information about social events, for example staff photos from hill walking trips and nights out which are sure to get a good staff response! It’s all about creating a balance that improves productivity and motivates staff.”

Mike Cole, Commercial Director at Visual Planet, says that GRAM’s approach is significant for the future of internal communications:

“This is the first application of a technology we hope will become widespread. Digital signage is reliant on regular updating, and GRAM’s solution is proving to be simple, effective and popular.”

Overall, the response to the system has been good. Employees have requested an extension of the project across a wider area, and the official factory staff representatives have been particularly impressed at the inclusiveness of GRAM’s creative technology use.

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### **About Visual Planet**

Visual Planet develops, designs and implements dynamic interactive visual solutions. It is based at St John’s Innovation Centre, Cambridge.

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