

NASA Takes Hubble Nationwide Thanks to Scala

Nationwide Planetarium Network Leaves Both Audience and Exhibitors in Awe

Baltimore, MD – Recreating the entire universe in a tiny man-made building is no easy task. Neither is getting budget-strapped planetariums up-to-date with the latest imagery downloaded every week from the Hubble Space Telescope. But thanks to the ingenuity of Scala and NASA, ViewSpace is doing both – and displayed so beautifully that it keeps people coming back for more.

ViewSpace started off as a CD-ROM publishing venture of the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore using Scala's older multimedia software package. The content was so fascinating and the presentation was so smooth that it wowed audiences from as far away as Germany. By last count, more than 100 museums and planetariums had subscribed to the monthly service.

However, as the Hubble's audience grew, so too did the costs of production. Imagine the time and cost of burning 100 CDs, making labels, and shipping packages. Every month. Now think about the logistics of getting each CD to the right person at every museum and planetarium and having to stop the current presentation and install the new one. Every month.

"I was getting sucked into a vortex when I needed to be creating content," said John Stoke, STScI's manager of informal science education.

It all added up to more than the non-profit organization could handle, yet it was Stoke's task to find new and exciting ways to bring what NASA had learned from the Hubble to the public. ViewSpace CDs were a nice first step, but the "sneaker net" approach of mailing updates was not going to allow him to focus on their mission.

Enter Scala's InfoChannel 3. The Internet-ready application suite took Stoke's presentations designed in Scala's easy-to-use yet powerful InfoChannel Designer 3 and replaced traditional CD-ROM burning and simple MPEG players with its intelligent store-and-forward design for displaying to remote sites, all controlled from a single location.

Now the STScI is taking the production/logistics nightmare out of the equation and ensuring that everyone receives the latest Hubble data and imagery right away with the click of a button in Scala's InfoChannel Network Manager 3. Eight locations are already online, with new museums being added all the time.

Take the Mueller Planetarium, for instance, at the University of Nebraska. Images, text and pleasant music give visitors a look at the latest images from the Hubble Space Telescope through a direct computer connection via the STScI's InfoChannel Network Manager.



“NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope delivers breathtaking views of the cosmos, forever altering our understanding of space and our place in it. ViewSpace portrays the beauty and power of the universe and gently guides the viewer to a deeper understanding of astronomy through lucid, well-paced exposition,” says Jack Dunn, planetarium coordinator.

While initial costs may seem high, this is one exhibit that never goes out of date – with no additional on-site work needed – since it is updated periodically by the STScI directly from Baltimore. ViewSpace consists of a long, repeating loop of individual story segments. Each segment ranges from five or six to as much as fifteen minutes, and if certain segments don’t change from week to week, they don’t have to be retransmitted. The whole loop adds up to taking well over an hour before it repeats. The segments are designed so that people with time- or interest-constraints can wander in and out while still enjoying the experience. Because ViewSpace has a slow, meditative pace, there’s time to soak in the views and consider the meaning. This is just what people do when they watch it – they interact with the message.

And just how well does that all-important message get across? According to the North Museum of Natural History and Science in Lancaster, PA, ViewSpace has been nothing but “stunning, provocative, and professional.”

In fact, the new network-based ViewSpace just won an award from the American Association of Museums Media and Technology Committee for the “Highest Standards of Excellence in the use of Media and Technology for Interpretation and Education in Science.” No doubt thanks to the broadcast-quality presentation and publishing tools offered in Scala’s InfoChannel Designer 3 content creation package as well as the smooth display and on-air updates of Scala’s InfoChannel Player 3.

About Scala, Inc.

Founded in 1987, Scala pioneered the cable TV industry with software and services to allow users to create localized channels inexpensively. Today, Scala has grown to lead the corporate communications, retail dynamic signage, and interactive kiosk industries as well. With an unrivaled software suite to handle authoring, networking, monitoring, and logged playback, Scala has been the choice of tens of thousands of customers worldwide. Built on reliable and flexible network architecture, Scala software can support nearly any existing infrastructure from dial-up to LAN to Wi-Fi to satellite and terrestrial-based multicast networks. Scala’s powerful and efficient store-and-forward design allows the control of unique content on a single cable headend or thousands of remote displays or kiosks from a single desktop PC without the constraints of streaming video.

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