

The Commercial Appeal

USA
Memphis, TN



The Commercial Appeal Zones in on Local Publishing with Tera

The Challenge

The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tenn., one of the 100 largest newspapers in the United States, wanted to increase circulation and maximize the paper's advertising revenue without raising its production costs.

The Context

With newspapers everywhere under pressure to attract new readers, executives at The Commercial Appeal, owned by the E.W. Scripps Co. and with a daily circulation of 171,000 and a Sunday circulation of 232,000, knew that one way option was to create local editions of the newspaper tailored to people in specific communities around Memphis. In addition, they wanted to geographically target advertising to these same communities.

After nearly three decades of using other systems, The Commercial Appeal needed an editorial solution to plan and publish customized editions in six Tennessee communities, to add more resources at the DeSoto Appeal in Mississippi, and create advertising zones to provide a more cost effective and targeted advertising vehicle. The challenge was to produce multiple editions to maximize the paper's advertising revenue without raising its production costs.

"We wanted to give [readers] a newspaper that was tailored to their own interests and obviously provide [a vehicle] to advertisers who wanted to be regionally in sync with our overall circulation," said Louis King, Director of editorial systems at The Commercial Appeal, "We felt the system we were using was a good system for layout and design but it wasn't a really good system to produce multiple editions of the newspaper or complex changes to the newspaper."

The Analysis

Executives at The Commercial Appeal put together a checklist of what they needed in a system, which, in addition to the editorial features mentioned, also included fast implementation; the design of pages without the need for outside software; and an installation process that could take place simultaneously with the total redesign of the newspaper. The company also wanted to move to a Windows platform as well as upgrade to the latest versions of hardware and software.

Tera met all those criteria and more, King said. "We decided pretty quickly that we liked the way Tera looked and we liked the people that we met at Tera, but the final decision was based on the fact that the other systems we looked at just weren't as good."

While the other vendors said it would take an entire year to several years to install their systems, the Tera executives told the paper they could do it in three months and redesign the newspaper at the same time. And they did, King said.

"The other companies we looked at weren't offering any kind of a path to that at all," he said. **"And the Tera system cost nearly three times less than some other systems."**

The Tera system also worked smoothly with Citrix, which the paper wanted to use to establish local news bureaus. With Citrix, reporters, editors and other users can access applications—whether layout, writing or editing—remotely over high speed connections. Said King "Tera had that all worked out and they had a method for how everything

At a glance

Company

*The Commercial Appeal
Memphis, TN, USA
Group: E.W. Scripps Co.
Circulation: 171,000 daily
232,000 Sunday*

Topics

*Local editions
Targeted advertising
Zoning*

Challenge

Increase readership and advertising by publishing local editions without increasing production costs

Solution

*Tera content management and archiving solutions enable efficient zoning and layering of content and advertising for seven local editions.
Standard Microsoft platforms control system costs.*

Implementation

*Three months.
Onsite Tera support team managed the installation and training simultaneous with a newspaper redesign.
New system integrated with existing production systems.*

Result

*Dominant local news provider with seven targeted local editions.
Decentralized news operation with local news bureaus.
Increased revenue and doubled pages produced.*

Products

*GN3
Tark*

“When we saw Tera working it just was clearly outperforming everything else that we saw. Tera’s been good for us.”

Scott Sines

*The Memphis Commercial Appeal
Managing Director*

could be kept up to date and all the servers installed. We were pretty impressed by their knowledge.”

The Solution

The Commercial Appeal selected the GN3 content management system and the Tark archiving and digital asset management system from Tera Digital Publishing. The systems are based on Microsoft’s Windows Server 2003 and Microsoft SQL Server 2000. The client computers are inexpensive PCs running Windows XP. The Tera solution allowed complete editorial creation, copy flow, pagination and automatic archiving of all data including articles, images and complete pages.

Ultimately GN3 gave the paper advanced management tools and flexibility to control the content of its seven zoned daily editions. The GN3 layering technology allowed seamless sharing of content – editorial and advertising – among the different editions. The newspaper paired up the zones so that readers in Germantown, who were similar to readers in Collierville, received news of interest to both communities, plus news specific to just their neighborhoods.

“Tera also helped us go from a centralized model to a decentralized model and that saved time and trouble and record keeping,” King said. “It’s a nice way to run the newsroom.”

The Commercial Appeal also implemented Tark, Tera’s archiving system. Tark integrated with GN3 so that all data– stories, pictures and complete pages – could be archived in a single automatic step. The links between elements are automatically recreated in the library, so that it’s possible to search for a story and then jump to the page where it was published and from there to list all the pictures used on that page.

“The Tark system stores text as well as art of various kinds like graphics and pictures and it also stores the PDFs of each edition,” King said. “The system handles all the details of taking that edition from the editorial side and separating out the text and the art and putting them into Tark.”

The Implementation

The initial installation at The Commercial Appeal included 215 workstations, remote news bureaus, a newly crafted communications infrastructure, and a complete redesign of the paper. It was completed in three months. Tera had a support team on site during the entire period.

King said the implementation was very, very smooth because Tera planned for and integrated the GN3 system into The Commercial Appeal’s production system, including its typesetting and proofing operations. In fact, King said, Tera told the paper exactly what hardware and software it needed to buy for the desktops and the servers, and advised on the necessary Microsoft licenses.

The Result

Tera enabled The Commercial Appeal to re-imagine how it delivered news to its local readership. The paper increased its revenue and doubled the number of pages it produced by becoming a group of smaller interconnected neighborhood newspapers rather than a larger regional newspaper, King said. The paper was able to streamline its entire operation, and station people in local news bureaus with the tools they needed to do their work more easily.

“Before, we were struggling to produce one core newspaper with a few additional tacked-on products for the various neighborhoods. Now our entire newspaper is integrated toward the neighborhoods,” King said. “Since we split up the concept of the universal core newsroom and split it up into news bureaus, we now have a new system of associate editors and associate publishers who run the various bureaus with their staffs.”

Scott Sines, the managing editor of The Commercial Appeal, said the paper decided to buy Tera in a competitive process because it was the best system around. “When we saw Tera working it just was clearly outperforming everything else that we saw,” Sines said. “Tera’s been good for us.”

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