

BANK :: Ambler Savings Bank - Ambler, Pa.



BEFORE

The backstory

Founded in 1874, Ambler Savings Bank has always held a special place in the Ambler, Pennsylvania community. For years, the bank promoted community events on large banners hung from two poles located on its property. But a combination of community growth and the popularity of the space eventually made promoting all local events impossible. That's when it occurred to Ambler Mayor Charles "Bud" Wahl that an electronic message center could help the bank accommodate the community while augmenting its own on-site advertising.

The challenge

The plan was to use the new sign for three purposes: to promote community events, broadcast public service messages like Amber Alerts, and provide an advertising space for Ambler Savings Bank. However, there was no ordinance governing the installation and use of electronic signage in Ambler, and citizens quickly expressed concerns about traffic safety and the amount of light the sign would emit. It soon became evident that getting the sign approved would be a complicated matter.



AFTER

:: SIGN SPECS ::

19mm Color LED
Matrix: 64 x 112
8-Lines x 5" Characters
4'4" High x 8' Wide

The resolution

When Mayor Wahl's idea for an electronic message center was met with resistance, he and Ambler Bank president Martin Brown contacted Bud Reed of Reed Sign Company in Pennsburg, Pa. Reed's company installed the bank's original signage in 1962, and he was happy to help this time around.

Reed contacted Bill Smillie of Watchfire Signs, who contributed by providing sign demonstrations in the community and offering insight into electronic signage ordinances. Reed and Smillie accompanied Wahl and Brown to planning commission and council meetings, where, along with former Borough Manager Rocco Wack, they spent innumerable hours negotiating, reviewing and rewriting the sign ordinance.

The sign was finally approved and erected in September, 2007, and thanks to the craftsmanship of Reed Sign Company, it immediately won over the townspeople – including the few who opposed it. "We really took care to make sure it fit into the surroundings," Reed said. "It has a certain architectural appeal, with a nod to an old English style."

The sign isn't only stylish, but smart, too. It automatically adjusts its light emission based on the ambient light around it. It hasn't caused any traffic problems, and no one has complained about its brightness. It's safe to say the sign has been an unqualified success for the entire borough, including that old Ambler cornerstone, Ambler Savings Bank. "When the bank puts a good mortgage rate up on the sign, people come in," Wahl said. "There's a clear and direct correlation."

"To this day, people will come up to me and say, 'I didn't understand how good the sign would look.'"

**-- Charles "Bud" Wahl
Mayor of Ambler, Ambler, Pa.**

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watchFire 
BY TIME-O-MATIC

Banks :: Gate City Bank - Alexandria and Fergus Falls, Minn.



Background

For years, community banks have used electronic signs for everything from displaying the time and temperature to advertising their latest interest rates. But you would be hard-pressed to find a bank that has embraced electronic signage more enthusiastically than Gate City Bank in Fargo, N.D.

Results

When it began buying LED signs nearly two decades ago, Gate City Bank put its trust in Indigo Signworks CEO Bernie Dardis. Under Dardis' guidance, Gate City has outfitted 13 of its 30-plus branches with Watchfire signs. And as the bank has upgraded from single-color to full-color signs over the years, it has donated its used signs – which are all still working reliably – to local non-profit community based organizations.



:: SIGN SPECS ::
 19mm Color LED
 Matrix: 48 x 176
 6 Lines x 35 Characters
 3'4" High x 12' Wide

Case Study

Bernie Dardis of Indigo Signworks still remembers selling Gate City Bank its first electronic sign nearly 20 years ago. The bank wanted to control multiple signs remotely from one location – a tall order at the time. “I did a lot of research of different brands,” Dardis recalled. “And I found the networking capabilities of Watchfire to supersede all others.”

While other sign companies now offer similar networking capabilities, Dardis still prefers Watchfire for other reasons. “From the beginning, Watchfire was founded on this wonderful philosophy of having a capable desk staff to troubleshoot, diagnose, and follow through with getting the materials to the field overnight. Best of all, they do it with a passion and desire to fix the display as if they were working directly with the end user to solve the issue.”

While that makes Dardis' life easier, Watchfire's Ignite™ software makes life easier for the marketing staff at Gate City Bank. “It's the most user-friendly software out there,” Dardis said. “It's what puts Watchfire over the top, especially in terms of ease of use and display control.”

“Watchfire has the best networking capabilities and the best software, and they're competitive in terms of technology.”

**-- Bernie Dardis,
 Indigo Signworks, Fargo, N.D.**

Dardis is in the business of pleasing his customers, and will forgo Watchfire when it better suits his customer's needs. “We sell a few other brands,” he said. “But nine times out of ten, I recommend Watchfire. It has the best networking capabilities and the best software, and I have all the confidence in the world they're competitive in terms of technology.”

Jay Krabbenhoft, Gate City's office services manager, says the signs are a “dynamic addition” that “help the banks reach an audience who otherwise might not see our message.”

“It's just a good form of communication,” he said. “It's a way to engage the community, and it offers something fresher than a static sign. If you're advertising a CD special, or a special rate, customers know it's a new message, because the sign is always changing.”

Likewise, Gate City Bank is always keeping their facilities up-to-date and fresh for its customers. In this respect, its practice of donating used signs to nonprofit community organizations is admirably progressive. “It's an opportunity to partner with the community,” Krabbenhoft said. “It's good for the bank, too, because we get to put some advertising on it.”

“We hate to waste anything,” Krabbenhoft continued. “We want to be as green as possible, and I get a lot of personal satisfaction from knowing these organizations are getting good, high-quality signs that have a lot of life left in them.”

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BANK :: Home Savings Bank - Chanute, Kan.



BEFORE

Background

A full service financial institution in the town of Chanute, Kan., Home Savings Bank has been serving area residents for 122 years. Located on a busy thoroughfare in this agricultural town of 10,000 residents, the bank wanted a unique way to communicate with customers as well as the community, and to increase its franchise value. Operating in an extremely competitive environment for financial institutions, Home Savings Bank President Mike Reid also was looking for a way to stand out from other area institutions.

Results

With the help of Sign Designs of Joplin, Mo., Reid selected a 3' x 7', double-sided, 19mm digital message center from Watchfire by Time-O-Matic. The sign enables Home Savings Bank to have an ongoing dialogue with residents of this close-knit community. "There are four other banks in Chanute and we're all trying to expand our base," said Reid. "Our Watchfire sign gets us recognized in the community, not only for the products we offer, but for our involvement as a good neighbor. That was a key objective," Reid added. The bank also has dramatically reduced its budget for newspaper and radio advertising, since Home Savings Bank now goes directly to its customers and prospects with timely and customized messages, 24 hours a day.



AFTER

:: SIGN SPECS ::
19mm Color LED
Matrix: 48 x 80
3-Lines x 5" Characters
40" High x 6' Wide

Case Study

One year ago, Home Savings Bank President Mike Reid began considering a Watchfire sign when Chanute's hospital, Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center, installed the town's first digital message center—also by Watchfire. "That sign prompted me to start thinking about the capabilities of using a sign for Home Savings Bank. I took a close look at the money we were budgeting for advertising versus the benefits we were getting from those dollars. I concluded that a digital message center would be more innovative and provide a greater impact, while allowing the bank to customize information for residents and bank customers," said Reid.

Reid turned to Sign Designs and worked hand-in-hand with its president, John Hipple Jr., who provided answers on local zoning regulations, sign design and installation. "Shortly after we installed the Home Savings Bank digital message center, Mike told us that it was the most impactful thing they've done for advertising in the bank's history," said Hipple.

"People have come in and thanked us. They told us that we made an impact on them as they drove by. Prior to the sign, they drove by and didn't even look in our direction. That's what we wanted — to be noticed."

**-- Mike Reid, President,
Home Savings Bank**

The new full color digital message center replaced a 20-year-old wood structure with three-dimensional plastic letters on it. It lacked messaging capabilities, and according to Reid, it was rarely noticed because besides being drab, it was placed above eye level. "It was way too high. To catch the eye of passersby, you had to look up 20 feet, so we were barely noticed."

The new message center provides passersby with the time and temperature as well as morning greetings on their way to work and community event information throughout the day. Myriad background colors accompany messages about special bank promotions or the latest rates on mortgages or certificates of deposits. Reid says the professional-looking display is simple to program, thanks to Watchfire Ignite™ software and the training given to two staffers at the bank.

The sign has achieved Reid's goal of positioning Home Savings Bank as a devoted Chanute citizen. "If the high school has a prom, we promote it. If the Rotary Club has a fundraiser or the Chamber of Commerce hosts a pancake breakfast, we accommodate them."

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watchFire 
BY TIME-O-MATIC

CREDIT UNIONS :: Sussex County Federal Credit Union - Sussex County, Del.



BEFORE

Background

Sussex County Federal Credit Union in Delaware has been in business for more than 50 years, serves roughly 22,000 members, and boasts \$200 million in assets. Still, it's not without its challenges. For one, many in the Sussex County community don't fully understand the differences between a bank and a credit union. Some people are scared off by the word "union", and this misunderstanding gets in the way of the credit union's efforts to attract new members.

Results

Sussex County FCU has used traditional advertising for years. But in early 2009, in an effort to better distinguish itself from the competition, it embraced a newer, more progressive advertising medium: an electronic message center by Watchfire. Today, four of its five branches are outfitted with LED signs. According vice president of operations Allen Riley, the signs have proven to be incredibly effective sales tools. "Since we've installed the signs, we've seen an increase in membership, checking accounts, and credit card sign-ups," he said.



AFTER

:: SIGN SPECS ::

19mm Color LED
Matrix: 48 x 112
6-Lines x 22 Characters
40" High x 8' Wide

Case Study

In the past, Sussex Federal Credit Union has relied on traditional advertising to appeal to new members. But with newspaper circulation dwindling, it began exploring other options. After months of research, the credit union finally decided that an electronic message center would provide the highest return on its investment. Vice president of operations Allen Riley was put in charge of buying the sign.

"We generally ask for bids from three different businesses when making a big purchase," he said. In this case, one of those businesses was Phillips Signs Inc., an exclusive reseller of Watchfire Signs by choice.

Phillips Signs sales manager Matt Phillips and Watchfire representative Ben Barr met with Riley for an on-site sign demonstration. Riley had looked at other brands, but none impressed as much as Watchfire. "It stood out immediately because of its clarity," he said. Still, Riley continued his research, driving the roads of Sussex County looking closely at other LED signs owned by local businesses. "Eventually, I recognized a pattern," he said. "All the best-looking signs had a Watchfire logo on them."

More than a few Sussex County businesses have trusted Watchfire thanks to Phillips Signs' relationship with the brand. Matt Phillips says being a Watchfire dealer "just makes good business sense. We've dealt with other manufacturers, but Watchfire offers a superior product," he said. "We like the overall package Watchfire offers, from tech support to software to the product in general."

Sussex FCU was so thoroughly satisfied with their first purchase that they installed Watchfire signs at two other branches. "At our fourth location, we had to apply for a zoning variance because the ordinance wouldn't allow LED signs. We recently received that variance," Riley said. It's a relief, Riley said, because the signs are far more than an advertising tool for the credit union. "I'm a retired state trooper, and when I realized we could use these for Amber Alerts and promoting community involvement, that appealed to me right away," he said.

In the end, an LED sign does numerous things for the credit union: it gets attention; it educates the public; it serves as a venue for community messages. Most importantly, it does what it was purchased to do - increase traffic in each Sussex County FCU branch, driving up membership numbers.

"We have been able to promote not just memberships, but loans, credit cards and more," Riley said. "We know for a fact the sign brings in people."

**-- Allen Riley, Vice president of operations,
Sussex County Federal Credit Union**

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BY TIME-O-MATIC