

FIDS - A New Viewpoint



Everyone knows that in order to succeed in business you need to have a flexible approach. With this in mind, Sentel has delivered a new product for the FIDS market – Midas ViewPoint Secure, a flexible and advanced multi-purpose information display system based on an embedded PC (ePC), this being essentially a small computer unit designed for high-reliability graphic-intensive applications that need to function round the clock.

Midas ViewPoint Secure is a software application that airports can use to display general and airport data to passengers and staff on a network of ePCs; this display can also include customised TV distribution, while delivering the highest reliability and quality of information and the best in video presentation.

Turin Upgrade

Sentel was recently awarded the contract for Turin International Airport's new public and staff information display system. Turin will be the first major airport hub to deploy a secure display system with a total of 232 LCD display screens throughout the facility. This is designed to be ready for the Winter Olympics 2006, for which Turin is the host airport, and will replace the original ViewPoint system installed in 1999, which controlled 178 Sentel ePCs and screens, for which there was not one single IT support incident.

ViewPoint is unique as it provides easy-to-use advanced data processing and display facilities that enable information screens to be generated without the need to write scripts, allowing airports to be more self-reliant and thereby save on costs. A comprehensive range of

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edit dialogs allows users to precisely specify operational properties, from individual screen objects to data filter and playback schedules. It is a true object-based display application written entirely in the professional C++ language, producing fast and reliable code in contrast to many competing applications developed in Visual Basic. Turin Airport's IT manager Italo Guglielmetti has been able to support all the needs of its users without requesting technical support because the system has been so easy to operate. In addition, the latest version provides automatic warning via email or SMS message direct to mobile phones should there be any system problems, including in the event of any remote displays ceasing to function.

In addition to the public flight displays, Mr Guglielmetti has used ViewPoint to provide information displays for baggage and catering staff, and for airport managers, providing real-time information about airport operations. Although each computer running ViewPoint (the clients) can connect directly to a wide-range of databases, as in Turin, the usual technique is to use Midas Secure Server applications to access the databases and distribute data to the clients via encrypted datagrams (small packets of data). This ensures that only the data required is transmitted, ensuring efficient and fast operation, and that the load on the database and the network is kept to a minimum. The server application can process and filter data before sending it, and clients can provide further processing and filtering as required, creating a flexible, fault-tolerant and efficient solution.

As an example, a typical airport display system – including arrivals, departures and baggage screens for a

Robin Colclough, Information Display Systems Manager for Sentel Advance, describes the company's new Midas ViewPoint system purchased by Turin Airport.

medium-sized airport – can be set up in one afternoon. ViewPoint is installed on one or more workstations and the remote embedded-PCs controlling the display screens, at which point users can begin controlling the displays immediately.

In addition to a free library of sample screen formats, users can design their own screens using the real-time form editor, which allows even the most complex animated screens to be designed and tested without the need for scripts. In addition, content can be mixed on-screen, from textual data to animations, all the latest video formats, web content, and Macromedia and PowerPoint presentations, which are all safely controlled.

In fact, Sentel guarantees that if a client has a requirement that ViewPoint is currently unable to meet, it will add the required feature free of charge. This is the reason that ViewPoint continues to evolve with the features clients need most.

Recent Innovations

Another recent innovation is the addition of professional CCTV or Web cameras to each display point, providing a low-cost surveillance system which operates across the ViewPoint network. System users can select any ePC in the network from their PC and view not only what is displayed on each remote information screen, but are also

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able to see and record images from the local cameras in real-time.

ePC – The Embedded-PC

Sentel's range of ePCs now includes two new models for 2006, available for leasing or purchase. The lower-energy model, ColdFusion, smaller than a notebook and just 44mm high, is based on the new VIA Luke chipset. The higher-power model, PowerCore, based on the latest proven Intel 945 chipset, can handle the heaviest workloads, and is 80mm high. Both are available with high-reliability hard drives with 500,000-hour operational life (mtbf) or solid-state drives, and a wide range of options, including control of two monitor displays with independent information from a single ePC.

The Sentel ePC was primarily developed to provide a stable and reliable platform for Midas ViewPoint, which although it can be installed on any modern PC, would not bring the same advantages of reliability and performance which are gained by using the ePC. Sentel works directly with the core component manufacturers to ensure that their software (hardware drivers, etc) are stable for long-term operation. Testing the system as a whole yields controllable consistency and consequently reliable performance, and this substantially reduces costs, both for Sentel and its customers.

