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New Service Keeps Office Workers Up to Date

By Maureen Wilkey, Staff Writer



A chilly breeze blows through the lobby of 10 South Riverside Plaza as the building's employees, bundled up in coats, scarves and hats hurry in.

Some rush straight to the elevators while others dawdle in front of the security desk, finishing up cell phone conversations or pulling off gloves; and many glance up to the brightly colored 37-inch flat screen panels hanging just outside the elevators and inside the lobby's front glass.

More people linger over their morning cigarette outside, taking notice of the stock prices and news flashes floating across the screen that hangs outside the lobby's front window.

Hoping to draw everyone's attention is the Wall Street Journal Office Network, which has expanded its service in Chicago, mounting its glitzy flat-screens in seven new buildings.

The screens have website-like updates of news and the stock market for people as they stand in lobbies or wait for elevators. Content is updated by the Wall Street Journal, sometimes every few minutes.

It's something for workers to do while waiting for the elevator, says Tim Conway, general manager of 680 North Lakeshore Drive, one of the buildings with the network.

"More people look at it than not while they're waiting for the elevator," Conway says. "It's a good way to convey important information and also something to do while you're waiting."

Conway likes that one screen out of a several screen rotation is controlled by the building manager, so he can display messages about what is going on in the building or anything of local interest. Last week, for example, he put up a message wishing the Bears luck in the Superbowl.

In addition, building owners get a portion of the revenue generated by the advertising on the screens.

WSJ Office Network is currently operating in Class A buildings in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Washington D.C. as well. Jim Harris, CEO of Office Media Networks, says he plans to get the network started in five or six more cities in 2007.

“We did surveys in the first few buildings we put it in, and the response was overwhelmingly positive,” Harris says.

He says many building owners say it has helped them to lease space. However, Robert Sevim, Corporate Managing Director at Studley, says that while WSJ Office Network is a nice “peripheral amenity,” he doesn’t think it will really help sell space.

“It might be a new, sexy enhancement; it might help with the appeal of the building,” he says. “But at the end of the day, a firm is going to look at how much a space is going to cost and how their company and employees will fit in that space, not whether or not there’s a Wall Street Journal display in the lobby.”

Harris says the network is a unique amenity that is usually relevant to people who work in the buildings. Trevor Shattuck, who works at 120 South Riverside Plaza, one of the buildings with WSJ Network, agrees.

“I check it every day,” Shattuck says. “It’s updated every couple of minutes, so I can get my stock information before I read WSJ online later.”

Shattuck says on nice days he watches the outside display on the building while on breaks, and he checks the screen in the elevator lobby any time he is there. Shattuck’s coworker Patrick McCarthy says he enjoys the “personal journal” feature on the network.

Mike Kay and Rick Toned work next door at 10 S. Riverside, and they say they hardly ever check the screens.

“It’s nice to see the stock quotes up there if I do have to wait for the elevator,” Toned says. “But I don’t think it really adds any convenience to the building.”

Josh Greenwald, a spokesperson for Office Media Networks, says the content is updated throughout the day to match the stories on the website, and there is a specific editor in charge of updating the network.

“There’s updated breaking news throughout the day,” he says. “The large screens have a good impact and we mainly focus on buildings that are big enough for this to make sense.”

Another feature Conway and Harris like is the ability for a building manager to suspend the content in the case of an emergency. The screens could display a static message informing people on how to evacuate the building.

Conway says the only complaint he has received about the screen is that it doesn’t match the 1924 vintage of his building.

“But most people like that it doesn’t look like the rest of the building,” he says. “It’s useful and it adds a high-tech nature to the older building.”

While some compare WSJ Online to Captivate, a similar service provided by Gannett that places smaller screens inside of elevators, Harris says the network is unique and not really in competition with Captivate.

“People are anxious to make us competitors but we’re trying to do a couple things that are very different,” Harris says. “We have original content and the two things really aren’t in the same space.”

The service is up-and-running at 225 West Washington, 33 North LaSalle, 680 Lake Shore Place, 10 South Riverside Plaza, 120 South Riverside Plaza, 550 West Washington Boulevard, Two North LaSalle Street, and Tower South Park, 211 West Adams.

Building that will get the service this year are 300 South Wacker, 401 North Michigan Avenue, Lakeside Point I & II, 120 Lakeside Drive (Waukegan), 1717 Deerfield Road (Deerfield), Bannockburn Centre, 1200 Lakeside Drive (Bannockburn).