

ENCO Automation is a “Game Changer” for Award-Winning High School Station WAHS-FM

By Kimberly McKnee

Station Manager

WAHS 89.5 FM, Avondale High School

Auburn Hills, MI – Owned and operated by Avondale School District in Auburn Hills, Michigan, non-profit WAHS 89.5 FM – branded as “Avondale Community Radio” – provides practical educational experience in radio broadcasting for students at Avondale High School while also serving the local community. Launched with 10 watts of power in 1975, we now have the furthest-reaching high school radio signal in Michigan at 2400 watts.

When I was asked to rebuild the program in 2013, WAHS had been dormant for years because of funding cuts, it was simply rebroadcasting another station’s programming. Notably from a technology standpoint, we had no automation system, which we needed to make our vision of growth a reality.

As an English teacher, I was new to radio, so I started researching automation software. I visited ENCO at a trade show, and the user-friendliness of the DAD platform stood out right away. ENCO also showed a genuine interest in helping our small station achieve big goals. Add to that ENCO’s training offerings and local support, and DAD became the obvious choice.

As our educational justification and funding processes took time, we deployed ENCO DAD in September 2016. ENCO provided extensive on-site training including a one-on-one session with myself, and two days with the students.

Our students produce most of WAHS’ content and run many of the day-to-day operations. Our workflow starts with students loading music and other content into the DAD library, with the DAD Dropbox utility making it easy for them to ingest music ripped from CDs or downloaded material. The kids simply drag and drop the files into a folder, and Dropbox performs any necessary conversions and inserts them into the library. We use the same method to bring in original content such as liners, show intros, PSAs and sponsor promotion spots that students record in our studio and edit with Adobe Audition.

We love producing live-assist shows with DAD’s intuitive Presenter interface. The students bring their content into the daily playlist, set the system to manual operation, and do their live show, setting DAD back to full automation afterwards. ENCO also makes it easy to record those shows, do some basic editing, and schedule them as replays. We can do a live show during class time in the morning, and by the end of the school day, we have it saved and scheduled to replay in the evening.

Another great ENCO tool we use is the Enconveyor utility. Last year, we expanded our programming to include nationally syndicated programs alongside music, locally produced content, and high school football coverage. Enconveyor makes it easy to bring in syndicated content, automatically downloading the audio files from the web or FTP sites and bringing them into DAD in the format we need.

ENCO DAD’s ease of use has enabled our kids to learn and accomplish a tremendous amount in a very short period of time. In our on-air studio, our everyday student operators start doing live-assist productions with a mentor, and typically master it themselves by the second or third show. Students performing other functions do a brief tutorial and are mentored a couple of times, then are comfortable enough to go solo.

The ENCO automation system has truly been a game changer for us. Before we had it, the students would go live, but that was the end of the road. They could record something, but there was no way to then replay it unless someone was in the studio. We were rebroadcasting another school’s signal and just doing our own small live spots.

Now, with our own production systems, live studio, and ENCO automation, we're fully our own station – and in fact, one of the best in the state. Less than six months after we went live with ENCO, we were honored as High School Radio Station of the Year by the Michigan Association of Broadcasters – an accolade that reflects not only our creativity and content, but also the production values that DAD helps us achieve.

Everyone associated with WAHS is very happy we chose ENCO DAD, from the school board of education right down to newbie pupils. Our users are students, not professionals, but ENCO is enabling us to produce really good, professional-grade radio broadcasts.

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