

&gt;&gt; TECHNOLOGY &lt;&lt;

# SIGNS OF THE FUTURE

Venues take display technology to the next level

by LINDA DOMINGO

In 1908, George Baird invented the first electronic scoreboard. Just over a century later, venues are ushering in a new age of digital signage technology to not only enhance the guest experience, but to streamline operations and create new and innovative opportunities for increased revenue through advertising and sponsorships.


use at the Rose Garden Arena and Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment at Toronto's Air Canada Centre. Portland started to seriously look into new digital signage technology about six months ago and is excited about the new possibilities for branding and interactivity.

"We could do variable pricing by event," said Chris Dill, CIO with the Portland Trail

Blazers for installation. Software, computers, training and software installation cost about \$120,000. To save money, the Trail Blazers bought consumer-grade televisions instead of commercial grade. "They're really only going to be on for four or five hours for an event," said Robert Hanlon, database manager for the Blazers.

Air Canada Centre's digital signage project cost the venue \$3 million. The facility officially started planning the project in January of 2009, and the current rollout consists of transitional or walk-by areas, which have about 320 LCD screens of varying sizes. They will soon move into concessions, merchandise, washrooms and other areas. Land Shark Stadium's digital signage setup is made up of about 1,600 displays, but the cost of the entire project is yet to be determined.

The Trail Blazers, who have created 15- to 20-second ad inventory within their menus, plan to see large returns on their investment in digital signage within the very near future. "We've seen a lot of excitement," Dill said of advertisers. "They've gone wild, so that's the kind of advertising I want to be doing. If we were to set our goals to sell all our ad inventory the first year, we'd probably bring in almost double what it costs to build this thing."

The Trail Blazers have their sights set on some futuristic applications, including touch-screens throughout the venue, barcode or RFID interfaces with digital signs, or perhaps a display at the entrance where guests will flash their ticket and their favorite player will greet them to the game. "We really feel that digital signage is on the verge of exploding. It really is a new medium," said Dill. "And you do see it in more places than you ever did." 

**"THEY'VE [ADVERTISERS] GONE WILD, SO THAT'S THE KIND OF ADVERTISING I WANT TO BE DOING." — CHRIS DILL**

While the term "digital signage" generally refers to an electronic display, vendors such as Cisco, Omnivex, X20, Scala, Harris, and Visix are offering much more than just another place to put an ad. Venues can now connect every monitor in their building to a network and control them from a central location, or various locations if needed, feeding and changing content in real time.

For example, Omnivex's digital signage software, Moxie, can be integrated into a venue's concession operations to play a large role in promotions and inventory control. "Some facilities are using the same software to run the scoreboards, the ring around the seats, even the timer clock," said Jeff Collard, president of Omnivex. The software has capabilities to associate specific promotions or brands with a particular player that has just stepped into the game, or notify fans that beer won't be available in the fourth quarter of the game, and then automatically take beer off the menu once the fourth quarter starts.

Recent adopters of the Moxie software include the Portland (Ore.) Trail Blazers for

Blazers of the venue's menu boards. "If all of a sudden there's an inflation on the cost of goods and we have to up the prices, it's almost an automatic one or two click type of thing."

Cisco offers the sports and entertainment industry another option in StadiumVision, unveiled at Miami's Land Shark Stadium in September. The facility is using digital signage not only at concession stands, where game action plays alongside menus, but also in the suites. The signage allows the facility to change the branding of each suite on different days, depending on the event or client.

"So as a suiteholder comes in, they'll be in their place, they'll be in their home," said Tery Howard, senior vice president and chief technology officer at Land Shark Stadium. While suite holders are enjoying the game, they can select any HD camera angle to view the game on the monitors through controls on a Cisco Unified IP Phone.

Portland spent \$425,000 on the entire project, about \$205,000 of the cost being allocated for 800 televisions and another \$70,000

Interviewed for this story: **Chris Dill and Robert Hanlon**, (503) 234-9291; **Jeff Collard**, (626) 388-7570; **Tery Howard**, (954) 452-7136