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# The Evolution of Digital Signage



POSTED BY: **Anonymous** in Best Practices  
TOPIC: **Applications**  
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There have been numerous technological advances that reshape the way people communicate and interact with information. We are in the midst of one such advance – the development and acceptance of digital signage. By combining the capabilities of computer graphics, broadband access and flat panel display technologies, digital signage is becoming more prevalent as a communications resource for many CIOs and their companies.

In order to provide some guidance on the real promise of this technology, we can look at the rise of the Internet to explain how things might unfold with digital signage.

When looking at the societal acceptance of new mass communications technologies, like the Internet, three phases become apparent:

- Phase 1: focus on infrastructure
- Phase 2: focus on content
- Phase 3: focus on context

When the National Science Foundation created network access points for commercial companies in 1995, they opened the web to the world. Soon after, telecommunications firms created a backbone for national and regional Internet service providers (ISPs) to connect. Phase 1, developing the infrastructure for the Internet, happened very quickly.

Phase 2 kicked in with the introduction of browsers. People started creating websites. With time, the Internet became a huge content and data cloud but was in danger of becoming a compilation of static screens with little relation to the people viewing them.

With the advent of Web 2.0, phase 3 arrived and suddenly the web shifted from a repository to an information delivery system based on the viewer, not the author. The web now had context so adoption accelerated. Search engines provided contextual search and its by-product, personal relevance, to information. Web 2.0 created a rich user experience, both dynamic and participatory.

A new phase for Digital Signage  
Digital signage is following the same three phase approach and that allows us to develop better strategy and implementation.

The digital signage industry has had ties to stock exchanges, call center queues and other less public uses. The early driver for the industry was hardware-focused, evidenced by the industry's name, digital signage. Systems were sold based on the promise of what might become available from the content side, and installations grew dramatically, especially in consumer-facing locations.

Many early digital signage networks were stuck in the same phase 2 limitations of the Internet. Just because you have content on a screen does not mean that anyone looks at it. The problem with phase 2 strategies: the presumption that people will watch what you push out regardless of relevance.

If too much information is irrelevant, viewers will tire of the displays and the effectiveness is compromised. This creates a public backlash about the intrusiveness and irrelevance of ads and people tune out.

The industry now finds itself entering a consumer-centric phase 3. Users want relevance. With digital signage, this puts a premium on attaching context to the messages so that they are indeed more relevant to the viewer. Context is the next big issue for the industry to resolve.

People are already migrating away from a hardware-focus and even basic content to a need for intelligent content, or contextual content. By thinking of digital signage as a communications tool, CIOs are realizing they need to place intelligence at the point of display to capture relevant product data, customer interactions and other events that impact the environment. For instance, it is possible to use face recognition and other contextual data to dynamically change messages to suit a particular audience. RFID solutions can also make information more relevant and therefore more effective to the viewer.

As previously seen, the transition from content to context is a natural phase in industrial evolution, so any CIO looking to upgrade his current signage should embrace that fact. Content might be king, but to make the system really work, you can't overlook the importance of a context-driven solution.

— A post from Jeff Collard President of Omnivex Corporation ([www.omnivex.com](http://www.omnivex.com)), the provider of enterprise-wide software that manages all aspects of digital signage networks, including content management, real-time data acquisition and distribution, and remote device management. Jeff can be reached at [jcollard@omnivex.com](mailto:jcollard@omnivex.com).

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