

Trees, Wood & Digital Signage!

Technology is really rolling into place now for screen media and digital signage solutions. *John Taylor* puts a little perspective on it all.

Still innovation oozes into digital technology, with screen media networks and digital signage no exception. Indeed, continually proliferating software and hardware innovation now provides a serious challenge to those considering digital signage implementation and even re-implementation.

Now more than ever before, it's important to weigh up all the pros and cons more deeply, considering proposed projects really carefully. Evaluating proposals, requirements and solutions is crucial to success. That means seriously addressing content and its delivery as well as the audience and the ramifications of how the disparate parts of a digital signage solution sit together.

Recent screen and indeed awesome software capabilities are now driving screen media networks and digital signage, widening the prospects of the technology. Jeff Collard, President of Omnivex, gives his perspective: "Right now," he says, 'we are at a point in time where the goal posts are shifting. Recent advances in operating systems, displays and processors allow software developers much greater freedom to do more complex things.'

Expanding that thought, Jeff Collard says. "Displays are no longer limited to a fixed size or orientation, and syncing multiple displays is becoming common in many software products. The ability to manipulate content based on real time data makes that content more expressive, targeted and effective. Multi-touch capabilities will make interactive experiences even better. The term signage will be less applicable as digital environments evolve around the viewer experience. Software companies have had to learn a whole new set of skills, re-engineering their products to take advantage of new capabilities. And those investments are starting to bear fruit!"

Step back a year and interactivity was the buzzword, with its much vaunted promise of providing those vital extras that a simple sell cannot deliver: the ability to give added value, to do more to bring people in, to involve them and take things on to further stages with even more opportunities. Interactivity can also be used to advantage in vending machines, selling events, even train tickets, promote events, print vouchers, conduct market research, reward loyalty and more, all to a more targeted audience.

Whilst interactivity now soars with multi-touch capabilities, such innovation as that of the iPhone is now available to screen media networks, digital signage, kiosks and more. Other, just as relevant associated technology, has taken a quantum leap too. Screen technology certainly drops into that category and Amsterdam's ISE, for example, threw up Prism, MicroTiles, Mitsubishi's OLED innovations and a host of innovation on the screens and displays front.

Prysm's new laser phosphor display, LPD, tile solution boasts groundbreaking large format display technology, said to deliver



unparalleled performance without the shortcomings of conventional displays. The high resolution, tiled solution is highly configurable, delivering energy savings via long life components, with built-in flexibility for applications from arenas to airports.

Prysm's TD1 tile arrays can be seamlessly integrated into displays of any size or shape, delivering stunning displays on multi panel 'walls'. Tiles measure up at 15x20in wide, with a pixel pitch of 1.6mm and resolution of 320x240 pixels. Brightness is 1000nit and contrast ratio is 200,000:1

In similar vein, enabling video walls and screen arrays of virtually any size and shape, Christie's MicroTiles integrate DLP, LED and rear projection. MicroTiles also are bezel-free and virtually seamless, and without compromise on contrast and clarity. Viewed from distance, these technologies are simply great! Taking a different but nonetheless visually stunning route is Mitsubishi with its OLED displays, just one of several new display technologies from the innovative company.

Its 149in OLED screen prototype previewed at ISE is a scalable solution based on electro-luminescence. Each pixel comprises an anode and cathode separated by a thin organic membrane, delivering a light and thin surface that is edgeless, with modules easily joining together seamlessly in any size and shape, including curves. Screen resolution is 1088x 640 pixels with a 3mm pixel pitch.



Southcentre shopping mall, photos courtesy of Omnivex



Driving 3D

Of course the current buzzword is 3D which is sure to get more grip in the expanse of screen media networks and digital signage. Screens are more expensive and so is content production but certainly 3D is a space to watch as it can maintain and further the essential wow factor requirement of stunning displays and watchability.

There are some stunning 3D screens around at present from the likes of LG and Samsung which are glasses-free. And there are others, equally stunning, from the likes of Hyundai which need glasses and are thus more for captured audience applications.

Earlier this year, in February, Magnetic 3D glasses-free autostereoscopic 3D LCDs were mobilised for the Sun Life Stadium's Suites of the Future campaign for the Super Bowl. The campaign gave NFL team owners at the Super Bowl an exclusive first look at the next generation of out of home entertainment and innovative fan engagement.

"The 3D technology made a great impression on all who entered the suites," says Tery Howard, Senior Information Technology VP for the Miami Dolphins and Sun Life Stadium. "Our VIP Super Bowl guests were amazed at the glasses-free 3D technology and the high definition clarity of the displays. We are truly transforming the way our fans experience the game."

The project featured a 42in Allura screen delivering HD, glasses-free 3D video and images whilst also providing backwards compatibility with traditional 2D using the Magnetic 3D FuzionCast network player. Those in the suites were even able to watch 2D content on the same screens, providing a seamless experience for the audience.

"The combination of our simultaneous 2D and 3D capable Allura displays and FuzionCast player enabled the Suites of the Future to demonstrate the next level in major stadium and event experiences at this year's Super Bowl," comments Eric Angello, Magnetic 3D's Marketing & Creative VP. "Not only was the content an exciting complement to the game's thrilling live action but our content distribution channel also seamlessly deployed each stage right on cue. Throughout the event, this maintained a steadily engaging, and unforgettable, in-stadium experience for the fans, right up until we broadcast the winning logo to cement another place in football history at the end of the game."

Measuring your audience

And obviously vital to the whole concept of screen media networks and digital signage is audience metrics, identifying not just the audience watching specific content but also providing a vital marker for advertisers on what they get for their advertising spend.

Latest moves in audience metrics include Australia's outdoor media industry launch of Move, the country's first, national, industry wide audience measurement planning tool for outdoor media. Measurement of Outdoor Visibility and Exposure, Move, is web based and interactive, providing a planning tool for media buyers, advertisers and outdoor media operators, covering all major OOH environments including roadside, airports, rail and bus stations, as well as buses, trams and shopping centres.

Move is seen as introducing new and more accurate audience measurements. Likelihood To See, for example, considers only those who in all probability will see an outdoor advertising face in audience viewing results. Alternative media tend to base results on passers-by who have the 'opportunity' to see particular content, regardless of whether they actually do or not. Five major outdoor media companies, APN Outdoor, EYE, Adshel, JCDecaux and oOh!media, along with Australia's Outdoor Media Association have stumped up \$ 10 million in equity and resources to develop the system over three years. The Federal Government's Industry Co-operative Innovation Programme also supported the move with a grant of \$830,000.

"The outdoor media industry has taken a giant leap forward by delivering its promise to provide a fully transparent and accountable audience measurement tool that will be directly available to media agencies, advertisers and OMA members," states Move's Chairman, Steve O'Connor. The Move system was built by a consortium of Australian and international researchers, headed by the Brisbane based transport and traffic modeller Veitch Lister Consulting. Simon Cooper, architect of the UK's Postar outdoor audience measurement system, was also a key participant.