

Successful Digital Signage Contingent on Aligning Powerful Technology with Sound Business Strategy

The age of dynamic digital signage is upon us. You won't travel very far without seeing an advertisement in a grocery store, a menu in a restaurant or a way-finding display in a hotel – all running on large-screen monitors. There's a lot of excitement about digital signage and its potential. iSuppli, a major market intelligence firm, predicts global sales of digital signage will reach \$14.6 billion annually by 2011. Companies see the possibilities for increased revenues, reduced costs, and healthier customer and employee relationships. But the actual displays are only a small part of the equation. A digital signage system won't transform your business without a sound strategy and the right technology behind it. Here are four principles to consider before deploying a digital signage platform.

1. Context is King

There's an erroneous assumption that if something is playing on a digital sign, people will watch it. But think again. If the content isn't relevant or interesting to the viewer, why would they? Effectively engaging audiences to inform, motivate or persuade is not just about creative content, it's also about timing, environment and relevance. In a word: CONTEXT. When businesses target messages to individual viewers based on who they are, where they are, what they are doing, and what that location has to offer, then they can fulfill customer needs (both internal and external customers).

The message that you deliver to a young single man looking for a car may be quite different from the one you provide to a working mom with kids at the same location or to that same man at different times of the day. Many companies talk about this capability but are limited to specific responses or simple play-list manipulation. But adapting the content is not pie-in-the-sky. It's actually happening now. Take for example the Vancouver International Airport's display network. Way-finding and other information on its digital displays change languages based on the origination of a flight. If the plane lands from Mexico City, then the board at that gate renders information in Spanish, in addition to French and English (Canada's two official languages). The Hyatt Regency Chicago deploys the same system in a manner that is much more consumer specific. Content can change on digital displays around the hotel based on individual customer characteristics that are encoded on an RFID chip in a conference badge or card key that moves with them, directing them to the appropriate venue. With the advent of face recognition and other sensory technologies, you are able to get more information that can be used to determine appropriate content within a presentation.

2. Real-Time Information Drives Results

Context is derived from a set of circumstances related to a particular event or situation. The more focused the message or the more recent the event, the greater the impact. Real-time information connects a call to action to an opportunity and a result. For many businesses, that is a significant competitive advantage. In retail, inventory turns are an important measure of profitability. If your digital signage system can match customers with the appropriate products that are currently available to purchase, both the consumer and the store benefit. If you promote an item that is not currently in stock, you undermine the credibility of your organization and aggravate a customer. Price changes



may be implemented at different locations at different times based on stock levels or number of patrons in the store at a given point in time. As stock of an old model depletes, promotions at each store may vary as their local inventory is sold. Price changes may be timed to minimize the number of customers who might have an item in their cart when the price change is implemented to avoid inconveniencing those customers.

Live data can be pushed to each screen the instant something changes to drive an event or inform the viewer. Simple polling for information that is eventually downloaded and read into your content doesn't trigger events; it lags behind them. Companies today are awash with information and are looking for ways to make it actionable. By connecting your data directly to your visual communications network, you make these precious assets work for you and not against you. Insist that your digital signage system relies on live data. A strong data foundation is a strategic advantage that will pay huge dividends while making your messaging dynamic and meaningful to your audience.

3. Expectations Rise with HDTV, Video Games

The world is moving to high-definition content. Analog television will end in the United States in February 2009. Your television at home, your video game systems and new Blu-ray disc player will all be HD. Just as the introduction of color television quickly ended the production of black and white content, 3D vectored graphics will become the new video standard, and flat, low resolution content will die off. Consumers will come to expect rich media consistent with the quality that they can receive at home. Products and messages are an extension of the media, and weak content will be associated with weak products.

Vectored graphics automatically scale to fit any screen without the pixilation that today's rastered images suffer, so your message will look good on every screen in your world regardless of resolution. High-definition 3D graphics will bring images to life, making messages more compelling and actionable.

People today have access to much greater diversity and choice. In a customer centric world, supply chains revolve around individual customer needs. Progressive companies are looking for better ways to communicate their messages and engage their audiences. They are investing in technologies that not only ensure that their messages will have a receptive audience but deliver value to their customers. Great graphics are needed to capture their attention, and relevant graphics will deliver results.

4. Pay Attention to your Network

An effective digital signage system should drive costs down and efficiencies up. Too many people focus on content delivery and proof of play, ignoring what it costs them to deliver those messages or ensuring that the system is actually running. Your content might be playing on the PC or media player but if the screen is turned off or input changed, no one will receive your message, and your proof of play logs will be misleading. A properly configured system not only tells you that your message played, but that the display was on and properly configured to the right input. It should also monitor the hardware and automatically take corrective action when necessary. These displays are expensive assets and when they are not working properly, they are costing you money.

Bandwidth is expensive and although the infrastructure is growing, so are the requirements from other applications. Efficient transmission is becoming a major factor in the operating cost of digital signage networks. Digital signage software should ensure that your assets are delivered in the most efficient manner. If a change is required, then only the information pertinent to the change should go to the display. Recreating and redistributing a large video or Flash file because one small piece of information changed is an unacceptable and unnecessary expense. The change should happen



automatically without any content recreation effort.

Different people need access to different information about your network. A marketing person should be able to dynamically drill down and look at a video asset in real-time in the same way that the system operator can drill down to look at a hardware asset. The experience should be the same in both cases. Good network tools allow different people to do their jobs independent of each other in a way that protects the security and integrity of your business. You don't want to create information log jams that prevent people from gaining access to the information they need.

As you roll out your digital signage system, keep in mind that technology supporting a well-thought out business strategy will deliver the critical building blocks for growing revenues, reducing costs and endearing you to customers for years to come.

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