

# Jumping on the Digital Signage Bandwagon

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Digital signage is starting to hit its stride in the marketplace. Marketers, retailers, facilities managers, and other public venue managers are starting to get the message that dynamic signage is the wave of the future, and that they need to get on the bandwagon. At The Digital Signage Group we are seeing a tremendous amount of interest from all segments of the marketplace – from end users, integrators, content providers and everyone in between.

The challenge is to harness that upswing in awareness and desire to actually getting companies into digital signage. While there are a lot of projects underway, and even more people talking about it, the real potential of digital signage is exponentially larger. With all of the opportunities out there and the high level of buzz surrounding the industry these days, what is it that's keeping the majority of buyers and potential end-users on the sidelines?

## **Why Digital Signage**

Many potential network owners get into building a system without really understanding what it is that they are trying to accomplish. They see other people – competitors maybe – deploying systems and thinking, "I need to do that, too." They get someone to sell them screens and players and software, but once they get them installed they realize that they didn't know what it was that they were trying to achieve. All of this leads to frustration and disappointment that this digital signage thing isn't as cool as it was supposed to be, but it isn't the fault of the technology.

## **Content**

The element that seems to be most likely to make or break a digital signage system is the content. Although a popular first idea, simply re-purposing TV ads or marketing presentations almost always results in less than optimal outcomes. Digital signage is a new medium that is fundamentally different than any other and the rules are different. The target audience needs to have a reason to look at the screen. It isn't enough just to have movement or flashy graphics. There has to be some reason for someone to look at the screen and actually pay attention. Even more importantly the screens, and in turn the content, have to generate results. Those results might be increased store traffic and sales, or shortened perceived wait times and reduced wayfinding questions. Whatever it may be, content is going to be the driver.

## **Technology**

While the various technologies available for digital signage systems are making huge strides in feature sets, falling prices, and improved interoperability, there is a lot more to a successful digital signage deployment. At The Digital Signage Group we have yet to find a single project that didn't have some unique characteristic that required careful design and integration engineering. For example, while most of the asset management software packages will support a wide range of functions that most of the signage systems need, they all have their own particular focus and specialties. The right software package is one that best fits the organization that is using it. Workflow, compatibility with legacy systems, and even organizational culture all play a part when deciding on the right technology.

## **Achieving Success**

So how does one deploy a successful system? First you need to know what the end-user wants to do with the system. Sometimes they don't even know, so it is important to help them understand what is possible and what it is that they are trying to accomplish. Second, choose the right partners that can provide the right mix of function, operational compatibility. If it doesn't do what they need it to do in a way that they are comfortable using it, the price doesn't matter – it'll

fail. Third, make sure someone who understands both the challenges and the benefits that dynamic signage presents handles the content.

### **Measuring Success**

Once the system is in place and operating, it is important to measure its success. Content operations (production, distribution, etc.) are expensive. While systems can pay for themselves through advertising sales or by increasing register receipts, it is tough to justify the ongoing costs to the bean counters if there are no data points to prove it. On-going success requires some way of measuring the results.

### **Size Doesn't Matter...Really**

It isn't just about the "mega systems" that everyone drools over and that you read about in the trade magazines every month. While those projects are glitzy and enticing, there are a lot more of the small to mid-sized projects out there. Those projects can be just as technologically exciting – if not more so – and just as profitable for everyone involved. The rules mentioned above still hold true, but the problems are different and often require more creativity to make successful.

### **Digital Signage Is For Everyone**

Although it's one of the more popular areas at the moment, digital signage isn't just for the retail market. Transportation, education, government, and civic facilities can all benefit from creative and impactful digital signage deployments. Essentially any place where people are asked to wait, or where you'd install a traditional sign are excellent places to install a dynamic sign. Doctor's offices, automotive repair waiting rooms, or ticket booths are all good examples. A lot of theatres are getting into the act by placing signs in areas where people wait in line to buy a ticket or in line to buy popcorn. The theaters are taking the opportunity to promote products available at the concession stand and movies that are coming soon. The theater operator can actually make money by selling the screen space to the concessions suppliers and the movie promoters. And, at the same time, the people waiting in line can be entertained so they don't notice how long they are waiting.

### **It's All About Who You Know**

Regardless of the location or what the content, a successful deployment is all about having the right partners. No matter what anyone tells you, one company can't do it all. The Digital Signage Group is in the business of helping potential digital signage network owners understand what it is that they are looking for and then putting the right team together to make it happen. We are also a resource for integrators, content suppliers, or anyone who has a client who wants to deploy a system but they don't know who to call to get the parts to complete the system.

### **The Time is Now**

Now is the time to get involved in digital signage. With traditional broadcast television advertising becoming less attractive and the power of narrowcasting becoming more accepted, there is a tremendous upsurge in interest on all fronts. Need proof? Look at the recent mergers and deals being announced – In Focus and the University Network, 3M and Mercury Online Solutions, IBN's Kroger deal, and the IPO of Focus Media, China's first public digital signage company. As vendors consolidate, the people already playing in the marketplace are going to have the advantage.

Sure there is a lot to think about, but that is why we started The Digital Signage Group and this magazine – so you have the knowledge and support you need to make it happen. Some of the brightest minds in digital signage have contributed articles to this directory issue, so I encourage you to read them. No more excuses. It's time to jump on the digital signage bandwagon; it's going to be a great ride!

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