Getting Started With Digital Signage: What You Need To Know To Be Successful

Key Takeaways

Digital signage is a medium that is used to enhance customer service, increase revenue and promote brand awareness.

Customers expect tech engagement, not static print mediums.

Companies that do not adopt digital signage in the next 5 years will be at a competitive disadvantage.

An understanding of the fundamentals of digital signage equips companies to drive powerful customer engagement.

Challenges

Confusion about the multiple aspects of building a successful digital signage solution.

Lack of understanding about digital signage purpose and technology.

Companies are reluctant to adopt digital signage until they are sure of its benefits.
Introduction

As business operations adapt to rapidly advancing technology, so do the methods in which companies communicate with customers and employees, particularly in the area of signage. Gone are the static bulletins, billboards and paper posters of old. The screen—digital signage—has become the modern tool to share content and grab the attention of an audience. According to Digital Signage Today, digital signage captures 400% more views than static displays, and has a recall rate of 83%, making it the new medium of choice for businesses wishing to increase revenue, retain customers and improve engagement. If you’ve considered implementing digital signage, here’s what you need to know to create a successful solution for your business.

What is digital signage?

Digital signage is a dynamic electronic medium that communicates information to a given audience using display screens. It’s deployed across a variety of industries both internally and externally. From boardrooms and waiting rooms to reception areas and travel hubs, screens offer instant engagement and lasting recall for the viewer. The flat screen television mounted in a bank’s reception area, the digital menu boards at the local fast food restaurant, the giant display in the company conference room? Each of these is an example of digital signage in action.

Unlike its static counterparts, digital signage is an agile, engaging communication tool because of its fluidity, CAPEx, ROI, speed and other extensive capabilities. The information displayed can be changed rapidly and managed centrally. As a medium, it has been shown to drive revenue, enhance the customer experience, and broaden the ability of businesses to build their brand identity and share their messaging. Because of this, digital signage use has grown exponentially in the last 20 years.
The Evolution of Digital Signage

The early roots of digital signage began in large cities. In Times Square, the world-famous “zipper” debuted in 1928, broadcasting news to passersby on the exterior of the Times Building. Headlines were loaded letter-by-letter into a conveyor system to cross thousands of lightbulbs. These letterforms contained components that triggered illumination of the bulbs and displayed the message.

Signage later advanced from those manual systems into set-ups that worked using analog video and large, heavy cathode ray display televisions (CRTs) that played pre-recorded content using VHS cassette tapes. In the 90s, the shift from VHS to DVD deployment made signage more user-friendly and more accessible to multiple industries—as did the options for slimmer, lighter displays utilizing plasma and LCD screens instead of CRTs. Contemporary digital signage is the fastest, least expensive and easiest to deploy of any of its predecessors due to the accessibility of the internet via cable and wireless connectivity and the near-continuous streamlining of modern displays.

Common Uses for Digital Signage

Digital signage can consist of a single screen or a network of displays broadcasting diverse or identical content simultaneously. Typically, signage falls into three categories: video/entertainment, directional/informational and audio/visual. These three uses can — and often do — overlap, and are the most common ways that companies and organizations leverage digital signage in their everyday operations.

Video/Entertainment: Signage is used to share content that keeps the viewer engaged and entertained. Restaurants, for example, use digital signage to share live television broadcasts such as sporting events, as well as interactive trivia and special offers. Other businesses, such as beauty salons, dental offices or county services offices, use signage to display content such as news broadcasts or television programs to help waiting customers pass the time between services.

Directional/Informational: Signage provides information to the user such as directions, schedules, important updates, area information and special offers. Hotels frequently use digital displays to share conference schedules, direct guests to amenities, or to share local news and travel updates. Airports push instant schedule changes and travel advisories to travelers as well as directions to various areas of the airport.

Audio/Visual: Many businesses use displays and audio equipment for internal company meetings, training and day-to-day communications with their employees and clients. Digital signage is also used in larger external settings, such as city council meetings, university lecture halls and classrooms, museums, zoos and other settings.

How does digital signage work?

Digital signage is comprised of multiple components that include external displays, media players and a content management system (CMS). Content is loaded to the content management system and pushed out to media players via wired cables or a wireless connection. The displays then broadcast the message according to the preset schedule.

Cloud-Based Solution vs. Premise-Based Solution

Digital signage has two types of accessibility: cloud-based and premise-based. Cloud-based solutions are accessible via the internet. Content exists on a server that is in the cloud, in the network or on the web. Depending on the permissions granted, content can be uploaded and edited anytime and anywhere the approved administrators have access to a computer. The content management software is hosted by the chosen software company.

By contrast, premise-based solutions are hosted by the owner. The content and software are contained in the company server, providing total system control. It should be noted that both solutions offer data security so that content can be safely managed.
Who uses digital signage?

Because of its versatility as a communication medium, digital signage is used in almost every industry across multiple verticals, both internally (employee-facing) and externally (customer-facing). As the technology has advanced, it has also become more affordable and easily deployable, increasing its use in a variety of markets. The global digital signage market is expected to hit $23B in value by 2023 because of rapid implementation by businesses and organizations of every type. These are just a few examples of how different industries are utilizing digital signage:

**Financial**
Financial institutions leverage signage to display current promotions such as new CDs, home mortgage rates, business account bonuses and more. In addition to that, displays can be placed in waiting areas to entertain, share up-to-the-minute financial news or inform customers about wait times and other pertinent topics.

**Restaurants**
Digital menu boards and personal tablets are rapidly becoming commonplace in restaurants to display menu items and special offers, and to streamline the ordering and payment processes. The agility of the medium allows restaurants to change menus or offers hourly, daily, and weekly without enormous expense or time. Additionally, signage supports the staff in increasing sales through upselling and promotions, resulting in greater revenue for the business.

**Hospitality & Travel**
Hotels and travel hubs use digital signage to provide information to their customers quickly and efficiently. Hotels, for example, use signage to display conference schedules, directions and local amenities. Airports and bus stations provide up-to-the-minute travel updates, giving customers instantaneous access to changes in their travel plans.

**Government**
Government deployment of digital signage is balanced between internal facing communication to employees and external communication to customers and citizens. A local DMV might utilize signage in the breakroom to share policies, department information and/or relevant news updates. Simultaneously, alternate screens in the lobby could share wait times, county information and a local news broadcast. County courthouses can utilize this for judges, changes in court case locations, etc.

**Healthcare**
Like government departments, the healthcare industry often deploys digital signage in a two-fold platform. Screens are used in waiting areas to entertain waiting patients and update them on service times. Internally, displays may share important health alerts/warnings for staff, important company updates and other pertinent information.

**Education**
Because of its multifaceted environment and diverse audience, the education industry has one of the broadest sets of deployment for digital signage. Classrooms and lecture halls use televisions to share information, videos and notes. Signage directs students to various locations and services, as well as informing them of upcoming events and activities. In lounge areas and waiting rooms, televisions entertain and inform students and faculty. Exterior signage placed in front of the school can advertise major events to passersby.

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How is digital signage implemented?
Once the equipment is installed, a system for getting content created, loaded and displayed must be put into place. Digital signage will also need an administrator to manage the content strategy, as well as a security plan to protect confidential data and equipment.

1. Content Creation
Begin planning a digital content strategy by determining how content will be created. If the choice is to design it in-house, be sure that the end-product will be clean, professional and on-brand. Some content management software will come with design tools to help in creation of messaging. The key to any design is to create visuals that are engaging and attractive to viewers. Some companies choose to hand off design to a professional agency. This is a good option for those who have a larger budget and desire the highest quality design. If an agency is out of the budget, an experienced freelancer can also develop content at a more affordable rate while still providing the aesthetic and skill of an agency.

2. Scheduling & Planning
To avoid gaps in broadcasting, it’s vital to create a comprehensive content schedule. Here are some questions to consider when developing your content strategy:

What is the purpose of my content?
As we discussed in the section Common Uses for Digital Signage, there are three general purposes for digital content. Knowing the main goal will create a schedule that brings the best results.

What is the average amount of time a viewer will spend engaged with my display?
If customers are mainly passing by the signage, repeating certain offers on a loop will make sense. However, if customers will spend a longer period watching the content - playing the same ad repeatedly will cause fatigue and irritation.

What are my peak hours/days/seasons of engagement?
Knowing when users will be most engaged with the signage allows content to be tailored to maximize results. For example, restaurants can schedule drink specials to pop up during the broadcasting of a football game to boost orders, or a bank could share information about an upcoming mortgage seminar in their waiting area before and during the peak home-selling months in their region.

3. Choose an Administrator
Once the content plan is built, the process of input and distribution should be managed by a designated administrator through a username and password. Administrative privileges can be restricted to scheduling content or expanded to complete control over the entire system. The number of administrators and the extent of their authority to make changes is flexible and strictly up to the discretion of the system owner.

4. Ensure Security
Whether choosing a cloud-based or a premise-based solution, it is vital to ensure that every point of the system is secure. Not only can data be compromised, screens can be hacked to play inappropriate content. The software provider should be able to offer security solutions to protect company data, as well as options for locking the equipment itself.
How is digital signage maintained?

Digital signage is high-use equipment that is expected to run for hours at a time. In many cases—airports, hotel lobbies, 24-hour restaurants—signage is operated continuously for days, weeks, or months with minimal downtime. Loss of use with this equipment because of system failure can result in reduced customer service, loss of revenue and other issues. Because of this, it’s vital to ensure the solution is protected with strong warranties and a solid service plan.

The Benefits of a Digital Signage Service Plan

Unless a company employs a digital signage specialist, there will be equipment issues that cannot be fixed in-house. When that happens, an expert will be needed to help solve the problem and get the system back up and running. This is where a solid service plan can save a great deal of time and money. Most products purchased for a digital signage solution are covered under a manufacturer’s warranty. However, this can often mean downtime for necessary equipment, particularly if the manufacturer requires that the hardware be sent in, rather than repairing onsite. Ensuring there are replacement parts on hand or some sort of stop gap plan is essential to maintaining the system.

Conclusion

Digital signage is a medium that is rapidly becoming a norm in modern business communication. Armed with an understanding of how the medium works, how it is used, and how it is deployed effectively, you now have the information you need to make the right choices for an effective digital signage solution.
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