

# Signs, Signs, Everywhere Signs

Using digital signage and self-service applications to reach the customer at the "last mile."

If you haven't noticed, digital signs are suddenly showing up everywhere. Retail stores, malls, movie theaters and banks are using digital signage as the tool of choice for advertising, customer education and self-service applications. In an age where people expect instant information at every location, the need for businesses to provide timely and targeted messages through a digital medium that effectively captures consumers' attention has become critical.

Advertising and customer service is critical to the success of any business and it is especially true for retailers who are trying to serve a broad range of consumers—ranging from well-informed, serious buyers to impulse shoppers. Retailers face the constant challenge of providing advertising and customer service in ways that capture the attention of consumers and impacts purchasing behavior where it counts most—at the point-of-sale.

For decades the main form of in-store customer communications has been printed signs. But the high cost and time-consuming planning that is required to print hundreds or thousands of signs puts enormous restrictions on the type and number of signs that businesses produce. Many nationwide chain stores need to target local customers while simultaneously following corporate messaging policies. Printed signs are quickly outdated and it requires in-store resources to continually take down and put up signs. Digital signage allows businesses the flexibility to easily communicate time-sensitive information and makes it possible to create targeted messages based on consumer demographics and psychographics.

For early adopters in the digital signage area, the rewards have been clear.

According to a recent CRN (*Computer Reseller News*) poll, 66% of companies received a return of 150% to 200% for every dollar spent on deploying digital signage within the first 12 months of installing their system.

According to a study by InfoTrends, digital signage displays generate 32.8% more in-store traffic and increase the average purchase amount by 29.5%. By giving customers the information when and where they want it, the path to the sale is clearly marked and the customer guided to the purchase.

The benefits of a digital signage network are evident but the path to deployment has been fairly complex. There are four basic components of a digital signage network:

- Media player
- Content or media files
- Delivery system (server and display)
- Software management system

A system can be as simple as a DVD player connected to several display screens, or a network of 100 displays with independent media players connected to a server via wireless Internet connection. Regardless of the implementation size, however, there are key points to consider when deploying a Digital Signage Network for commercial use.

The price of flat panel displays has dropped

sharply and many businesses look to buy an LCD display from a local retailer to build their own digital signage network. These types of displays, however, are designed for consumers and are made of parts that are not durable enough to withstand commercial use. Businesses have additional requirements, such as the ability to easily move the location of the sign, to ensure that the system is esthetically pleasing, without the liability of loose cables, and the need for touch-screen displays that can stand up to thousands or even millions of finger taps per day.



Since digital signage requires multiple components, it is vital to consider the compatibility of the software and hardware components. Some businesses have an IT staff available to research and test technical components for compatibility. Or a systems integrator can be hired to recommend a system, test components and ensure compatibility. But the testing process can be tedious and adds to pre-deployment time and costs. In addition, compatibility doesn't necessarily mean that all features of the components will function. Systems can be compatible, but only utilize part of the feature set.

Another key point when building a digital signage system is scalability. A department store might begin with a few displays in one store and later decide to add displays to every department and every store. It is best to have a system that is easily scalable that can perform with one or 1,000 displays.

The final key to a signage system is the ability to manage the timing and distribution of content. There are many content management software systems to choose from. Some offer minimal functionality but are very easy to manage and some are multi-function software systems that require days of training. It is important for retailers to know what types of content will be played (video, static images, flash) and how the content will be managed. Some software might require access to each display and player, whereas some will allow management of all displays from any location. Remote management becomes more important when the displays are in more than one store, or if the person assigned to manage the content delivery is not on-site.

## ALL-IN-ONE SOLUTION

Although there are many things to take into consideration when putting together a digital signage network, a simple solution that would cover all key points is to find an all-in-one system that provides all these key components. The new WebDT Signage System by DT Research is an example of a system that is easy to use and is flexible and scala-



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ble enough to grow as needed. The DS3700 and DS4700 computing displays integrate the media player with the display, providing a streamlined panel that is easy to mount and move around. The media player runs Windows XP Embedded, providing the flexibility of running any XP-compatible software with the system. In addition, the media player is easily accessible, allowing for easy upgrades for future use with the same display.

The system also includes the WebDT Content Manager, which allows for remote management of the media files, such that files can be scheduled to play when and where desired. With playback verification, the date and time that files are played is confirmed. This feature is especially beneficial for retailers as it can be used for billing purposes if advertising is played to generate revenue for the store.

With the WebDT Device Manager, retailers can control each display—regardless of the location—and schedule operating times to remotely power on and off and download any needed

updates. With optional hosting service, a complete signage system from one manufacturer provides a fully integrated and fully compatible signage network.

As customers look to find information on-demand, retailers need a system that can function both as an advertising vehicle and as a self-service tool. With interactive digital signs, customers can retrieve specific information while advertising plays for passers by. For instance, an advertising message can bring the customer to a desired location and then provide side-by-side product comparisons of items in that department. The WebDT Digital Signage System offers an optional IR Touch screen, providing the flexibility to turn a static display into an interactive sign. Using a flash file, a retailer can design a multi-zone screen that can provide product or sale information, wayfinding, or serve as an interactive directory.

The digital communication revolution is in full-swing. Savvy businesses have seen the benefits of digital signage and are reaping the rewards by targeting their audiences at the right place and the right time. A digital signage network gives retailers the power to deliver compelling messages to customers and boost profits while improving quality of service. A digital signage network can also generate an additional revenue stream by allowing more advertising space that can be quickly updated, targeted and tracked.

There are many considerations when building a signage network, but new systems such as the all-in-one WebDT Signage System provides a simple, but powerful solution for large and small retailers alike. Whatever system you decide upon, remember to allow room to grow within your network, because digital signage is paving the way to a future where digital advertising and self-service applications will become a mainstay in every store.

▶▶ John Ochoa is director of business development for Digital Signage DT Research ([www.dtresearch.com](http://www.dtresearch.com)).