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DigitalSignageExperts

BRINGING DIGITAL SIGNAGE TO LIFE

Digital Signage:
Avoid the Pitfalls.
Top Ten Tips to Success

Digital Signage: Avoid the Pitfalls. Top Ten Tips to Success

Digital signage is changing the way we bring our environments to life. It's more than a poster, more than a sign, more than an intranet. It doesn't work like TV broadcasting, or like a PC network.

Digital signage offers a fresh, engaging and dynamic means of communicating. It requires us to think differently about how we talk to our customers, employees or publics. New skills and techniques are being developed all the time as the technology improves.

These days we're used to seeing screens everywhere we go. But far from Big Brother watching us, modern screen-savvy audiences are watching out for ever more

real-time, eye-catching and interactive content. That's why digital signage is already a commonplace sight in shops, banks, airports and bus stations, cinemas and doctors' waiting rooms, schools and hospitals, corporate offices and call centres. Even in times of recession, digital signage has continued to grow when other traditional media channels have struggled.

As the cost of technology has come down, so digital signage has become accessible to a much wider user-base. Flat screen technology and improved network integration have enabled digital signage to be both simple in application, and sophisticated in use.

So is it for you? If you are reading this eGuide, then perhaps your business or organisation is considering exploring this new frontier for the first time. Or you may already be a digital signage convert and looking for ways to further enhance your communications or brand.

Embarking on a digital signage project can be daunting. There are a multitude of systems, software and technologies available and many potential stumbling blocks along the road to success. This eGuide is designed to help you avoid the pitfalls and consider the ingredients for a successful deployment.

No1. So You Think You Need Digital Signage?

Isn't it often the case when a new technology explodes onto the scene, that the unwary can trip up; perhaps caught up in the excitement of the hi-tech bubble, focusing more on the shiny new technology than the delivery?

Someone in your organisation may have decided that digital signage is the new "sliced bread", the next best thing ever to be introduced into your communications mix. But is it right for you? The starting point has to be exactly what does your organisation want to accomplish with digital signage?

It's an old saying, but failing to plan is planning to fail. Start by clearly defining the purpose of your digital signage network and make sure all your internal stakeholders share the same views. Taking time to agree on expectations for the project is essential. Digital Signage may not be the solution.

You will then need to set clear objectives and define how you are going to

measure success. A clear, well-thought out proposal will also be an essential tool in getting buy-in and funds from senior management. All too often, digital signage installations can fall at the first hurdle. By having ill-defined or "me-too" objectives, hapless project teams end up back in the boardroom having steered blindly towards a system that does not meet their real requirements.

Digital signage offers unique potential for dynamic and customised information. For you, it could offer the opportunity for better customer service and to provide greater product information to your customers. It could be a means to inform and motivate employees or simply to create a certain atmosphere which supports your brand identity. Whether you want to sell popcorn or evacuate a building, there are some key features to bear in mind in the planning stages.

Uniquely, digital signage communication can adapt instantly to time, place and audience. Content can be tailored to a specific location e.g. near a featured in-store promotion. It can be updated in real-time - delivering airport timetables for instance and feeding in current events such as weather or traffic conditions. Finally, it is highly specific to the audience. It allows relevant 'narrowcasting' i.e. delivering targeted messages to a specific known

demographic. In a cinema for example, there is a different footfall during the daytime, than in the evenings or in school holiday periods. The content can be tailored accordingly.

Understand what the technology can do, and then know from the outset what success will look like.

No 2: Should the Buck Stop with Marketing ... Or IT?

A digital signage installation has been called a 'technology ecosystem' of different media and disciplines. To achieve success requires coordination and knowledge sharing with many parts of the organisation. There's the hardware and software; the project management; the networking and connectivity. Then there's the design and authoring and finally ongoing content management and system maintenance.

Even the most skilled IT manager might struggle to appreciate the full communications capabilities of digital

signage. On the other hand, a marketing manager may fall short of understanding the technology requirements. Of course, there's no right or wrong answer to which department should take control.

In any organisation, undertaking a digital signage project for the first time, it's essential to establish a capable multi-disciplinary team incorporating all the relevant stakeholders. Senior management need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to any project to enable a successful outcome and that all stakeholders are kept informed of progress.

For some, the solution lies in appointing a supplier that can provide end-to-end project coordination. Digital signage specialists have amassed the broad skills in everything from hardware to content design and can offer a 'one-stop-shop' approach that can circumvent potential internal difficulties.

An external specialist can also open up new options for you in terms of the applications for the project you may not have considered.

No 3: Who's in Charge?

Who should you ask to take the lead in a new digital signage project? Certainly, having one point of contact to drive the project forward is essential. You should insist on this from your supplier, too.

What skills set should your project manager have? They must understand the full scope of what is required from them and in turn they should be provided with all the resources necessary from the rest of the organisation.

Consider also, who will manage the system once it is up and running. This may not be the same individual.

No 4: Know your Place – or Places!

Digital signage is about location, location, location. Think carefully about the number of signs and where they are strategically positioned. How many signs would be too many for your organisation? How many too few?

Every digital sign needs to be placed where it is most available to the target audience. It sounds obvious, but the more you know about the footfall of your audience, the more you can place the signs carefully. Research has shown that signs too close to entrances can be less effective. As a rule of thumb, the closer to eye level a digital sign is, the better, although there can be exceptions to this, in the case of cinema foyers or call centres, for example.

Increasingly, the location of digital signage is being considered right from the design of a building. Digital signage is becoming part of the architecture of stores, foyers and cinemas, where static and dynamic media are planned together as part of a physical infrastructure.

Digital signage experts are starting to appreciate the impact that it has on the total environment of a building. The way you want your environment to look and feel drives the technology, placing, messaging and graphics on your digital sign. The creative solution could be different for two places within the same department store, for example. Whether you are a major organisation or a modest SME, consider carefully how your digital signage network will affect the atmosphere and ambience of the space around it.

No 5: Content is still King: Long Live the King!

A day does not pass when the words "content is king" are spoken or written down somewhere with reference to digital signage. The truth is that success really does lie in the application and the skilful delivery of your message. A digital signage network has the ability to run video, graphics, text and animation. Multiple visual elements are put together to a defined playout schedule.

Digital signage can make a big impact; but it is also subject to the filtering, avoiding and ignoring that people use to tune out of media. Failing to consider the screen content adequately, can result in a loss of "stickability". Stickability is the compulsion for the viewer to not only notice the message, but to actually digest and process the information.

So there's a real art involved in creating the right kind of text, images and video. Content needs to be kept simple. People may need to get the message in a glance. Screens should be kept with a minimum of images: - no more than three elements on screen at the same time.

Consider carefully when to incorporate big moving images, or complex graphics. They can catch the attention, but detract from the viewers' ability to understand the message on screen. Digital signage has the option to include sound, but this must be thought about carefully, especially in an environment where there is background noise.

So a simple message is important. But aim for too low impact and you'll end up with nothing more than moving wallpaper – and very expensive wallpaper at that. Well executed, digital signage delivers compelling and interactive communications in a two-way experience with the viewer.

The content may need to vary across the installation. A 65-inch screen in landscape for example, may need a different treatment to a 32-inch screen in

portrait. The more screens you have in any installation, the greater the challenge.

Finally, you will need to consider who is responsible for designing the content. For larger organisations, it may be a case of recruiting a full-time specialist or appointing an advertising agency. For SMEs, the choice is more limited and it may be a case of working with an individual to develop their skills and knowledge in the role.

No 6: Who Updates the Content?

Digital signage has an insatiable appetite for content. To attract attention it needs to be constantly changing and updating. Yes, you can use RSS feeds and news wire services to refresh information, but you will still need to update your own organisation's content on a regular basis.

From the outset, from the moment you start planning and budgeting for your digital signage network, you need to consider who will update the content once the system is fully up and running. That means identifying the necessary staffing costs, too. It's no small task, and it requires someone with the necessary skills and access to information in your organisation.

You may be fortunate enough to be able to assign a full-time qualified, competent person to manage the task of creating content. It's tempting to rely on a number of people to 'chip in' with their own contributions, but without someone in charge, the text, graphics and video on display will soon grow stale and lose focus.

Choosing the right design of system and a suitable content management solution are also important. Using design templates, for example, can be one way of minimising the amount of work involved when content is to be updated allowing someone to populate the system with new information on a regular basis.

Choosing software that allows data from other systems to be imported automatically can also save time and

staffing. For example in a hotel, the system could be integrated with the management software for tracking reservations, meeting room bookings etc, saving the need for re-entering data.

Above all, when specifying and selecting your system, be sure that your system supplier incorporates a content creation software package which is easy to use and manage.

No 7: Watch out for Hidden Costs

It's vital to consider all the hidden costs associated with a digital signage installation. All too often, organisations fail to identify from the outset the associated costs and to incorporate them in the budget. The result can be a shiny new system, without the resources to maintain it adequately, or an embarrassing justification to be made to the finance manager. It's vital to identify the total cost of ownership of a chosen solution, and avoid the temptation to underestimate – or even ignore – ongoing costs. Pre-launch "buy-in" is a must.

Just as importantly, is the need for a fully-scoped and well-communicated installation project involving all stakeholders, with an integral monitoring and review process. A project that is not carefully planned out, could run into difficulties and incur extra unforeseen expenses.

Ensure your solution provider identifies all the costs associated with content creation, component replacement and hardware refresh right from the start.

No 8: Train the Team

Any budget for a successful digital signage network should include an ongoing allocation for training. Creating content for a digital signage network, scheduling it and making changes to playback along the way will require a large degree of skill, interest and commitment from your team.

It takes time to be properly trained in using a digital signage network. Of course, there is the option to learn 'on the job'. But it would be ill-judged for an organisation to invest heavily in the installation of hardware and initial graphic content, then fail to allocate sufficient funds to the ongoing training of personnel. After all, what was the investment for, if it is not sufficiently supported in the post-installation period?

Failing to learn how to update the content of your new system could prove embarrassing, and make it difficult to justify the initial outlay in the system to senior management. Worse still, it could negate your objectives and do a poor job of communicating with your audience.

Make sure you allocate a training budget from the outset of project planning. Identify and recruit carefully those who are going to be trained in the system, and what level of skill they require. If appropriate, work with your system supplier to tailor a training programme to meet your needs.

No 9: What's your Return on Investment?

As the digital signage market has developed, so users have become more discerning and more conscious of the Return on Investment (ROI) offered by their digital signage network. But to measure ROI can be a challenge.

As digital signage is moving from a nice-to-have, towards a need-to-have business tool, so has the requirement for a strong financial case to be put for funding the system. It won't be enough to tell the board about the benefits of this exciting technology. You are also going to have to set measurable targets – and deliver against them. That means showing how the system is paying back, be that in increased sales, or by saving on costs that would have been incurred elsewhere, for example eliminating print costs for internal posters.

There's plenty of documented research

to show how digital signage has boosted sales, increased customer enquiries, increased awareness or reduced perceived waiting time. But how will you measure it in your organisation?

The good news is that there are tools and techniques available for reporting success. Some measurements simply record the output – the ‘impressions’ made on screen, some identify the success of a system in reaching its audience, and more sophisticated calculations can express the number of people ‘reached’ compared to the total audience. Perhaps your organisation may not need this level of sophistication. At the very least, it will need to have a system which logs what has been played and when.

The trick is to establish from the outset what the Key Performance Indicators are against your measurable ROI. Understanding your success criteria will provide you with an accountable framework. Ensure that your chosen supplier is well versed in harnessing proven strategies and methodologies for measuring the success of your system.

Finally, make sure you have an effective review process. If you are measuring ROI and you have information about how your system, or parts of your system are performing, make sure you have the processes in place to make improvements easily.

No 10: Ensuring a Successful Installation

Because it relies on such a mix of disciplines: hardware, software, networking, design, authoring and so on, installing digital signage can prove to be a messy process. That’s why it’s important to select a systems integrator with the skill and experience to serve as a general contractor.

It’s not just IT vendors, software developers and graphic designers who all have an input into the project outcome. It’s likely you’ll have carpenters, electricians, plumbers and even heating and ventilating contractors who might need to make changes to the building infrastructure during the installation.

It’s important that your systems integrator can co-ordinate all those resources and manage them successfully. Entrusting the overall management of the contract to your supplier, could well save significant time, expense and worry.

In Conclusion...

Every successful digital signage project should start with the question, why? If

you’re confident of the answer, you will be able to set objectives and identify measurable success criteria from the outset. You will also be able to demonstrate a return on your organisation’s investment and have a process in place which will help you to evaluate and improve your system for the future.

True success will depend upon the location and the quality of the content of your digital signage system. Think long and hard about how you are going to ensure you keep it well populated with quality information moving forward.

Make sure you cost your project carefully to include any ongoing expenditure for content creation and maintenance of the system hardware and software. Select a multi-disciplinary team to input into the project from the start with a capable project manager at the helm. Then, make sure those people tasked with updating the system moving forward are properly trained.

Finally, select your system supplier carefully, to ensure they can provide a comprehensive support from system planning, right through to content creation and ongoing support. If you follow these guidelines, then you can make the best of this new, exciting technology and perhaps avoid the pitfalls.

Good luck!

Head Office Address

Saturn Communications Group Ltd
Wigan Investment Centre
Waterside Drive
Wigan WN3 5BA

T 01942 824 224

F 01942 820 932

E info@saturnvisual.com



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Company Number 03600388 Registered in England

About Saturn

Saturn is a global provider of integrated digital messaging solutions for corporate, healthcare, hospitality, retail and cinema environments. Its technology has been installed in over 20 countries and is currently powering 30,000 display screens worldwide.

Saturn’s award-winning digital signage software solutions, including its flagship Connectvision and Cinema Solutions brands are used by numerous blue-chips companies as well as major public sector organisations.

Saturn’s reputation is built on a commitment to delivering end-to-end digital signage solutions using the highest quality products and services. Saturn combines impartial sourcing of hardware and networking with specialist software and expert content development to deliver integrated digital messaging solutions.

Saturn can provide a range of complementary services:

Project Management, Software Development, Data Integration, Hardware Specification, Media Co-ordination, Content Creation, System Installation, Support & Maintenance and Helpdesk.

[Saturn’s reputation for innovation, quality and project delivery has truly earned the company the title The Digital Signage Experts.](#)

For more information contact 01942 824 22