

6 MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN BUYING DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Buying digital signage requires an understanding of the key elements involved in a digital signage system and their interaction. This includes hardware and software components; personnel to install, manage and maintain the system; and content to fill the screens and keep them interesting. Here are the most common mistakes to avoid when buying a digital signage system:



NOT INVOLVING THE PEOPLE WHO'LL USE THE SYSTEM

Nobody wants too many cooks in the kitchen, but it's better to get everyone's input earlier rather than later. Think about content designers, schedulers and managers; IT staff; security folks if you're using the system for alerts; and even Purchasing to manage your budget. Involving people early will give you insights you may not have considered, and makes folks more enthusiastic and much more likely to use the system to its fullest.

SHORT-SIGHTED BUDGETS

Make sure your budget doesn't just cover the initial system costs, but also includes software upgrades so you can stay current and get new features. And don't forget new hardware – no PC or screen lasts forever and you might want to add more players or bandwidth in the future. Other budget items might be training – not just at the start, but ongoing training as you add new features or users – and creative services. You may want to hire designers once in a while to refresh your look. And don't forget technical support. In general, try to budget for 18-24 months if you can.



NOT THINKING ABOUT EXPANSION

If you buy an inflexible or closed system, you won't be able to add to it or change the configuration when you need to. Odds are that you'll get good results with digital signage, and other buildings or departments will want it for themselves. Another possibility is that you move locations or upgrade to a bigger facility. Make sure you don't box yourself into a system that can't be added to, or you'll spend a lot more money buying a bunch of small systems instead of one that can grow.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH HARDWARE

Maybe you've found somebody who's offering you a big discount on media players or digital displays – don't do it until you know which content management software you'll be using. Remember, it's the software that people will interact with, so make sure the hardware supports the software, not the other way around.



NOT DOING A NETWORKING SURVEY

The people buying your digital signage don't always know what's under the hood of your network. Make sure you have a qualified IT person involved early on, and have them do a survey of power, network connectivity and IT security policies for every location where you'll have digital signs. There's nothing worse than hanging up a new screen and not being able to put anything on it because you didn't know about some firewall or cabling issue.

RELYING ON ONE PERSON TO DO IT ALL

Even if you have software that sits on one computer, one person can't think up every single message for your screens. Make sure you invite everyone to participate and contribute content ideas. Or, consider a licensing agreement or a web-based system so more can people create and schedule announcements. You don't want to have to jumpstart your efforts every time a new person takes over, and you want as many people as possible to be involved and excited about your investment.



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