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13 Steps to **Successful Digital Signage**

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER

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We're here to help! If you have any questions about your application or our products, please contact us at **800.572.4935** or **salesteam@visix.com**.
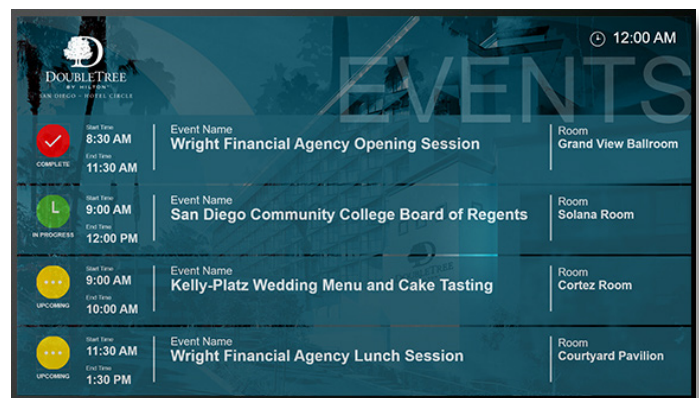
Why Digital Signage?

To communicate with people, you have to get their attention. Our love of TV and computers has trained us to look at screens for information, so digital signage is a natural choice for reaching large audiences.

With a well-designed system you can deliver messages, schedules, news, weather and alerts across your organization. Welcome visitors, show wayfinding, post daily announcements and update schedule changes on screens in just a few clicks. What you show is really only limited by the amount of content you can imagine and create.

Digital signage is better than email, printed posters, and bulletin boards because:

- you can deliver breaking news in real-time
- screens are bright and show motion
- you can have multiple things on a screen at once
- you can change what's on screens throughout the day
- it's modern and ubiquitous for today's campuses
- and it's cheaper than print for big audiences

Considering all of the variables for a digital signage solution can seem overwhelming, but taking the time to define your goals and understand your options is well worth the effort, and can save time and money in the long run.

Before You Shop

1. Involve the right people

Nobody wants too many cooks in the kitchen, but it's better to get everyone's input earlier rather than later. Often times, digital signage purchases are relegated to the IT department – this can be a mistake. Although your IT staff will be vital to the successful deployment and maintenance of the system, they usually aren't the ones using it on a daily basis.

Make sure to include all of your content contributors when creating your project plan. This may include marketing and communications, human resources, administration, web staff, department managers and even purchasing agents to budget for installation and updates. It's also essential to include your security team if you plan to use the system for alerts.

Involving people early will give you insights you may not have considered and makes people more enthusiastic and much more likely to use the system to its fullest. Buy-in at every level is crucial.

2. Define your goals

Well before you research technology, you need to nail down what you want to achieve. Outline your objectives in as much detail as possible because it will help you measure your return on investment later.

Imagine how you will use the system. Once you have concrete objectives, draw out how the system will operate within your organization. What kind of content will you display? Who will create and approve it? Where will the hardware live and who maintains it? Who will be responsible for the software maintenance costs and hardware life cycle?

Write a project plan that describes the key action items, timeframes and resources needed. Include things like:
- The location of displays and which screens will show what content
  - Make sure you place your screens in high traffic areas
  - Don't place your screens so high that people can't read and/or interact with them
  - Only use audio on screens where it won't be intrusive
- IT issues like connectivity, bandwidth and network security policies
- Outsourced services like content creation, paid data subscriptions, etc.
- Potential revenue sources like advertising
- Crisis communications plans
- Future expansion

The more you can cover in advance, the fewer surprises, unexpected costs and delays down the road.

3. Clearly define the content

This is the most important step in planning your digital signage system. If you don't know what you want to show on the screens, you aren't ready to buy a system.

Your goals should give you a good direction for defining your content – now you need to drill down into detail.
- Determine the number of people who will create, schedule and/or approve content
- List the content to be created on a regular basis by topic or department
- List content file types or sources (RSS feeds, event schedules, MP4, Flash, etc.)
- Will you include interactivity like wayfinding or kiosks?
- Will you integrate social media into your playlists?
- Don't forget alert notifications!

By clearly defining who will create what, how often, and how that content gets to the screens, you can have a greater understanding of the type of software and hardware you will need to accomplish your goals.

4. Do a networking survey

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 plan to have digital signage. 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.

5. Create your budget

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 content design services. You may want to hire designers for your initial launch or to refresh your look periodically. And don't forget technical support. In general, try to budget for 18-24 months if you can.

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 will get good results with your 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. So make sure you don't box yourself into a system that can't be added to or you will spend a lot more money buying a bunch of small systems instead of one that can grow.

Choosing Your System

6. Choose software before hardware

Maybe you've found somebody who's offering you a big discount on media players or flat-screen TVs – don't do it until you know which content management software (CMS) 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.

If you buy digital signage software that sits on one computer, you will only have one person who cares about it. Consider a licensing agreement or a web-based system so more can people participate. 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.

Your CMS should:
  •   Be easy to learn, easy to use and easy to update
  •   Have user-friendly, high-quality content creation tools and easy importing options
  •   Have day-part scheduling and automatic retirement of messages to ease your content management burden
  •   Meet the hierarchy that you've outlined in your plan (i.e. – allow for multiple contributors, separate content approvers to support a centralized deployment and individual departments)
  •   Meet the technical requirements for the content file types and data feeds you've outlined (i.e. support popular campus systems like EMS, 25Live, Rave Mobile, Blackboard Connect, etc.)
  •   Include alert notification capability, preferably CAP-compliant emergency alerts

An important consideration in choosing your software is the vendor. Is this their main business? Are they familiar with digital signage deployments for organizational communications? Do they offer ongoing support and services to help you achieve successful adoption and broad use of the system? Always ask for references.

7. Don't skimp on hardware

Don't skimp on the hardware or it will cost you in the long run. That being said, there is no reason you have to go with proprietary hardware that costs a lot and locks you into one vendor. Your software vendor should be able to provide you with industry-standard hardware, or give you the specs to buy it yourself.

Remember that all hardware has a finite life that depreciates annually. Operating systems change, I/O interfaces evolve, physical devices fail. Be sure your machines have the flexibility to grow and adapt with future updates and changing requirements, or that you have the budget to replace hardware as needed.

8. Do a pilot before launching system-wide

A pilot program allows you to launch and test digital signage in an isolated environment before rolling it out across the organization. This gives you an effective way to evaluate the software and hardware you've purchased, your workflows and processes, and how your content is being received.

This also gives you the opportunity to craft the look of your screens with branded layouts and complimentary content templates, so your screens look their best. You can use this time to see which designs work best, whether you need additional layouts or design themes, and if your content contributors need some design coaching.

We recommend a pilot launch for 60-90 days before sitting down with your digital signage vendor to go over the successes and adjustments that may need to be made to your original system plan. While your pilot is running, be sure to solicit feedback from all stakeholders.

We also recommend test environments to compliment production environments. This is especially important when you have a large system in place and are updating software or hardware. Instead of launching the update across the whole system, test it in a localized setting to make sure everything works before implementing updates system-wide.

9. Make a fuss

Once you've run your pilot and made the necessary tweaks, roll out the system across the organization and make a splash. Involvement from everyone participating, including your audience, is important.

Advertise why you're doing it and what you hope to achieve. Make sure your audience understands how you're trying to meet their needs and how they can provide feedback.

Maintaining Momentum

10. Keep it easy

Once your system is up and running, you need to constantly monitor, adjust and motivate your team. The fastest way to alienate your content contributors is to make their job boring, time-consuming or complicated. Make it easy and take mistakes out of the creation process by setting up templates for quick message design, especially for repetitive tasks.

Make sure everyone using the system gets regular training. Even though they might be comfortable when the system is launched, new features can need a bit of explanation in order to provide their intended benefits. Provide a list of resources or best practices that people can refer to.

Publishing policies can also streamline workflows, improve content and make people self-sufficient:

- Discuss appropriate and inappropriate content
- Include naming standards for players, playlists and content
- Include identity guidelines for fonts, colors and logos
- Give some basic design tips
- Outline acceptable file formats
- Clearly define the submission and approval process
- Explain distribution channels and endpoints
- Publish browser requirements and IT security policies
- Provide contact information for questions

The main thing is that your policies are clear and concise, but still contain all the information your users might need.

11. Content is king

No matter how great the technology is, if the content looks bad, you will lose your audience.

You need to engage your audience with relevant content that they want to see on a regular basis. Use news, weather, and date and time to draw attention to other announcements on the screen.

Understanding aspect ratios and basic design rules is a must for your content creators. A lot of companies set up their system with branded layouts and matching message backgrounds with templates to try to control the look of their screens. This is a great idea and highly recommended, but not every piece of content will come from a template. Get some basic design training or provide guidelines or articles that your staff can read to help them look their best.

Your software comes with a lot of options, but you don't need to show everything at once. Remember that your goal is to deliver information. Your message can get lost if you have your screen packed with so much that viewers can't pick out the different things you're telling them. You're better off using different features at different times to keep drawing people in and keeping them interested. Also, people like to see their own work. Democratize the content submission process as much as possible so that more people can contribute.

12. Keep it fresh

Don't let content or layouts get stale. If you've left something on your playlist too long because you forgot about it, chances are your audience has too. Keep it fresh by showing new content every day, and show things more often for shorter time periods verses running one thing on the screen all day long:

- 8-10 Items in a playlist
- Schedule messages for 10-12 seconds
- Repeat messages at least 10x daily

It's easy to get into a rut by using the same formulaic backgrounds, fonts and graphics for messages, but without periodic updates, your messages can get a bit stale. Set aside time to take stock of your digital signage strategy and to refresh and redirect your efforts. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do our messages communicate information succinctly and stylishly?
- Are we using good visual rules when designing our messages?
- Do message colors, fonts, and graphics all look good together?
- Do messages look good together when grouped in multiple-window layouts?
- Is there appropriate variety in our messages to grab audience attention?
- Are audiences paying regular attention to our digital signs?
- Are they responding by taking the requested action noted in messages?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you're content may need a refresh. Remember – getting your audience's attention is only the first step. Keeping their attention is a constant challenge that you have to work hard to meet.

13. Measure success

We're talking about ROI – which can be return on investment or return on involvement – it's just how to know your digital signage is working. A lot of people don't think about measurement when planning their messages. But if you are investing time and money to create and publish content, you should want to measure ROI so you can justify those efforts.

The biggest factor in measuring ROI is including a call to action in your content. If you just put out a message without asking the audience to do something that says they saw the message, you have no way of knowing if it worked. Everything you publish should prompt the viewer to do something – visit a URL, scan a QR tag, present a coupon – some form of tangible action that you can measure.

Another idea is to see which displays in your facility get the best response by using interactive touchscreens or pairing displays with web kiosks to let viewers take action on the spot.

However you choose to measure your ROI, make it a long-term, continuous process so you can fine-tune your messages to become better and better at reaching people and getting the results you want.
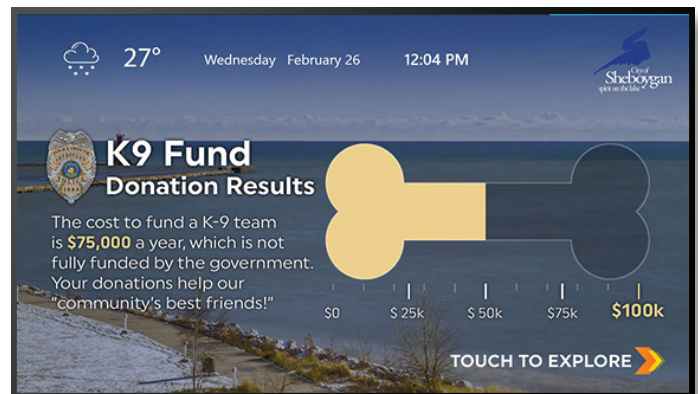
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