Integrating **Social Media** and **Mobile Devices** into Your Digital Signage Plan

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**.

The Connected World

The heart of today's most successful communications is inclusion – two-way dialogues instead of just pushing messages down and out from the top.

The key to a successful digital signage (DS) strategy is to interest your viewer. If you don't get them to look at the screens, there's no point. Modern technologies add a new gloss to things. However, if your audience doesn't interact with your message, then it is not effective.

DS can embrace these trends by drawing in content from social media portals and delivering messages beyond screens to smartphones, tablets, desktops and webpages.

This is especially relevant for schools and universities, since social media and smartphones are the primary channels that students use to communicate. Recent studies and surveys show that students use an average of 6.9 gadgets each throughout the school year. Topping the list are laptops and smartphones, and smartphones are being used more and more every year. In 2013, college students spent 3.6 hours a day on their cell phones and smart phones, and 92% of students say they check and send email using a smartphone. Another common practice is "showrooming" – using their smartphone or tablet while inside a store to research products and prices.

When it comes to social media, Facebook is still the leader (with somewhere between 67 and 86% of students saying they use it regularly), though Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and other sites are gaining in popularity. Students use these websites to keep in touch with their parents and folks back home (an average of 9.1 times a week just on social media), keep up with celebrities or things they are interested in, posting links to and updating their own websites and blogs, and making arrangements with friends.

This increase in mobile computing devices is not limited to universities. The same technologies are growing in popularity for both personal and professional communications across all types of organizations. Many people are now accustomed to receiving and interacting with information while on the move, often multi-tasking – checking email, looking at news feeds, doing the shopping, answering emails, posting pictures on social media sites, commenting on stories or posts by friends, and arranging a birthday party for later in the week, all at the same time.

In the US, according to a January 2014 report by the Pew Internet Research Project, 71% of adults with online access use Facebook, 22% use LinkedIn, 21% use Pinterest, 19% use Twitter and 17% use Instagram. So, we know people are using social media – why not play to those preferences to grab attention, making your DS screens another favored source for information? DS can move beyond the phone or tablet, integrating your audience into an information-rich environment that communicates what you want them to know.

Get Social

Whether it's Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, you can build community and boost participation for one or all of your social media sites by incorporating them into your DS strategy.

By advertising your social media efforts, you not only create buzz and excitement around your posts, but can attract more followers and entice people to follow your pages. It's also another great source of content that you don't have to maintain since it's auto-updating on digital signs.

Many social media sites have either RSS feeds or simple APIs to allow you to pull your posts into a DS playlist. You can either go full-screen or simply include social media content in traditional layouts. If you want to show your whole page, try using the webpage display function in your content management software.

You can also start very simply – just posting "Find Us on Facebook" or "Follow Us on Twitter" messages with the page name or handle will let people know that you're active on social media and remind those who haven't visited your pages for a while to check in. You'd be surprised how much attention you can draw to the screens just by showing a Facebook, Google + or Twitter logo.

If you use an interactive screen to show your social media sites, people can scroll through your pages to catch up on the latest posts or tweets. They may not check your sites when they're at home or on their smartphone, but the attraction of a big touchscreen is sure to draw attention. (Don't worry – you can specify how much interactivity you want. You may not want people posting or touching links that go to another page, so you can limit the interactive areas on the screen.)

Whether you're using DS to promote your social media pages, or using social media messages to hook viewers so they see your other communications, remember that the content should always be relevant and targeted to your audience.

A Real-World Example
At the University of South Florida, 10,000 students a day pass though the Marshall Student Center – the key university social hub. Marketing and Communications Officer Brian Schulte says, "From the feedback we've gotten, it [their DS screen] really seems to add to the atmosphere of the student union." He feels that the system adds an intangible benefit – a lively sense of dynamic community, which has its own kind of return.

Schulte and his team have used DS to boost their fan base on Facebook. He tells us that the Facebook page had been languishing with a mere 10 or 20 members, but once they put the word out using DS, membership began to take off. "Within just two hours of putting the news of our Facebook page up on the screen, we had 30 new members, and it just kept skyrocketing from there." Today, the page has nearly 10,000 fans and has received over 40,000 visits.

Go Mobile

Not that long ago, email was the biggest advancement in communication. Today, spam filters and sheer volume have virtually crippled email's effectiveness. And DS, while valuable, depends on viewers paying attention to screens as they pass by.

Why wait for your audience to come to you?

To target diverse audiences as they change and grow, you need flexible tools. To capture attention at the right time, you need to be able to reach your audience wherever they are – and that may not be in front of your digital signs. The more precise yet flexible your delivery methods, the more likely you are to capture your viewers' attention and increase readership and interest.

Most people today use smartphones and tablets as their main source for information. A lot of folks grab their phone to check news and updates before they even get out of bed in the morning (you know who you are and you aren't alone – in 2013, Statista found that 84% of smartphone owners use phone apps first thing in the morning). Using the network of mobile devices and the PCs you already have in your facility, you can deliver DS messages to specific audiences on displays that don't cost you a thing.

Depending on your content management software and design resources, there are several options for reaching an audience on the move:

Desktops
For stationary audiences, you can instantly turn every PC in your network into a digital sign that shows vital notices or alerts via pop-up messengers or screensavers.

By pointing a small client applet to your content manager, you can publish your playlist of messages and display them on all desktops or just specified ones. These tools will need to be coded to circumvent existing screensavers and to work in concert with your network's standards for pop-up blockers, email clients and firewalls.
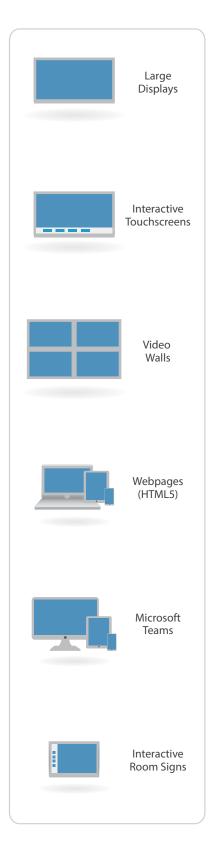
RSS Feeds
Really Simple Syndication (RSS) automatically broadcasts text updates to subscribers. Again, depending on your software, you can choose from existing RSS feed subscriptions or use an RSS publisher to deliver your own messages when and where your audience needs them. RSS feeds can either be turned into a message block or ticker on your big screen, or delivered to smartphones, tablets or desktops.

Note that many sites have a disclaimer about commercial broadcast of their feeds. You should contact individual sites for permission to broadcast or share the feed. In most instances, the copyright terms refer to rebroadcast on a website and generally do not mention use with DS, but you should check the copyright terms of any feed you plan to publish, just to be on the safe side.

Webpages & HTML5
If your software doesn't have messaging app or RSS capability, you can look into publishing your messages to a webpage. This is a simple way to let people see your playlist, either full-screen or embedded into an existing webpage.

Some DS software allows users to publish content using HTML5 web code. This is a great option because a responsive HTML5 design will detect the device where the content is delivered and automatically format it to fit that screen.

Large Displays

Interactive Touchscreens

Video Walls

Webpages (HTML5)

Microsoft Teams

Interactive Room Signs

Apps

To really jump on the smartphone bandwagon, you need to have an app. This doesn't mean you have to have a huge development team or create expensive code. There are free app builders online that let you create an app icon and home screen with links to anything on the web – that would tie in nicely with the HTML5 idea above (a few to look into: AppsBar, AppsGeyser, AppMakr, AppyPie, BuzzTouch, and Yapp.)

One idea is to send several playlists to different HTML5 webpages – announcements, event schedules, café menus, etc. – and then create a single app that brings these altogether on a home screen with different buttons that users can tap to access the playlist they want. Don't bother putting news headlines or weather into your app unless it's something very unique, since most people already have those widgets on their phones. Keep the content updated and relevant to keep your viewers engaged.

Text Messaging

We only recommend using an SMS service to deliver alerts. If you barrage your audience with text messages about daily menu items, you'll likely lose subscribers – they'll just see it as spam and get annoyed. Also, the service can be complex and time-consuming to set up. That's not to say it isn't valuable – for crisis communications, this is a great option.

The first thing you'll have to do is subscribe to a gateway provider to manage your message delivery. You can investigate whether they can pull messages from your content management software to save you time. The second step is building your database. Usually, you'll have to ask people to subscribe because most of these systems are opt-in. After that, it's just a matter of publishing.

Main advantages of these types of targeted communications:
• Reach audience immediately with critical updates and instructions
• Make information available to audiences on the go
• Jump ahead of traditional media and don't get lost in clutter
• Reinforce other methods of communication

Collaborative Content

Interactive doesn't have to mean touchscreens. You can leverage your audience's love of smartphones – not as receivers, but as participants – to create a two-way dialogue through some creative content.

QR Tags

QR tags are something you may have seen in print ads, but they can also be used in DS. You can embed QR tags in your messages to prompt action from viewers – send them to a website, have them vote in a poll, or offer a downloadable coupon.

A QR, or Quick Response, tag is a two-dimensional bar code that embeds data, such as a website URL. Smartphones and tablets can read this code with their cameras. The tags can be put on any visual medium that can be photographed – print materials, emails, webpages, t-shirts – and, of course, DS content.

Generating the QR tag is easy. There are a bunch of free online generators you can use. Simply tell the generator the destination you want the QR tag to go to, and it will generate a square image file with the embedded data – usually a PNG image file. Then you just insert the image file into your bulletins and media designs.

Audience members with a camera phone simply use free reader software on their phones to interface with QR codes. Their phone's camera captures the image and scans it for data, which causes the phone's browser to launch and redirect to your designated URL. Keep in mind, though, that you need to keep your QR tag on screen long enough and position screens so people can take the photo.

The most popular destination for QR tags is a webpage you've created. However, you can direct your viewers to Google Map locations, social networks, email addresses, app downloads or downloadable coupons and images.

Digital signage QR codes are also a great way to track ROI for your messages. See our white paper – *Why You Should Care About ROI* – for more on this.

SMS Voting
We've all seen American Idol ask viewers to text their vote for the next American pop superstar using their mobile phones. Well, you can use the same technology to poll your DS audience. It's not just a great tool for voting, it's also a terrific way to measure ROI and get audience feedback.

First, you need to secure a polling plan with one of the many online providers. Plans are based on the maximum number of responses you want to allow for an individual poll, and many are free if you only need to collect a few votes. Also, semester-long plans are available from some providers for K-12 and higher education customers.

Creating an SMS poll for DS isn't much different than creating any other content. Simply design your message with the question, the phone number where people send their votes, and a list of options with their corresponding SMS codes. Viewers see the screen and send a text message. It's that easy.

Most polling services can also send a reply message directing voters to a URL where they can see the overall results. You could schedule that results webpage in your DS playlist to let your audience track results on screen as votes are received. Or, you can post the result in real-time on your social media page and push that content to your screens.

As technology continues to evolve, so do people's expectations. Today, we all expect more – more details, more ways to interact, and more ways to connect. Including social media and mobile devices in your DS strategy will help you better connect with today's audience in the ways they expect.

Resources
- Social Networking Fact Sheet – PewResearch Internet Project
- A Look at Mobile Device Usage Among College Students – presentation at the AAPOR Annual Conference
- The Evolution of Social Media Use Among College Students – CampusQuad.co
- People No Longer Trust Traditional Media, Go to Family and Friends on Social Media for News - Christian Post
- 84% of Smartphone Owners Use Apps During Their Morning Routine – Statista
- Tech-Savvy College Students Are Gathering Gadgets, Saying Yes to Showrooming and Rejecting Second-Screening – re:fuel
- Majority of college students own smartphones, but dislike those ads – Ball State University

Want to learn more? Contact us at **salesteam@visix.com**.