



Piloting a Digital Signage Deployment

The benefits of digital signage compared with other forms of media are readily apparent, but how can a deployer ensure their network has maximum impact?

By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer, Digital Signage Today

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Digital signage continues to solidify its position in the marketplace as one of the premier methods of communicating with consumers. It seems as if every day brings new technologies and new ways of using digital displays.

Although forecasts vary as much as the researchers making them, a recent Markets and Markets report predicts the digital signage market will grow to \$32.8 billion by 2023 from \$19.6 billion in 2016, a compound annual growth rate of 7.4 percent. Helping to drive that growth is rising demand for newer technologies such as ultra-high-resolution displays, larger and ever-thinner screens and increasingly energy-efficient components, as is the ability of those displays to attract and engage consumers, increasing sales in the process.

But the success of a digital signage deployment isn't simply a matter of erecting a few screens and running some flashy content. A digital signage network can involve a significant investment, and ensuring the best return on those dollars involves planning and testing.

Here is an overview of the steps involved in achieving the maximum ROI for a deployer's digital signage dollars:

Establish the goals

All too often, companies invest in technology simply for technology's sake. The first question that must be addressed when considering digital signage is "What do we hope to accomplish?" If the company operates a chain of fast-food restaurants, are they looking to speed up service or increase sales of high-margin items? If it's a retail operation, are they looking to deploy marketing content quickly and efficiently and compare the effectiveness of different promotions?

In addition, where in the operation will those displays be placed? Are there considerations that must be addressed, such as the ability to lay cabling or mount displays in leased spaces? Will it be easy to scale up the network as the company grows?

And of paramount importance is the question of future-proofing. With the rapid pace at which technology changes, how does a deployer prevent their network from becoming obsolete in a year or two?

"We work with clients that are energized about an experience/story they would like to communicate with their target audience. Understanding the desired user experience at the beginning is critical in assuring the design will match expectations on day one."

— Jeffrey Martin, CEO of digital signage provider Right Media Solutions.

RMS offers turn-key digital signage solutions by developing plans, procuring and testing equipment, implementing the roll-out and providing on-going support services. The company also provides data analytic services to ensure that signage is effective and optimized.

Determine what's needed to achieve those goals

The next step is to determine what hardware, software, displays, connectivity and control systems are needed to create the type of network necessary to deliver the desired results. In addition, the deployer needs to determine from where they will purchase those components.

When sourcing those components, the client should consider what functions they desire and what functions they might like to make use of in the future.

"Futureproof components are a necessary part of the design," Martin said. "And that leads us the first steps of that successful installation."

Source hardware/software/content for testing

Once the client and vendor have agreed on the design of the digital signage deployment, including what hardware, software and content will be used, it's time to set up a pilot deployment to see how it functions in a real-world setting.

“With the design/vision of the client understood we move to the testing phase. Typically we will test a few versions of the design to prove out the component functionality and reliability in our lab and at the client facility as well,” Martin said.

That may begin with a small version of the deployment set up in a conference room to work out any kinks. For the best results, the test should include a variety of different locations and network conditions.

The idea is to make sure the system designed can handle the stress, whether it's heat or cold or power surges or some other condition, that it will operate in.



“We test extensively in artificial environments and try to understand ahead of time what we might be running into given whatever type of space in the system is installed,” Martin said. “Lab testing becomes a critical element of after design, to really test it and kick the tires on it before it ends up in any place where it would client and user facing.”

Launch the pilot

From there, testing should be moved to a small number of locations where the network can operate in a real-world setting. And if something isn't working according to plan, now is the time to make modifications.

“We learn as much as we can in the lab, but the pilot's usually where most of the learning occurs,” Martin said, “Because it's now not in a controlled area in your lab but in a live location.”

Another important factor to consider is how to measure success. Is the goal to achieve a 5 percent sales uplift, or to improve scores on customers surveys. How about customer recall of content shown on the displays? While measuring sales uplifts is relatively easy, measuring recall may require employing surveyors to obtain customer feedback.

Develop, plan and initiate rollout process

Once the concept for the network has been thoroughly tested and any modifications made, it's time to begin sourcing the various components and plan the rollout process.

Even though both client and vendor may be confident in the viability of the project, it's advisable to undertake the rollout in stages, especially if a large number of locations are set to participate. No matter how thorough the pilot, unforeseen issues may arise that may require changes.

In addition, a number of new issues come into play at the deployment stage. If the components are to be shipped to individual locations prior to installation, where will they be stored? In addition, if the rollout involves locations spread out over a wide area, who will supervise the installers to ensure they are done in a consistent fashion?

And if any of the components are damaged or lost prior to installation, who will be held responsible?

Monitor the network

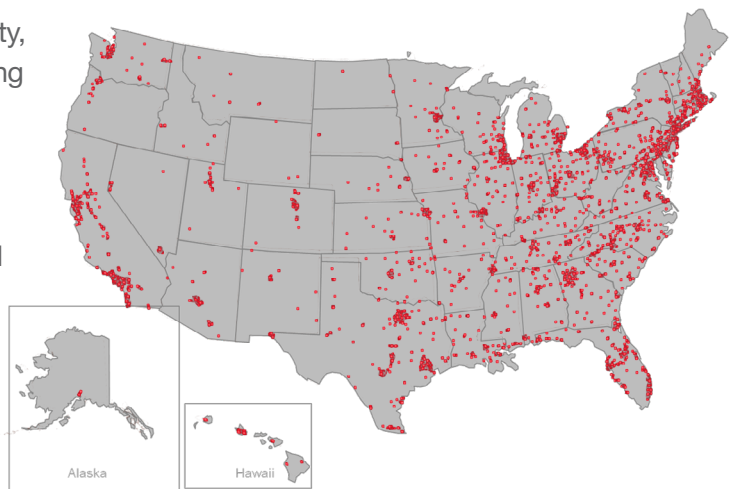
Few things reflect more poorly on a brand than having a digital signage deployment that's out of order for an extended period. Haphazard maintenance of a digital signage network is likely to give consumers the impression that they pay the same attention to the products they sell.

And if the deployment is critical to operations, such as digital menu boards in a QSR or fast-casual restaurant, an extended outage can have a significant impact on sales.

For those reasons, and others, it's important to have ongoing monitoring of the network to spot and solve problems as they occur, as well as a support plan in place to have a technician visit a site, if a remote solution isn't possible. In some cases, that may involve signing an agreement with service providers to handle maintenance and software updates.

Also, if content is being managed by a third party, the deployer should have access to logs verifying content is actually being played as desired.

It's also advisable to have an ongoing mirror of the network at the company headquarters, or similar location, to ensure what's displayed on those screens matches the company's goals. As anyone who's ever seen a spelling error in a newspaper or online can attest, it never hurts to have an extra set of eyes looking over the content, especially when those eyes have a vested interest in seeing the network perform to its maximum potential.



So while a digital signage network may be successful on day one, the key to success is ensuring it remains successful six months, a year or two years down the road. For Martin, that means the vendor or integrator most likely will need to stay involved and provide ongoing support.

“The highest value we offer is ongoing monitoring and support,” he said. If his firm set it up, they’re likely to be the ones best suited to monitor it and keep it running — and to be able to do so for less than any other service provider.”

“We tend not to just hand it over because our costs are lower than they can typically hire internally to support a network because we’re supporting so many units out there,” Martin said. “For us it’s just adding another layer and another client into the same group of technicians who have been doing this for well over a decade.”



Right Media Solutions directs rollout of Chrome retail media network

Right Media Solutions recently completed a full network upgrade of 3900 Chromebox media players for a National Retailer with a presence in all 50 states. The project was successfully piloted in 25 initial locations and a subrollout to 300 locations. Building from the results of the pilot and subrollout, the RMS project management team was able to complete the full network roll out in just over 7 weeks.

The Commercial Chromebox media players are cost effective and powerful. The flexibility of the Chrome Operating System now provides a solid platform for the delivery of our client’s highly dynamic content demands. Beyond traditional media, the players offer the seamless integration of HTML5 content as well as onboard Eddystone Beacons. These features provide the tools required for the network to evolve in-step with advancements in digital signage technology and consumer attribution.

Source: Right Media Solutions



About the sponsor:

Right Media Solutions offers turn-key digital signage solutions by developing plans, procuring and testing equipment, implementing the roll-out and providing on-going support services. The company’s headquarters near Boston provides a unique layout that allows it to offer warehouse and logistic solutions while simultaneously providing testing and development centers. Additionally, RMS provides data analytic services to ensure your signage is effective and optimized.

Through the development of interactive content and dynamic digital signage media, RMS is driven to enhance brand awareness and create deeper consumer experiences that translate directly into increased revenue and customer satisfaction. Our creative team can develop messages that drive your brand. We develop content for video walls, menu boards, wayfinders, video displays, interactive kiosks and mobile platforms.