

The Deployment Roadmap

By Lyle Bunn

March 2009

The following was edited to shorter form for inclusion in the Digital Signage/Digital Out-of-Home supplement carried in the March 20, 2009 edition of USA Today.

“The human race is obsessed with communication” declares Steve Israelsky of Tightrope Media Systems. “Perhaps no other human activity demands as much of our resources, concern, attention, research, or time. No other human activity creates as much love, war, hope and empowerment. Dictatorships depend on its limits and democracies survive only with its free exchange. We chat with instant messaging, we text and talk on cell phones, we send email on just about anything with a power plug or a battery. Information always existed, but now it flies around the world at light speed. Time and space have become malleable. Communication technology has changed our reality”.

Tightrope Media Systems, which calls itself “passionate about the creation of tools that eliminate the barriers to communication”, says “We make it simple for anyone to communicate on digital displays at any time in any space to any audience. We give voice to communities by making it simple to create and operate local television channels”.

The march toward simplicity, reliability, scalability and cost effectiveness has been steady and successful, during which best practice has accelerated quickly, new products as well as supply and funding models have emerged.

The success of digital signage has spurred on many technology innovations to better serve the consumer communications need. One of these is a 17:6 aspect ratio LCD display from LG Electronics. This new stretch “format” display is easier to position and can use media composed for 16:9 aspect ratio to easily accommodate ‘dynamic’ content areas and ‘static’ content areas” says Ron Snaidauf, vice president, Commercial Products, LG Electronics USA, Inc.

Snaidauf continues, “In today’s world of advanced digital marketing techniques, there has been a marked increase in creative advertising to communicate core messages across a broad audience. From conference rooms to retail, digital advertising is a way of educating and engaging consumers through unique content applications on a variety of products, services and messages.

“Keeping the intended objectives in mind and not being drawn to non-primary goal areas is a critical success factor says John Melillo”, President of Diversified Media Group, a managed network provider, offering full-service design, engineering and managing capabilities for digital signage. In this way, additional abilities can be evaluated against intended outcomes and measured for possible addition.” He adds “advertising-based networks may start with distinct principles, but flexibility should always be designed into

the network so that key innovation opportunities and experiences can also be delivered on the foundation of a solid, stable, scalable infrastructure.

Melillo adds “many industry suppliers have seen themselves as the innovators because DS/DOOH was initially a technology-driven, but that has changed, and innovation is now coming from advertisers and communicators.”

In a recent keynote presentation at GlobalShop, Melillo used specific case studies in his presentation of “Digital Signage Project Management: From Pilot to General Roll-Out” describe how this flexibility could be achieved in networks used for branding, advertising, corporate communications, distance learning and IPTV/Video on Demand.

Keith Amodio, Marketing & Communications Specialist at Magenta Research, says “central control of media presentation on multiple displays at multiple locations is an inherent strength of digital signage. The network connectivity at a location must enable this capability while striking the balance of cost-effective capability to distribute the media and gather playout information”.

SpinetiX provides an ultra compact, solid state appliance as a standalone playback device for digital signage content that can be installed directly behind the screens for reliable, long term playback. As displays in many environments grow toward providing a unique message on each display the ease of installation, very low power consumption and reliability are as important as the ability to load the player with any software for use with any media management system. Serge Konter, Marketing Manager of SpinetiX SA says “straight forward integration with other state-of-the-art technologies is key to success.

Creativity also applies in how displays are integrated into the environment. ITS Enclosures offers products to safely enclose electronic devices to protecting them from harsh surroundings including cold, heat and dirt as well as vandalism, making them more powerful tools, extending their useful life, and above all else, protect our customer's processes from costly downtime.

Displays need to fit into the aesthetic of locations, and new architectures, modern design, historic significance and building structures add to the importance of display enclosures as part of the overall system. By harmonizing the enclosure to the environment, the display can enhance the experience at a location and assure its maximum benefit.

“Even in today’s economy, the question is not whether to purchase digital signage, it’s “How fast can I get it?” says Brian Kutchma, Director of Marketing at Black Box Network Services. “No other medium makes it possible to deliver compelling content at the right location at the right time for maximum impact. Whether your goal is to increase sales, improve branding, encourage certain behavior or improve communications with employees, there has never been a better time to consider digital signage. Digital signage is very effective and, most importantly, it’s affordable for almost every business.”

Black Box offers a roadmap to identify the right system and infrastructure to meet needs:

1. Define your goals and objectives: What do you want to achieve and how are you going to measure it?
2. What type of content do you want to display (e.g., static images, video, RSS feeds, live TV, etc.)?
3. How many locations and displays do you want to run the content on?
4. Will the content be the same on each screen, or do you want to show different content on different screens?
5. How do you want to manage your content and be able to change or update it?
6. Do you want to remotely control the on/off and volume functionality of the screen or confirm when content is played?
7. Based on location displays, will you have potential security issues? (Can someone simply turn off the display, change channels, or even tamper with or remove the player?)
8. Does your existing network have the bandwidth to support digital signage traffic?

“Digital signage is more than cool — it’s smart” says Andrea Waldin, Vice President of Marketing, Scala Inc. adding “companies around the world are realizing that digital signage is a good investment, not only because it adds a high-tech edge to a venue, but because it addresses the specific business needs of increasing revenue and decreasing costs”.

When talking about digital signage, the conversation usually turns quickly to advertising-based networks. Digital signage is an advertiser’s dream, allowing an ad displayed based on the audience who will view it by using an endless number of variables, including time of day, location of the ad, weather, sales system data and even the characteristics of the person standing in front of the screen.

As any good marketer knows, the more targeted the message, the better chance of compelling the desired response. Digital signage changes the game with a level of audience targeting that is unmatched by any other medium. Plus, it can be used to increase revenue in other ways than advertising. It can lengthen customer visits, improve customer experiences and increase brand awareness, all of which can increase revenue.

Digital signage reduces the time, cost and waste of traditional printed signage while assuring 100% compliance in messages being presented.

Other companies have saved money by using digital signage to communicate with employees not typically connected to e-mail or to communicate with visitors. “So, the question isn’t if digital signage will go mainstream, it’s when” says Andrea Waldin. Companies ranging in size from the very tiny such as the diner where you eat breakfast on the weekends to multi-billion dollar international giants like IKEA, Burger King and Rabobank are running digital signage networks today.

Digital signage just makes sense as a modern communications tool, and it has attracted suppliers with substantial experience in a range of business offerings.

The technology itself, for example is helping to advance the metrics and accountability of DS/DOOH. Cognovision with its fully automated Anonymous Impression Metric (AIM) is used to measure viewership while providing complete privacy. The Cognovision system captures potential and actual audience impressions, viewing duration, dwell time and anonymous demographics such as gender and age range. It is also useful in optimizing display locations. Since it is simply added to a display and its media player, Cognovision is easy and inexpensive to deploy and use.

While providing anonymous audience measurement in the immediate term, Cognovision capability sets the stage for “dynamic image provisioning” whereby a content spot is presented based on the demographic profile of the viewer.

“Bernie Shimkovitz, CEO of Alliance Financing says “funding is a crucial part of the deployment strategy and network facilitators or end user organizations should always look to finance the capital investment - turning it into a monthly operating expense and matching this expense to anticipated revenues - a perfect example of leveraging of their cash resources. This has been a successful strategy for the hundreds of network deployments that we have worked with.”

“Digital Out-of-Home offers real benefits in audience reach and message targeting for advertisers and network owners ranging from retailers to sports arenas. Media and ad management solutions from Harris Corporation will serve this emerging market with integrated, scalable tools that fit this business model, improve productivity and allow them to develop incremental revenue and build stronger brands” says Harris Morris, Vice President and General Manger of Harris Broadcast's Media and Workflow group.

The deployment roadmap it seems does not end with installation. Steve Harris, VP of Digital Display & Communications, which was recognised with three separate DIGI Awards in fall 2008, says “some of our best clients approached us after they had already struggled through an unsuccessful pilot project where they had taken on the responsibilities of system design, content creation and operations in-house, usually through their IT department. Too often we see companies getting caught up in the “coolness” of technology by trying to source hardware and software themselves, not realizing that there are experienced digital signage solutions companies like DDC that offer the Full Picture of digital signage services – from initial content strategy development through to system design, installation and ongoing services. Our customers also have the added benefit of working with our award winning creative team for their ongoing content production. By outsourcing digital signage operations to DDC, our customers are able to concentrate on their core business and focus on managing their message – not the medium”.

Lyle Bunn is a highly regarded independent advisor and educator in North America's digital signage/digital out-of-home sector. Lyle@LyleBunn.com

