

# HOW TO PLAN FOR YOUR DIGITAL SIGNAGE APPLICATION

Before beginning any digital signage project, you will need to assess your site and your resources by:

## **Surveying the site where the digital screens will be placed.**

Ensure that you can adequately mount, power, and have room to troubleshoot the installed LCD, plasma, or other screen. Be sure to have a technician verify the power levels for every location, so that it's clear of line noise and consistent, and there's enough airflow. Excessive heat can cause sensitive electronics to perform inadequately or even fail.

Also determine the lighting at all hours of the day. If it's under fluorescent lighting or in areas with a lot of sunlight, you may need panels with suitable coatings, the kind that reduce the amount of reflective light. And along with the ambient light, determine how much ambient noise is present. You may have to use larger speakers, at different angles, for your site's application.

Don't forget to take into account the size of the audience you plan to reach. Plasma screens with wider viewing angles may serve you better than LCDs in certain spaces. Touchscreen displays are a technology on the rise as well. This allows you to set up more advanced, interactive signage. Surveying traffic flow patterns at different times of the day will also help you determine optimal screen placement.

**Ensuring that you have the necessary network connections.**

If you don't, you may have to look into setting up a wireless link, which is also ideal for isolated storefront areas or deploying digital signage in historic, architecturally significant buildings where wiring isn't feasible. Or consider using standalone content player units near the signage (this won't allow you to stream live video from off-site or via the Internet, but it offers a solution if you're just playing pre-recorded content, such as slideshows).

If you have a wired Internet connection for content delivery or plan to use a private VPN over public broadband link, verify that your ISP can support your needs. Many providers limit the amount of bandwidth that customers can use. If this happens to you, your Web-routed content may

be unable to stream content to digital signage nodes at the edge of your applications.

Even if you don't use the Internet, keep in mind that the larger the files, the more bandwidth and processing power you'll need. Industry pros will tell you that DVD-quality video (for standard NTSC resolution of 720 x 480 Hz) requires approximately 40 MB of file space per minute. For 1080i digital signage, you'll need 140 MB per minute. What's more, data-heavy files can cause network bottlenecks and if not provisioned for appropriately, can lead to costly downtime and unhappy users.

You may even want to consider a private leased-line connection. Yes, it's expensive, but it'll enable you to keep tabs on bandwidth usage, monitor data flows, and direct bandwidth to digital signage links with the highest demands.

And what if you plan to set up a distributed digital signage network with, say, 100 or more sites miles apart, with some locations in rural areas, out of the reach of DSL or CATV providers? Satellite instead of terrestrial lines may be what you need, particularly if you plan to multicast DVD-quality MPEG2 video to different signs. If you do go the

satellite route, be advised that you might need signal decoders to convert what's captured by a dish on the rooftop, as well as a router that processes packets for content fed from an IP link.

### **Evaluating and planning content.**

The first step in planning content is to outline what you want to display, how you want to display it, and how often you want to change it. Do you want to show live streaming video, RSS news, or stock ticker feeds? Do you want to share breaking news stories? Do you want to deliver constantly changing updates, messages, promotions, specials, etc? With digital signage almost anything is possible.

Today's digital signage solutions offer you a wide array of options and nearly endless presentation opportunities, including video, audio, still images, tickers, HTML, and flash animation. You can display the same content at multiple screens or you can display unique content at each individual screen. You can even schedule the content to change at regular intervals or scheduled times based on your desired messaging or audiences.

If your internal resources are limited, you can easily find a large number of third-party content creators that can deliver world-class digital signage. Creative costs can vary so you might want to explore a few options. You'll also want to make sure you see their work, talk to their customers, and get estimates in writing. You might want to consider using both internal and external sources. Have an expert develop content to be displayed and then you can simply modify the content in-house as you see fit.

If you're starting to feel a little intimidated by all the available options and decisions, don't be. The good news is that many of today's digital signage media players are preloaded with a wide selection of templates and user-friendly design tools that make in-house content creation a viable, affordable option. Once you've determined what you want to display, conduct an internal review of your available resources. Do you have the available staff, experience, and existing collateral to create the content? If the answer is yes, then you might want to consider in-house content creation. There's probably a good chance you already have a library of resources from company literature, Web sites, etc.

Start with them. Most of the content creation systems available with digital signage media players are fairly easy to use and require limited training. Like most things, the more you work with it, the better you get.

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