



The Digital Moment of Truth







The Right Content in the Right Place at the Right Time

Know Your Medium

Digital signage is a form of electronic display that shows video programming, digital menus, information, advertising and other dynamic messaging. Digital signage displays can be found in public and private environments, including retail stores, hotels, banks, restaurants, entertainment venues and corporate offices.

Digital signage is increasingly used as a form of out-of-home advertising in which video content, advertisements and real-time messages are displayed on screens with a goal of delivering targeted messages to specific locations at specific times.

Businesses considering the use of digital signage are often most focused on the physical elements of the solution, including media players, screens, peripherals and network connectivity. However, the most important element of a successful and useful digital signage implementation is the content. Content for digital signage is different than other mediums used for marketing and advertising. The digital signage medium is unique. It is not the same as television, websites or print promotions. The content that should be created for digital signage is fresh, dynamic and

different. The technology components that control digital signage displays present opportunities to create and leverage content with exciting characteristics compared to traditional video.

In addition, the market has proven digital signage as more beneficial than static signage because content can be updated frequently, saving the cost of printing and capturing more attention. Digital signage also has the ability to be interactive using touch screens, gestures and mobile device integration.



Purpose > Objective > Environment > Call to Action > Response

Understand the Purpose

At the beginning of a new project, research must be done, and questions must be answered. Before moving forward with a digital signage deployment, the content strategist and designer must fully understand the objective of the project.

Research is pivotal in creating the right content for the business. To ensure the proper style of a company, refer to a Branding Style Guide that may be provided. Typically, the marketing team has already decided the selection of the colors, style assets and fonts to be used in their promotional messaging. Whether a Branding Style Guide has been provided or not, the designer must gather a variety of information from different sources. These sources include the company's web assets, print assets, broadcast ads, logo assets and existing photography. Any type of media that displays the company's image publicly is usually helpful when planning the digital signage content strategy. Previous content created by the company, such as flyers, catalogues, magazines, taglines, etc., could also be helpful for recycling and using in the process.

assets















The reason for using digital signage should be the driving force in creating the content. Understand the purpose of the digital signage, whether it is to educate, train, entertain, inform, etc. This needs to be understood before beginning to create content.

Define the Objective

Return on investment (ROI) is extremely important in digital signage deployments, but as a content designer, return on objective (ROO) is just as important, and may have a greater impact on the consumer experience. By delivering the best consumer experiences and brand messaging, you will leave an impression on each consumer, either negative or positive. This impression is directly impacted by the content created and will impact the ROO and ultimately the business.

By enhancing the experience, consumers will be more receptive and more easily motivated to engage with the brand. A consumer should be informed and entertained after viewing the content. Each experience has an impact, and could change the consumer's attitude towards the brand. By creating quality content that connects with the consumer, customer loyalty will push sales and positively impact the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

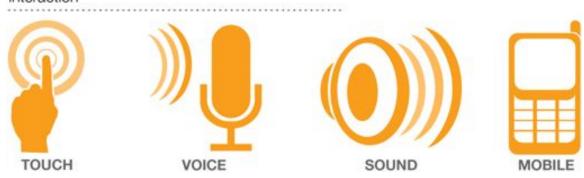
Relevancy is a key function to creating great content. If the content is not relevant to the product, to the demographic or even to the environment that it is in, the content can become lost, or even worse, obtrusive. Understanding that many types of viewers can be affected emotionally by content is also important.

"Eight positive emotions: self-creation, mastery, dreaming, security, playtime, sport, sanctuary, and connection."

Engagement is critical. Attracting and informing the consumer without being obtrusive, boring or annoying is the name of the game. Know when to use passive or interactive content. Each has their advantages. Some digital displays may not be suitable for interactive use depending on the type of hardware, venue type and proximity to viewers. Be sure to understand the objective of the messaging, hardware capabilities and venue characteristics before moving forward.

Determine whether to use touch or not. Interaction can provide a whole other level of connecting the consumer to the experience. By interacting with a display, a consumer can retain more of the content and derive more benefit, but the content needs to be relevant to their needs. Create the right type of messaging to attract the consumer's attention, and to let them know they can interact with the display. Determine when to use sound or not, when it is appropriate for the content and whether it works for the physical environment. Sound helps engage the viewer through another sense: hearing. Present one thing at a time. Offer choices. Determine whether to use mobile device integration such as text messaging offers to enhance the experience and to create opportunities for further engagement.

interaction



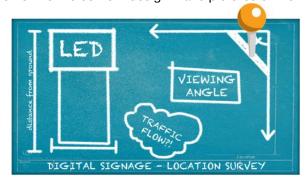
Loyalty and engagement are created by positive personal experiences and by fellow consumers. Thoughts about a brand are evaluated and communicated to other consumers. These moods and feelings are greatly impacted by first impressions. With digital signage, as opposed to some other traditional forms of promotions and messaging, the content created has the opportunity to be fresh and updated often. Take advantage of this by creating relevant, timely content that connects with consumers.

Consider the Environment

The physical environment of the venue can have a big impact on content design considerations. Knowing where the digital display will be located will help to keep the content looking seamless to the environment. An issue many companies have with digital signage is how it fits into their environmental design. As a content designer, it is your goal to seamlessly relate the content to where it is placed at the location. If possible, survey the location.

When surveying the location, there are many things to be considered. Taking photos of the location will help in coordinating the right elements into the content design. Take pictures of the

surroundings, and more specifically take pictures of where the digital signage will be located. When surveying the location, understand the differences in viewing angles and distances from the screen to understand what would be legible. Also, if sound is going to be incorporated, think about how it will fit in the environment and proximity to the consumer. If it's not possible to visit the location, coordinate with the business stakeholders in finding out as much as possible.



Technical details of the digital display technology are often overlooked, but are actually a large part of the equation when creating content. Be sure to figure out exactly what size screen and aspect ratio will be used. Knowing distances and screen sizes will help in creating a clearly defined message. It will help in understanding what can be seen, and what will be lost at certain distances. It may not make a great impact on certain decisions when creating content, but it is helpful to know on what type of screen the content will be displayed, whether it is an LCD, LED, Plasma, etc... This can affect viewing angles as well as brightness.

Understanding traffic frequency is also important. How many times does a consumer visit the location over a period of time? This will help in planning the frequency of your content updates. It will also help in determining the scheduling of media to be displayed.



times of day.

Scheduling is the key to providing the right content at the right time. When creating a single piece of content, understand that it is usually used as part of a schedule or playlist, and must fit with other content pieces to form a cohesive program. Schedule your playlist according to traffic patterns throughout the day. A playlist can vary depending on the time of day, week, month and season. A content loop should be discussed with the business stakeholders in understanding the objective of the display. Special openings or featured specials could be a part of a new playlist. You may also need to break the day into parts. This will help in creating specific content for specific

Critical success factors include the display capability, suitability of medium and content effectiveness. By taking advantage of all of knowledge of these characteristics, the content designer has a better opportunity to create content that connects with the consumer.

Create a Call to Action

Know your audience. Understanding the demographic of your audience will help better connect your message with the consumer. The best objective for demographics is to know certain classifications, such as age, sex, education, income, etc... Other research may be done on the actual consumers at a specific location to determine even more demographically relevant content. This content could relate to their wants, needs and desires. Unlike commercial TV, the consumers are typically coming directly to the source, and the demographic may stay fairly consistent. Effective communication starts with knowing your audience. Understand that the demographic can change throughout the day and week and that content programming may be changed based on time of day or day of the week to ensure a correlation between the content and the demographic of your consumer.

Content needs to be relevant, compelling, entertaining, colorful and readable in less than three seconds. The average dwell time may vary the amount of time that you have with a possible

consumer, but the attention span is short. The message needs to quickly connect with the consumer in order to have a chance at creating engagement.

Dwell times need to always be considered when creating content. A good rule of thumb as a designer is to assume you have a viewer for only 15 seconds. Know exactly where a digital sign is located, including its dwell time and its overall playlist duration.

There are three different types of digital signage networks. Point of Transit (POT) works by grabbing the attention of passing



consumers for a brief period of time – the return is driven by number of eyeballs. Point of Sale (POS) is what consumers encounter close to a product or service sale. Call to action is immediate – sales ultimately drive the success of this specific network. Point of Wait (POW) is targeted at consumers waiting for a product or service – eyeballs reached, and behavioral change in attitude of the consumer based on experience is the return on objective (ROO).

Measure the Response

Without a call to action, it can be difficult to measure consumer engagement and overall effectiveness of the digital signage content.

If the goal is to increase sales, create call to action messaging which can be measured. The effectiveness of passive media content can be measured against objectives using data, reporting, and viewer tracking and analysis. Interactive content can be measured by tracking which content receives the most active engagement and attention.

If the goal of the content is to entertain and/or advertise to the audience, there are also ways to measure this engagement. Traditional methods are similar to television. There may be services retained to "rate" the audience engagement, traffic, and demographic data. Increasingly, there are technology-based solutions for measuring viewership. Some display systems use Anonymous Video Analytics (AVA) to measure viewership. This can be helpful in determining the most engaging content, and to further optimize and realize better results by adjusting content strategy based on the results.

Feeding the Beast the Right Diet

One of the challenges for businesses undertaking digital signage projects is to produce content frequently and effectively. The term "feeding the beast" describes the need to keep content fresh, relevant, useful, interesting, compelling and inspiring.

Content is what connects the consumer to the brand, not the technology or medium delivering the message. It is beneficial to understand the guidelines of the brand's style, and stay true to the style and personality. Also, understand the objective, storyboard the ideas before starting to create content. If the business comes to you with a blank canvas, it is still your job to fill it in as a designer. Content can have many purposes: to inform, educate, motivate, or entertain.

Each piece of content should be simple and concise. Depending on dwell times, determine whether to have short or long messages. Longer duration does not mean to deluge the screen with text. Visuals will always have dominance over text, and will stay with the viewers for a longer duration. Don't try to force every bit of information into one message. If need be, break the message up into discrete units. Always consider that you will only get the viewer's attention for a moment or two. If the viewer is passing the display, the message needs to be quick and concise, but if the viewer is waiting, the content needs be engaging for the duration of the wait.

Proper planning will help in creating a more successful piece of content. Storyboarding the ideas and making sure the vision is clear and concise will help eliminate any additional time making changes later. Due to the frequency of content creation often required for the medium, creating templates and graphics that can be leveraged will help in making content abundant and consistent in look. Consider the content as a series of video segments.

Create content that employs visual motion. Humans, based on a primal conditioning, are wired to notice movement because it may represent a threat or an opportunity. Also, faces on screen attract viewers as well. Understand that people are impacted in various ways: by colors, shapes, icons, etc. Good quality content is important to achieving the objective.

Feeding the Beast: Content Specifics

Setting the standards for acceptable deliverables will save a lot of headaches. Determine what formats, codecs and sizes are acceptable and whether the deliverables will be High Definition, Standard Definition, or both.

While creating content, it is important to understand the aspect ratio, so the image or video does not get distorted or cropped in any way. Keep in mind that using multiple zones of content types on the screen can vary the aspect ratio as well.

Feeding the Beast: Showcasing Products

Ensure consistency in how products are photographed or videotaped so the look has continuity from one product to the next. The designer shouldn't draw the viewer away from the message because of subtle differences in product/brand positioning. Visual continuity is a good rule of thumb to go by when creating content pieces.

Feeding the Beast: Text Usage

Text must be legible, and easy to read at a glance. Utilize the brand's font guidelines to ensure continuity with other marketing materials. There will typically be only one or two fonts used on the screen. Vary the usage of the font to create visual texture in contrasting ways that are appealing and balanced. Combining bold and lightweights will help keep the viewers' attention on the right words. Select three or four font weights, such as light, regular, semi-bold and bold [Fig. 1A]. The designer has freedom in using whatever will look good. Keep the content creative, but not chaotic.

different weights

Light Regular Medium Bold

[Fig. 1A]

When determining the font size, keep in consideration the distance from which a viewer will see the information and the size of the screen on which the content will appear. Use large font sizes so that viewers can read your message at a glance [Fig. 1B]. Don't use too many fonts in a single piece of content, and don't go overboard with colored text [Fig. 1C]. Avoid writing in all caps.

different sizes

...efghijkImnopqrstuvwxy Z

bad

[Fig. 1B]

different font styles

Reflect Reflect REFLECT

good

bad

[Fig. 1C]

Group key phrases or concepts together, usually in bundles of three [Fig. 1D]. Repeating important words and phrases 2-3 times in a row reinforce the message. Using alliteration and rhyme can have a greater response.

spacing or "chunking"

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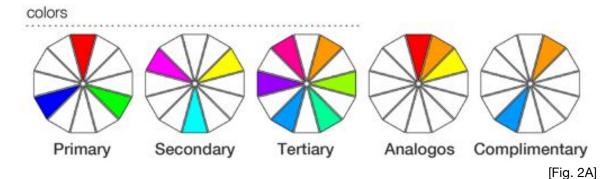
bad

9000

[Fig. 1D]

Feeding the Beast: Color Usage

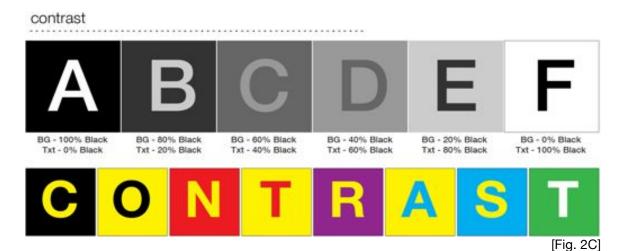
Identify the brand colors of the company, product, etc. Colors are usually designed to work well together and live in harmony within compositions [Fig. 2A].



Use gradients to create a sense of space around products. Adding depth to the content will make the product/message pop from the background. The focus should be on the product or message, not the background [Fig. 2B].

backgrounds backgrounds backgrounds Fig. 2B

It can be difficult to read certain messages when there is little contrast between the background and the message. There must be a significant difference between the Hue and Saturation of the message compared to the background [Fig. 2C].



Feeding the Beast: In Motion

Create a shorthand language with icons to help guide the viewer with specific visual themes. Depending on the type of display purpose, these can fall into a number of categories. They can be seasonal, departmental, contextual or emotional. Animate icons in specific ways to enhance network continuity. Icons need to be consistent. For example, all icons may relate to a specific look and feel. They may be bold or soft, or bright or pastel, in nature.

Transitions add movement to the screen and can direct the viewer's attention to one place or another. Transitions need to be seamless within a piece of content and among other pieces of content. Don't place too much attention on the transition that it takes away from the message.

Utilizing images and symbols that a viewer can relate with will help. They should be relevant to the objective. Be cautious when using images that grab the viewer's attention (people's faces, pictures of babies, animals, etc...) as these can easily divert attention from the main message.

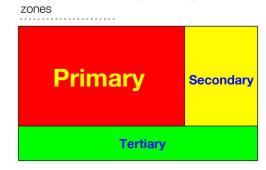
Motion graphics can be effective, but can also draw away from the message. Keep in mind that the text must be legible. Limit the amount of movement so that the message can be read and properly perceived.

Feeding the Beast: Template Usage

Structure the zones on the screen. For some display networks, one may want to have an onscreen zone with main content, another zone with secondary content, and potentially a third

zone for informational content. Storyboard the zones out, explaining each of their purposes. Only use zones for a reason. Consider the content needs of the display, the viewing distance, size of the display and traffic patterns of the audience.

Themed messaging can be useful according to the type of network. Example- In a corporate communications network one may want to have themes based on the department so viewers understand the type of message being presented.



Creating a template that pulls information from an RSS or XML feed can keep content fresh and up to date. This type of content can be used to deliver video clips, images, text, web content, and other data-driven messaging. Taking the time needed to create an application like this can help drive new content to the screen without the labor of producing original content for every messaging need.

The most important messages should be at the beginning and the end of your content. Allow the first item to be recognized and digested, and leave enough time for people to remember the last item at the end. It is better to focus on a maximum of two items. Limit the things the viewer has to remember.

Mission Accomplished

Creating effective content for digital signage displays presents unique challenges, as well as great opportunities for engagement, entertainment and motivation. As with any content creation, telling a story and creating a connection with the consumer require a thoughtful approach and a clear understanding of what works best for the medium.

Further Reading

The following are some recommended resources to further enhance your toolkit:

- Digital Signage Insider Blog Making great digital signage content: A quick reference www.wirespring.com/dynamic_digital_signage_and_interactive_kiosks_journal/articles/M aking_great_digital_signage_content__A_quick_reference_guide-459.html
- Keith Kelsen Unleashing the Power of Digital Signage www.5thscreen.info
- Digital Content Circle Making great digital signage content: Does color matter?
 http://www.digitalcontentcircle.com/topic/8-step-by-step-design/article/39-making-great-digital-signage-content-does-color-matter
- The Fundamentals of Branding by Melissa Davis