THE DIGITAL MEDIA
ICEBERG

Success Involves More
than What You See on the Surface

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Introduction

The digital signage industry is growing fast, and the benefits of it are becoming clear. According to a recent report[1], the worldwide market is expected to reach $23.76 billion by 2020, at a compound annual growth rate of 8.18% between 2015 and 2020. Behind such growth is the value digital signage adds to the bottom line: significant increases in brand awareness, sales and repeat business.

Digital signage communicates with targeted audiences in a more dynamic, engaging and effective way than other, more traditional mediums. Sometimes, however, companies that are considering digital signage put too much emphasis on the elements of it that are most obvious to their customers: modern, ultra-thin bezel displays, for example.

Those are important, of course, but too much focus on them sometimes means organizations neglect the bigger picture. A successful digital media solution accounts for much more than what you see on the surface.

It's what we call the digital media iceberg.

We've broken it down into three key components:

- **Really Sexy Stuff**
- **Pretty Sexy Stuff**
- **Geeky Stuff**

If you're considering digital signage or if you're moving from a pilot to a full roll-out, make sure your focus extends beyond the sexy stuff. In this whitepaper, we'll look at the less glamorous side of digital signage and provide some tips and tricks to avoid a shipwreck when you're designing and implementing your solution. You'll find that in terms of planning, decision-making and ultimate success, many of the elements that lie beneath the surface often are ones you want to bring to light first.

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1   Markets and Markets Research: Digital Signage Market worth $23.76 Billion by 2020 (http://www.marketsandmarkets.com/PressReleases/digital-signage.asp)

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A successful solution accounts for much more
than what you see on the surface

Really Sexy Stuff

.... Gorgeous Displays

.... Customer Experience

Pretty Sexy Stuff

.... Media Strategy

.... Ongoing Content Design

.... Data Integration

.... Programming Strategy

.... Content Management System

.... Hardware Decisions

Geeky Stuff

.... Content Workflow Process

.... Network Design
and Integration

.... Network Monitor

.... Service and Support

.... Measurement and Analytics

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Really Sexy Stuff

When you think of digital signage, the "really sexy stuff" immediately comes to mind: gorgeous displays showcasing amazing, dynamic content. That's what everyone wants, and understandably so, since they are the elements of signage that are most obvious to your customers.

Those same sexy elements of digital signage get us excited about its soft benefits: enhancing the customer experience, or how we assume people are going to react when they come into a store or restaurant with attractive, modern-looking displays. Among those assumptions? Our signage is so spectacular that customers are going to think about their experience days after. Or they're going to be more brand-loyal because of it.

Displays are going to lose their luster, no matter how cool they are. But purpose-driven solutions will stand the test of time.

This pie in the sky thinking isn't realistic and doesn't address the heart of your solution: why are you considering digital signage in the first place? Displays are going to lose their luster, no matter how cool they are. But purpose-driven solutions will stand the test of time.

Sure, it's tempting to plunge into screen types and sizes and spend time imagining content that's going to make a big splash right from the start. And yes, both are critical in creating an engaging and memorable experience. But that doesn't mean they are the first things you should consider in developing your digital signage program. Don't be seduced by beautiful flat screens. They're just a means to

an end and should be considered much later in the process.

Pretty Sexy Stuff

As we first move under the surface, we come to some of the less flashy details of digital signage. The pretty sexy stuff may not be as obvious as the really sexy stuff, but it's probably the most important element of a successful project. The pretty sexy stuff centers on strategy and the answers to four, not-so-easy to answer questions:

- **What's my reason for using digital signage?**

- **How do I plan a program that supports our objectives?**

- **How do I develop and sustain content to achieve results?**

- **What hardware and software do I need to meet my business objectives?**

Interestingly enough, a comprehensive **media strategy** that defines objectives for a program often is missing from most solutions. In fact, media strategy should be the cornerstone of your solution. This is where you define the what, how and, most importantly, the **why** of your program. You need to clearly define your business objectives, desired results and expected return on investment. Do you want to increase sales, enhance employee engagement, increase awareness of new products or drive higher margin transactions? Having specific objectives and ways to measure them should dictate how you use digital signage, where you place it, how your customers will engage with it and what kind of content will drive those objectives.

Lock step with you media strategy is an

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ongoing content design plan. Your content plan provides structure to your solution, ensures consistency in the creative design, execution and philosophy and defines the type of content that will deliver the best results. The development of a content plan takes into consideration your marketing programs, seasons and campaigns, your audiences and the environment in which the content will be seen. It should dictate a clear strategy for the ongoing creative required to keep your signage fresh and engaging.

One way to keep content fresh is by leveraging dynamic data: feeds from other systems and applications that offer information of interest to your audience. For example, showing real-time sales numbers from a customer relationship management system can keep employees plugged in. Or dynamically displaying hot products based on web sales can drive demand in-store. Such **data integration** keeps content fresh and can be very effective in engaging your audience. But choosing the right data and presenting it in a clear and meaningful way takes craftsmanship on the part of both creative designers and programmers.

While creating great content is critical,

Content Plan

designing the **programming strategy** for how it plays is equally important. Programming strategy should be developed for each unique display location and needs to account for the purpose and location of a display, the desired result and the overall story you want to tell. Consider parameters around scheduling, playlisting, message length and frequency, content refresh rate and day parting.

A key aspect to executing your programming strategy is the selection of a content management system (CMS). With more than 300 on the market, it can be tempting to roll up your sleeves and start work immediately to find the "perfect" CMS. But in reality, the CMS accounts for only one part of the total solution, and it must support your content strategy, not supersede it. Selecting your CMS actually comes relatively late in the planning and development process.

A final important note about content and content management: organizations often underestimate the amount of time needed to manage a solution, and typically do not have a dedicated team, or even a

dedicated person, to manage a fully rolled-out program. While systems are becoming more intelligent, content management can still be an overwhelming task, particularly if you have a complex network (one with a large number of locations and displays) and granular messaging. Giving thought to the human element of designing content and managing technology is critical to a successful deployment.

As for **hardware decisions**, they're important, but as we said earlier, often are made too early in the process. Your budget can be a limiting factor in determining what hardware to use, but decisions should be made based on the goals of your digital signage. Never let software or hardware dictate your solution; let your objectives and applications define your requirements.

Geeky Stuff

We're finally getting to the geeky stuff – the things that, truthfully, if you overlook, your project will have a higher chance of failure.

The geeky stuff is vital to the sustainability of your solution and is centered on its reliability, scalability and uptime. These are the details that are critical to the success of your solution. Some of the questions you need to ask yourself include:

- **How is everything going to work together?**

- **What happens when something goes wrong?**

- **Do I have the resources to make sure my system is running properly?**

- **How am I going to measure the success of my solution?**

Most marketers and vendors begin their discussion around digital signage workflow as if content had already been created. In reality, the development, review, approval and distribution of content is a critical component. It's important to have a roles-based **content workflow process** that defines and, when possible, automates that work to ease the burden on your resources, as well as provides an approval audit trail. Automated workflows can streamline the process and make working with an agency that much easier.

Content Workflow

Create   Review   Adjust   Approve   Schedule

Network design and integration are key components to ensuring that all elements are working together. Thorough testing, quality control and certification are essential. Equally important is getting approval from your IT department and understanding any bandwidth restraints or network limitations that could impact content delivery. Updating content on demand is one of the big lures of digital signage, but if you're distributing content across the same network that supports your point of sale (POS) system during business hours, it could raise an IT red flag.

Nobody likes to talk about it, but the fact is, screens, media players and networks sometimes fail. Think about how long is too long for a screen to be down in your store, restaurant, bank or office. Advanced **network monitoring** systems can track the status of your solution and alert you if any issues arise. Alerts provide immediate notification to technical support and engineering and allow them to remotely analyze, diagnose and resolve issues more efficiently. The alternative? Waiting for someone to notice and place a call to technical support.

Sales Lift

Engagement

Message Retention

Speaking of which: what kind of **service and support** do you have in place to go onsite and repair or replace hardware? And do you have a spares pool to draw from in case you need to swap out a display or other piece of equipment? Unfortunately, these are things many companies only consider after they have a problem, which doesn't help you get your signage up and running again as quickly as possible. While many issues can be resolved remotely, don't overlook or over-simplify the need for feet on the street when you need expertise to troubleshoot and fix problems fast. A robust field services team can provide quick, onsite problem solving and resolution to issues, and also can be used when you're installing your solution. Whether you have 50 locations or 1,500, efficient and effective installation and repair is essential.

Network monitoring and service and support are big considerations, especially for a large deployment; a managed services company with a reliable network operations center (NOC) is crucial. Running a pilot and supporting a full-blown network are very different. Network complexity, size and the volume of content across it can present challenges that aren't so obvious in a pilot.

At the very bottom of our iceberg are **measurement and analytics.** They can be summed up with one question: **Is your solution meeting your objectives?** A large-scale digital signage network can deliver amazing results, but most of the time, companies don't measure them. So how do you know what's working and what's not?

Digital signage is an investment, and it's not impossible to measure. Creating benchmarks to determine whether your solution is successful is paramount. They should be established as you're developing your strategy and should be tied to business objectives. Not only can measurement and evaluation help

you prove success; they also can give you the tools to make a successful implementation better.

Avoiding a Shipwreck
How to Implement Your Digital Signage Solution

So now you know that the sexiest elements of digital signage aren't necessarily those that should be at the top of your to-do list when you're planning and implementing a program. What should be? Consider these steps, in this order:

1. Define your objectives.

2. Understand your audiences and their expectations.

3. Consider other marketing channels and how they need to work together to drive results.

4. Define success. What does it look like for your company? What are you hoping to accomplish with your digital signage?

5. Define quantitative ways to measure success. Measures can include POS analysis for sales uplift, facial recognition for attention tracking and even the good old customer survey.

6. Develop a media strategy and content design plan that will guide your work on an ongoing basis.

7. Craft the content workflow process. It's important to make the process as simple and efficient as possible, while making sure you have checks and balances in place to eliminate mistakes.

8. Develop a programming strategy.

9. Select the right hardware – displays, media players, tablets, mobile, etc. – to support your strategy.

10. Choose a content management system that will support your creative and programming strategies and applications.

11. Develop an implementation strategy that takes into account network design and integration and data integration.

12. Create a technical support plan and implement a monitoring system.

Conclusion

Digital signage is being deployed in almost every industry and in an array of sizes: from single-site implementations to nationwide projects in thousands of locations. And with its contribution to brand awareness and sales, digital signage can be a fruitful investment.

But no matter the specifics of your program, remember that you need to think about the entire ecosystem – the sexy and the not-so-sexy. Like our iceberg, there is so much more to a successful digital signage solution than meets the eye.

About Us

Raising expectations for on-site digital signage experiences, we are Convergent, a Ballantyne Strong Company, with hundreds of thousands of locations deployed worldwide that are seen by millions every day.

We challenge clients to think differently about how they engage with their customers and employees and the technology they use to do it—from retail to healthcare, SMB to Fortune 1000, cinema to banking to QSR. We craft captivating and compelling turnkey solutions that increase brand awareness, turn consumers into customers and employees into brand ambassadors. And we handle it all—end-to-end—from strategy to implementation to unmatched technical support.

Our cloud-based digital media platform is transforming the industry. Its radical approach to content creation and management provides unlimited scalability, absolute reliability and lower deployment and management costs.

We are Convergent. And we are here to elevate your digital experiences.

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