

10 Best Practices in Implementing Digital Signage & In-Store Media

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In-store communications historically have been characterized by static signage and displays. Other technology-based media have entered the scene, however, and at the same time the effectiveness of television advertising is eroding.

There is a need for a more energetic and flexible way of communicating brand identity and purchase drivers in the store in “the last three feet” in front of the shelf, kiosk or fixture.

In-store digital media addresses this challenge and is a powerful strategy that gives retailers and brands the ability to leverage a vibrant delivery of sight, sound and motion to target shoppers with compelling, captivating messages at the precise moment they are making a purchase decision. Messages can be delivered at the product, brand or category level. They can come through multi-screen displays for an entire cosmetics department or through stand-alone screens integrated into a single brand’s nail or fragrance display.

Digital media, whether by the name “electronic media,” “digital signage” or “dynamic signage,” is no longer the stuff of dreams or science fiction. Widespread applications are in place and continue to grow in industries such as

banking. A number of retailers have demonstrated significant sales lifts and are increasing their investment in in-store digital messaging. When one considers that 70 to 80% of purchase decisions are made in the store, the importance of this medium (especially when deployed with more traditional printed media) becomes clear.

Several factors have supported the growth of in-store digital signage. High-quality display units are more affordable. Software has greater ease of use and reliability. Data travels quickly over existing networks. Stand-alone digital kiosks can be managed with plug-and-play flash drives.

Yet, in-store digital and electronic messaging still has tremendous growth potential. This is a crucial time for retailers and manufacturers who have not yet adopted the strategy to take a much closer look.

Experienced providers have gone through the learning curve of designing and implementing in-store digital media systems. This includes learnings about the mix of digital and traditional printed signage, as well as about the management of in-store digital media systems. Many early technical challenges have been overcome through

widespread availability of broadband connections, as well as content software improvements.

There are still many considerations in making an investment in digital signage and communications a success. No one consideration is difficult, but the discipline of addressing all of them is crucial. Both strategic and tactical, they represent integrated elements that must be satisfied to yield the highest possible return on investment (ROI).

Following is a list of 10 learnings and best practices that are crucial to success and optimized ROI for brands and retailers alike in the adoption of in-store digital media as an important component of a total communications strategy.

1 Digital in-store signage must be part of a holistic approach to consumer and shopper communications. In-store digital signage is an important part of total shopper communications – it is not a stand-alone strategy.

It is just as important to ensure that digital messages, images and words are consistent with comprehensive brand, distribution and pricing strategy as it is to ensure that print and television messages are consistent. In-store digital signage is

an unprecedented tool that can deliver the right message at the crucial point of purchase decision.

This is not to say that in-store images should be a carbon copy of print or television messages, but the tone and tenor of messages and images must be consistent with a comprehensive strategy, and due consideration should be given to the way in which different media interact and complement one another.

2 Define your objectives. In-store digital signage is meant to attain specific business objectives such as sell-throughs and margin optimization – digital signage is not the business objective itself. What do you expect from this medium? Category awareness such as reminding the shopper of sun exposure and SPF benefits of certain lip color manufacturers?



Drawing shoppers to a specific brand or free-standing kiosk? Promotion? Trial? Adoption? Cross-selling fragrance and eye color? It is critical to define objectives and measurements and it is important to adopt a long-term outlook when doing so.

3 Content and strategy must benefit three core constituents: consumer (shopper), supplier and retailer. Clearly the shopper must benefit through inspiration and navigation to the product/s she needs and desires (within her timeframe). At the same time, brand and category messages should complement one another. An individual brand strategy that succeeds at the expense of the overall retail category will have a short life. It is critical for suppliers and retailers to collaborate to maximize sales returns for both and to deliver shopper expectations.

4 DO expect digital in-store signage to energize communications when it is most important – in the selling environment. Do anticipate that a category strategy can lift sales in an entire department, for example, by reminding the shopper of comprehensive beauty messages or SPF attributes during summer or hydration

protection during winter. Do NOT expect in-store digital signage to solve problems it is not designed for such as a suboptimal color pallet, stock-outs or inappropriate product distribution in a particular market or season.

5 Choose the right partner – invest in reliability, flexibility and scalability. In an arena where there are still many startups, choose an experienced partner who knows the full range of elements that are required for a successful program. Ask questions about the provider's experience, staff and references. This helps you avoid being someone's learning experience. Make certain that the partner you choose truly understands shopper behavior and retail as well as the technology.

A successful implementation requires collaboration with a partner who understands your business needs, timing and purchase drivers – seasonally and in different retail channels – and who knows how to help you keep content fresh, on brand and on strategy.

Choose a company whose objectives are not skewed by a single-product focus such as one type of screen or network configuration. You can better avoid being stuck with proprietary technology solutions from a short-lived company and you can select a partner who focuses on the success of your business, not, for example, just on the sale of a network approach when a stand-alone solution might be the best choice, or vice-versa.

6 Develop a plan: Determine what you want to accomplish, a timeframe and a way to measure results. Include a pilot period as well as multiple content configurations and messages that are compared to each other.

Metrics are critical. Will you measure sales lift in an entire category, brand, product or cross-sell with another category? Without measurements you are sure never to know whether you have succeeded or failed. Make certain that all stakeholders are involved. This includes suppliers, category buyers, product development, store operations, IT and your digital signage partner. Plan communications first and then find the technology that is appropriate for your needs.

7 Plan for freshness and seek a partner who understands your business. Digital signage is alive and dynamic – just as seasons and products are. It is also only as good as the content and the timing of delivery, so plan in advance to keep content fresh and relevant. This is not a one-time purchase of a set of fixtures.

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seasonally and in different retail channels – and who knows how to help you keep content fresh, on brand and on strategy. That partner must understand the realities of retail and how digital messaging truly fits your brands, categories and retail environment.

8 Maintain perspective. Digital signage is a tool that can drive incremental sales – it is not an objective. The objective is the profitable sale of goods and services. Avoid the “we’ll get to that later” attitude that can appear in a rush to deploy a program. Also avoid knee-jerk reactions to a competitor's deployment of an in-store digital program. As powerful as this vibrant medium is, it must be planned and measured carefully.

9 Pilot first. Test your plans and strategies, especially regarding content and the mix of digital and traditional in-store media and then move forward on a greater scale. One of the greatest attributes of in-store digital messaging is its flexibility – it inherently allows you to test content and delivery strategies. The effectiveness of three different images and messages, for example, can be compared across different stores across regions to select the most powerful delivery. Thanks to powerful content management software, the winning message in this scenario could then be deployed across all stores and regions instantly. At the same time, pilot tests might reveal that purchaser's of some categories respond better to messages delivered on the weekend, at a certain time of day or in Spanish.

10 Be wary of pure in-house deployment. Even if you have excellent in-house IT, design and marketing talent, your team may not have digital signage experience. These crucial stakeholders should be on the strategy team, but do you want to be your own guinea pig?

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Digital in-store messaging is an ultra-powerful medium. As a strategic addition to traditional in-store printed communications, it can improve the shopper's experience and can drive incremental sales for retailers and manufacturers alike by first improving in-store navigation, delivering important information and delivering aspirational messages. Like all things powerful, it requires careful planning, commitment and selection of the right partner. **F**