

WHITE PAPER

Features to Look for in a Digital Signage System



Choosing the right digital signage system is crucial for companies hoping to make an impression on customers. But with so many features available, knowing what will be most appropriate can be difficult. Learn about some important considerations for digital signage systems.

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Digital signage can be an effective tool for some companies, but deciding on the right system can feel like a daunting task. Before beginning a digital signage implementation, the purpose of the digital signage system must be considered. Deciding what precise purpose the system needs to serve (whether it's company branding, employee messaging, entertainment, advertising or some other purpose) will help clarify what features the digital signage system should have.

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Features to consider

Digital signage systems can have dozens of features, but several of the most important include:

Content-creation tools

Content is king and must be relevant, engaging and appealing to the target audience, says Yael Elstein, vice president for C-nario, a digital signage provider with more than 15,000 players installed worldwide. Enhanced content-creation tools allow deployers to have independence and flexibility when creating content (whether in house or externally) and when changing content. This results in higher efficiency and lower costs.

Content-creation tools also allow movement, filters and effects to be added to the content, eliminating the need for post-production studios. Real-time information, displayed in eye-catching visuals such as graphs and charts, also can be created and displayed.

High-quality playback

The quality and flexibility of the system playback has a key role in the visual effectiveness of the message. The quality of the playback directly impacts the level of attention that viewers will give to a digital signage display; poor picture quality means less eyes on the screen, and that means less impact on customers, Elstein says.

Supporting true high-definition and synchronized playback, therefore, is a must for any digital signage display. Today, when there is a greater demand for multi-display arrangement of screens, the ability to play content over multiple displays in pixel-perfect quality (without blowing up



Photo by JCDecaux under Shanghai images

The Shanghai airport uses digital signage to advertise to travelers. The digital signage must be high quality to get attention.

the image so it becomes distorted) has become crucial.

Interactivity and openness

Interactivity, customization and openness provide the ultimate flexibility in designing an effective digital signage solution. Many digital signage systems deploy interactive touchscreens with SMS and gesture-tracking capabilities as a way to engage the customer directly with the display. It's one of the best ways for customers to remain immersed in the signage display, Elstein says.

Open-platform features

It's also important to have an open platform that can easily integrate with any external systems and other sources, including dynamic feeds and interactive sources. Look for:

Getting the right message to the right audience at the right time is key for a digital signage network.

Efficient distribution and scalability

It's important for a digital signage system to have the ability to easily establish a networked digital signage deployment, effectively transfer content to displays and scale the system up seamlessly. C-nario's system, for example, can provide multicasting performance on non-multicasting networks. Bandwidth also can be controlled with appropriate scheduling and size limits.

Scheduling and workflow

Getting the right message to the right audience at the right time is key for a digital signage network. One company, C-nario, has several different scheduling methods that can support different customer needs. One method is rule-based scheduling, which enables multiple playlists to be automatically generated for different channels or groups of channels according to predetermined rules related to keywords, types of media, demographics or other criteria. Another method is Web-based scheduling, which offers tools enabling content management and scheduling via the Internet. Other methods also are available, all designed to help get the right message to customers in a timely fashion.

System management

Efficient management of digital assets and databases is important for large-scale deployments and future scalability. Predesigned graphic templates, like the ones C-nario provides, are easy to create and maintain. According to Elstein, predesigned graphic templates also allow

new text and images to be added in real time to already existing graphics quickly and inexpensively, without the need to outsource content to external studios.

Monitoring

Enhanced monitoring and control capabilities of the digital signage system ensure smooth operation, minimal down time and financial control when selling ads. When digital signage is networked and connected to a central control center, all content changes or updates can be done remotely, without a service call. Instead of having to wait for a technician to arrive, changes can be made quickly, minimizing interruptions in service.

Purpose drives features

Determining the most appropriate features for a digital signage system depends on what purpose the digital signage system will serve. Here are two stories of companies that used different features to meet their specific digital signage needs.

Advertising and marketing

Diversified Media Group worked with C-nario to create one of the first synchronous displays aimed at advertising and marketing in the United States. The six-screen sign is the centerpiece of the four-story atrium in New York City's Time Warner Center, home to the only indoor mall in Manhattan.

John G. Melillo, president of DMG, says that his company wanted flexibility and synchronous attributes.

To achieve that goal, screens are located throughout the four floors of retail space. Six Samsung 63-inch plasma screens with synchronized playback are suspended 30 feet in the air above the central lobby and are housed in a custom-designed stainless steel bezel.

But DMG also wanted high-quality playback. "As a world-class engineering and IT company with a very strong background in broadcast



Diversified Media Group's control room manages a digital signage network in the Time Warner Center in New York City.

engineering and production, playback of all the signage packages we integrate is of ultimate importance,” Melillo said. “In the rich media environment, that can make or break a network.”

DMG used C-nario’s system because it provides a high-quality image across multiple-screen displays without losing the native pixel resolution of the screen.

Employee communications

For insurance company Blue Cross Blue Shield, digital signage is useful for sharing information with employees. That’s why the ability to update content was crucial to their digital signage system. Office Environments of New England (OENE) and C-nario partnered to provide templates that would allow real-time content creation for the digital signage system without having to go through an out-of-house production studio. Today, employees at one Blue Cross Blue Shield office in Massachusetts can see the latest traffic reports and human resources updates daily, thanks to the digital signage system.

***About the sponsor:** C-nario is setting the standard in digital signage software through innovative end-to-end products and solutions. Many companies rely on C-nario for their digital signage solutions, whether for the retail industry, finance, media, entertainment, out-of-home advertising or more. C-nario provides a complete digital signage display, distribution and management platform for digital signage networks of any shape, size and resolution at pixel-perfect quality. For more information, visit www.C-nario.com.*