

Making Digital Signage Work in Shopping Malls

The technology can attract more customers to a business, but when deploying digital signage, location, content and dwell time must be considered.

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As businesses realize the benefits digital signage offers over traditional, static forms of advertising, screens are proliferating in stores across the nation, including shopping malls. But before setting up digital signage in a mall, operators must be aware of the unique challenges posed by the environment.

The challenges

To be effective, digital signage must be seen. But a mall, filled with people, stores, music and other signage, is a difficult environment for advertising media, and it can be hard for digital signage to stand out.

“In a mall, you have a tremendous amount of visual clutter,” said Russell Young, senior manager for Samsung’s Business Enterprise Division, a provider of digital signage solutions based in Ridgefield Park, N.J. “You have to have something that will break through that clutter by size or content or location.”

When venturing into uncertain territory, a natural inclination is to fall back onto established traditions. While operators might be tempted to go with traditional

advertising paradigms when placing ads on mall digital signage, this is not always the best solution. Long-form, 30-second commercials of the style seen on television are not as effective on a digital signage network in a mall. Shoppers are busy and distracted, and usually will not stop to watch a full commercial.

“It’s a glance medium,” said Bill Ketcham, executive vice president and chief mar-



In a crowded mall filled with people, stores and signage, it can be hard for digital signage to stand out.

keting officer of New York City-based Adspace Networks, an in-mall television network. “People will look at it, but they’ll rarely stop to look at it.”

The solutions

First, determine where the highest traffic locations are in the mall and place screens there. Areas with long dwell time, such as a food court, also present opportunities for digital signage. When determining a location, however, keep in mind that some anchor stores have clauses in their contracts protecting their sight lines from any obstructions.

Once the screens are in place, the next step is to create content that will be relevant, useful and fun to the consumer.

“Keep them entertained, engaged and enjoying the mall experience,” said Rob Gorrie, founder and president of Toronto-based Adcentricity, a digital signage network aggregator and ad consultancy.

Part of keeping content relevant is understanding who is in the mall at specific times. Typically, older customers and mall walkers are in the shopping center in the morning. At midday, moms are the main demographic. In the late afternoon and early evening, children are the prominent demographic. The content on the screens should be tailored to these different audiences.

The content also should appeal to the consumer’s mindset and focus on shopping. While conventional wisdom says digital signage should contain informational content such as the news and weather, Ketcham said this is not ideal for malls.

Best practices for mall digital signage

- **Location.** Place the signage in areas with high foot traffic and long dwell times.
- **Content.** Create content that is relevant, useful and fun.
- **Demographics.** Understand who is in the mall at what times, and target the content toward those groups.
- **Wayfinding.** Help customers navigate to specific stores or share news about special events.
- **Mobile technology.** Integrating signage with mobile technology such as smartphones can help retailers more accurately assess who is entering their stores, and why.

Instead, people want to know about bargains, sales and events.

However, mall signage should not avoid informational content altogether. Announcements for mall events, such as telling customers where Santa is in the mall during the holiday season, are appropriate. So are tools that will help customers reach their destinations more quickly. For example, if a customer enters the mall looking for a bookstore, she can go to the digital signage and find the store on the mall’s map.

Informational content can be integrated with mobile technology to further assist retailers. By allowing a customer to engage with the signage via her mobile device and get directions to a store, individual retailers can find out how many customers are entering the mall specifically looking to shop with them, as opposed to customers

who just wander into the store because they already happen to be in the mall.

Interactivity can be used to create an experience that also is fun for customers. Steve Birnhak, chief executive officer of New York City-based Inwindow Outdoor, a provider of mall advertising signage, points to a digital mall display last year promoting the movie *Avatar*. Customers could walk up to the display, have a picture taken of themselves and then watch as their picture was morphed into a N'avi (one of the aliens from the film). Birnhak said customers waited between 20 minutes to an hour to use this display at Los Angeles shopping center The Grove.

When deployed with proper content strategy and screen placement, digital signage in malls creates a win-win situation. Businesses attract more customers, customers are able to find stores more easily, malls are able to provide another source of entertainment and information to the customers and businesses can keep track of who is specifically looking for their stores.

About the sponsor: LG excels in bringing innovative technology advancements to the digital signage market with its award-winning LCD and



Placing digital signage in a high-traffic area, as well as offering relevant content, are two keys to effective messaging.

plasma displays. With the explosive growth of digital signage applications, interactive displays connect with consumers more than ever before: for wayfinding, travel information, dynamic advertising, message boards and corporate communications. LG offers LCD and plasma displays designed to engage the customer in a variety of venues and understands the complexity involved with implementing and deploying a dynamic digital signage network.