

Content that Moves

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By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
Digital Signage Today



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Dynamic Content for Digital Signage

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Marketing is crucial to the success of any business, and at the core of any marketing effort is content.

For business to consumer establishments such as retailers and hospitality operators, the content they produce has a singular goal: to attract a customer's attention and encourage them to make a buying decision. Those operators are constantly in search of the most effective content possible.

As methods of delivering a company's unique value proposition and call-to-action change, so does the effectiveness of various types of content. While flashy colors and engaging text may have been effective in print ads of the past, today that intended messaging runs the risk of being lost in the clutter. Businesses today are being prompted to re-think their definition of what makes good content.

In the digital signage realm, some of the most effective content is that which incorporates movement, such as animation and full motion graphics. Not making use of those tools could potentially be a waste of the digital signage investment.

What is content?

Marketing-related content comes in many forms and is disseminated via a variety of media, from newspaper or magazine ads to websites, social media channels or digital displays.

In its most basic form, marketing content is something that pulls in and engages the viewer, informing them about a company's product or services. Along with the words and images used to describe those products or services, content can include the typeface with which that content is delivered, the color scheme used in the material and the inclusion of the company's logo.

"Content could be an article in a blog, a MEME, a gif, information on your website, an infographic, motion graphics or 3D animation," said Lindsey VanderMaas, social media and marketing communications specialist with Allentown, Pennsylvania-based Specialized Productions Inc.

SPI was founded in 2004 as an audio visual design company and eventually began creating motion graphics and video content for digital signage. The company now provides services to clients all over the United States and several other countries.

"In reality, there are benefits to each type," VanderMaas said. "If content is used in the correct way it can greatly increase traffic to your site and increase actual conversions."



Although marketing content had its origins in newspaper ads and static posters, the introduction of television in the early 20th century revolutionized the way that content was delivered. The term "content creator" has replaced the job titles of copywriter, writer, editor and even graphic designer. Although these jobs were seen as unique functions, recently the lines have been blurred. The advent of computer technology and digital displays has opened an entirely new avenue in content creation and delivery. Banner ads are a feature of nearly every website, and many companies include a section on their own sites featuring white papers, case studies and press releases. In addition, companies often create PowerPoint slideshow presentations detailing their business plans and financial statements for use at investor conferences.

Content in the digital world

Today, the notion of content has converged with digital technology to result in digital signage networks. By most measures well-developed content delivered via a digital signage network is one of the most effective marketing tools ever developed.

A 2012 study conducted by chipmaker Intel at several casinos in Ontario, Canada, compared static signs and digital ads that prompted customers to go to the customer

service desk and receive a free tote bag. One location displayed static signs while two had digital screens.

Only six people asked for a tote bag in the location with the static sign, while a combined total of 610 people asked for totes in the locations with digital signs, a hundred-fold increase!

Another Intel study, conducted at the Venetian and The Palazzo Resort-Hotel-Casino in Las Vegas in 2010, illustrates the power of incorporating motion into digital signage. The trial consisted of two digital screens displaying animated digital media and two static printed posters featuring promotions for a bar and restaurant in the complex.

“Animated digital content consistently attracted 4 to 6 times the number of viewers compared to the equivalent static posters,” Intel said in its report. “In addition, the exposure time of the digital signs was substantially longer.”

The ads on the digital screens also resulted in twice the uptake per viewer. The results suggest that movement and engaging messaging intrigued viewers enough to act on the offers displayed.

Increasingly, one of the most effective methods of creating captivating digital signage content is via the use of motion graphics. Although the concept of motion graphics has been around in one form or another since the birth of the film industry, the advent of digital signage has been accompanied by an explosion in popularity of such content.

While animation gives human characteristics to objects, logos or characters, motion graphics are something different. Instead, motion graphics use techniques such as the insertion of computer animated objects and camera angle changes to create motion.

“This distinction makes motion graphic videos much simpler and more flexible to produce and edit,” VanderMaas said. “But like an animation, good motion graphics tells a compelling narrative, with the visual elements backing up the story and reinforcing the message.”

And as an added benefit, those motion graphics can then be repurposed for use on a company’s website, in social media or in TV spots, reinforcing the company’s brand continuity.

“Once the full motion graphics have been created, the heavy lifting has been done,” said Todd Rickenbach, Operations Manager with SPI. “It’s easy then to reformat that content for other uses on digital platforms.”

Creating effective content

In addition to changing the way content is delivered, digital technology has made it easier for nearly anyone to create their own content. Most digital signage content management systems include software that allows deployers to create their own content.

The ease with which anyone can create content raises another question, though. Nearly anyone can create content for digital signage, but will that content be effective? Will the

resulting content take full advantage of the power of digital signage? In many cases, the answer is no.

“Digital signage media players often include content creation software that encourages people to do it on their own, but it doesn’t really give them the full range of motion to customize their content, create a meaningful brand and help them be remembered,” Rickenbach said. “If you use custom motion graphics as opposed to a template or static imagery, the motion graphics are what people will remember and help you get a better return on your digital signage investment.”

The power of motion graphics is clear from the statistics. More than half of marketing professionals worldwide name video as the type of content with the best return on investment, according to research firm Invodo, and shoppers who view video are 1.8 times as likely to purchase as non-viewers.

Although the ease of which content can be created may at first blush give the impression that content creation professionals are no longer needed, in fact the opposite is true. It makes little sense to work with a marketing agency to develop low-cost static signage, but abandon those professional services when it comes to a digital signage network that likely cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Digital signage deployers may be experts at running a restaurant or retail operation, but may not be experts at developing marketing content. For comparison, a rotary saw or nail gun may be easy to use, but using those tools won’t necessarily turn a master chef into a skilled carpenter.

In addition, the complexity of marketing and the sheer number of channels available for a business operator to convey their message means that working with a skilled professional can ultimately be a wise decision.

“Motion graphics have almost infinite possibilities,” VanderMaas said. “With a creative designer or agency, you can easily conjure motion graphics content that will surely attract your target audiences and have them avail of the many services or products your business offers.”

About the sponsor:

Since 2004, Specialized Productions Inc. has been creating dynamic digital signage content for thousands of screens that reach millions of viewers every year. SPI creates powerful, award-winning motion graphics and 3D animations that will engage audiences and compel them to take action. The SPI team prides themselves on top-notch customer service, high quality design and fast turnaround at affordable prices. Whether you have one small project or 50 large projects across a multi-channel network, SPI has a solution to fit your needs. No project is too large or too small and the same can be said about the screens on which it’s displayed.