



James Bickers,
editor

What lies ahead for digital signage?

A roundtable discussion of what's next for this exciting technology.

For a relatively young technology, digital signage has already made a major impact on how businesses communicate with their customers and employees. Many within the industry believe that the coming months will see an explosion in digital signage, both in terms of its installed footprint and its level of integration into the customer experience.

We asked several industry experts about their vision for the future of digital signage — the promise it holds for the next year, its possible uses and its impact on business.



Brian Ardinger,
Nanonation

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

A: Digital signage is fast becoming an essential part of the

customer experience mix; companies are realizing the impact digital media can have at the point when customers are most likely to make a buying decision. Having said that, there is still a long way to go.

There is a lot of confusion in the marketplace with a lot of providers and entry points to navigate. Much like the kiosk market, companies often start with the hardware folks. It's a logical decision, but can often backfire if the rest of the digital signage pieces are not put in place. This includes having a flexible, scalable and powerful software platform to monitor, manage and measure the content being delivered. It also means

understanding the customer experience and how the technology creates new ways to interact with customers. Just like it's ineffective to slap a Web site on a kiosk, you cannot hope to run the exact same 30-second spots and media you use for television ads and be effective in an in-store network.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: Most digital signage deployments are focused on a one-to-many experience — playing back media to whoever is walking by and hoping it is relevant and impactful. In fact, I'd venture to say that a large number of companies don't realize that interactive digital signage is possible. When you add interactivity or a one-to-one application to the signage experience, you deliver content that the customer is looking for, when the customer is looking for it, and you create a way to effectively measure what was watched, when it was watched and how long it was watched.

The best part is that when it's not being used it still delivers messages in a one-to-many fashion. Interactive digital signage makes a lot of sense for companies looking to further educate and differentiate their products and brands in the market.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: Unfortunately, too many companies are looking at digital signage as a way to sell ad space. Nobody walks into a store, a hotel or a bank saying, "Gee, I wish I

could watch some ads." Those companies who take a holistic, integrated approach to deploying multiple customer experience points in a store — from digital signage to kiosks — will generate the biggest benefits. The winners will leverage the power of digital delivery of content to create customer experiences that help their brand and products motivate and resonate with customers.



Stuart Armstrong, Digital View

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

A: Digital signage will begin to mature as companies move from testing to full rollout

within their locations. It will become the centerpiece of their communications strategy to both their customers/shoppers and to employees at the stores who are not behind computers and need high-quality messaging and training.

For example, retailers will discover how they can influence inventory and supply chain by promoting products that are in an over-supply and cutting off promotions of products that are out of stock at that location. Targeted, informative content that changes behavior — that is powerful stuff and we will be seeing more of that as it demonstrates its ability to be a competitive advantage.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: Interestingly, it may be in the promotion and instruction of self-service applications. Remember, shopping is essential; it is the same today as it has been for hundreds of years. This behavior is ingrained and difficult to change. Digital signage is a disruptive technology that can change behavior to move consumers to self-service or assisted self-service applications — and help ensure that the experience is a positive one. If the

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overall experience is not satisfactory to the customer, it will fail.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: In typical retailing environments, highly effective product promotion, trading up, increasing transaction size can be achieved. In environments where there are long wait times — such as doctor offices, pharmacies, commuter rail or banks — digital signage can significantly lower perceived wait time while also weaving in an advertising model to a target demographic. This is a target-rich medium, so this list goes on.



Jason Cremins,
remotemedia

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

A: With display and playback technology as well as communications

reducing in cost, the ROI for digital signage networks is becoming increasingly viable. Potential digital signage customers are now informed buyers who understand what digital signage can offer their business, whether it be for brand communication, selling distressed stock or generating revenue from third-party advertising and sponsorship.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: We are working on applications where digital signage is used in conjunction with mobile phone technology to create a call to action and, in some cases, to sell products. One such example is the use of digital signage to show live holiday auctions on which the user can bid using SMS from their mobile phone. We also have incorporated digital signage with transactional kiosks to create awareness of the kiosk's purpose to those passing by, whether it be for mail order

or ticketing applications.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: The major advantage our customers obtain from deploying digital signage networks is the ability to communicate with their customers in ways that they could not with static media. By installing digital signage our customers can implement new marketing and sales strategies within minutes of making a corporate decision, instead of the typical two-week cycles associated with printed media. In many cases, the immediacy of updating content has led to vast improvements in sales of products and huge reductions in waste due to product overstocking.

Dave Gonsiorowski,
WebRaiser

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

A: We see this as the year of convergence for digital signage. Filling high-definition plasma screens with cool content is fine for branding and positioning, but the ultimate business case for digital signs comes from driving sales transactions through integration with POS and kiosk technology. Convergence is not just about technology. It also is about combining cross-discipline expertise between kiosk, digital sign, content creators, publishers, media companies and the traditional advertising world. There also is a need for content that is a hybrid of TV, Internet and POS promotions.

What we see on most digital signs today makes it obvious that as an industry we haven't figured out what works. Until we do, we run the risk of adding digital signs to the clutter instead of making them the tool to cut through the clutter to get to a transaction.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: With the price of screens dropping, we think that every self-service system should now be equipped with multiple monitors.

Take the photo app. We introduced Vendipix this year with two monitors. The top monitor grabs the consumer's attention, educates him on photo processing and promotes higher-margin photo products. It leads the customer to the application screen. Digital signage also can add functionality to a kiosk. For example, a hotel check-in system with two monitors can check people in during peak times and, during slow times, provide concierge services. A hotel with 10 self-service check-in systems can dedicate three units for check-in and then have seven units that change function depending on the flow of traffic. The convergence of digital signs into the enterprise will enable companies to be extremely nimble and responsive to customers.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: We see self-service as a continuous business process that we call Method8. As the name implies, there are eight steps in the process. Digital signs are ideal for the first two steps in the process: Engage and inform the consumer in a direct and personal way. The premise is that the consumer is in a shopping environment and ready to buy. Digital signs — with the right kind of content — will lead to informed (or maybe emotional) purchase decisions.

Use in retail, hospitality, grocery, c-stores and, eventually, financial, healthcare and government sectors, will create a network effect that will generate new opportunities across all industry sectors. I think it's safe to predict that digital signs combined with self-service will transform many businesses and become the most effective way to engage consumers in this century.

Alex Richardson, Selling Machine Partners

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

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A: I believe we've learned two key points from our 50-year history with broadcast television: Moving pictures create a mystical "dog whistle" for a consumer's

attention; and product demonstrations on television increase the velocity of consumer sales. Leading businesses are beginning to realize that digital signage solutions are one of the most cost-effective ways to deliver their message directly to the consumer when and where it is needed most: at the point and time of purchase.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: The core value of a great digital merchandising solution is relevance. I recommend that you start from the consumer's point of view: Turn off your computer, go visit the store and talk to store customers and store associates. Digital signage is a different medium, requiring a different set of software tools and merchandising functionality.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: The industry seems to be moving rapidly to help leverage the growing base of kiosk POS systems designed to reduce consumer queuing. The signage prods the consumer to avoid the wait and use the self-service ordering device.

One of the most innovative digital signage applications that I've seen is inside an English pub. Instead of the standard branded beer tap, the beer manufacturer put a small 2x3 digital display to show their brand value and to encourage the bartender and consumer to notice their beer versus the other beer vendors.



Wayne Ruttle, ADFLOW Networks

Q: What does the next year hold for digital signage?

A: The next year will see considerable growth in the adoption of digital

signage networks. The cost of ownership will continue to improve as prices for hardware, technology and services become more attractive, providers become more efficient and effective in deploying and supporting these networks, and they continue to deliver a sound ROI.


We also will see consolidation and alliances between organizations who merge their core competencies together to offer turnkey solutions.

Q: What is the most viable self-service application for digital signage?

A: The whole idea of attracting consumer or prospect attention and providing information in a casual, non-intrusive, dynamic way while influencing their decisions in a faster, easier, more cost-effective manner.

A good example of this is placing in a retail environment an interactive kiosk that broadcasts dynamic content, which attracts consumers to engage, learn, configure and even purchase products or services, and that uses headphones or directional sound to entertain those consumers during the process.

Q: What is the most critical role digital signage is playing/can play in various verticals?

A: Influencing buying behavior, improving the buying experience and providing relevant information at the right time to the right audience. 

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