

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

By Troy Crocker, ISA Chairman



When is the last time you had lunch with a wagon salesman?

The on-premise sign industry has certainly come a long way from the days when sign people drove a truck and carried paint cans and paint brushes. I remember the days when we first went to hand-drawn patterns with an overhead projector, a big wall and lots of paper. That was about the time I was carrying a bag phone on my shoulder instead of a computer in my front pocket.

If we take a look at some of the history of this industry of ours, we will quickly be able to see that, in all of its various applications for the sign business, computerization stands as the principal technological advancement in the industry's history.

Beginning in the mid-1990s with the introduction of computer-aided sign making (CAS) equipment, the arduous process of creating artwork, signs, graphics and related patterns began to be drastically simplified. During the same period, machine tools suitable for fabricating wood, metal, stone/marble and rigid-foam signs were developed. Operated via computer numerical control (CNC) software and incorporating precision machine controls, these tools vastly simplify operations such as cutting, bending, punching, stamping, carving and engraving, which formerly were executed manually or via hand-held power tools.

These developments substantially reduce the labor content of sign products and give managers far more control of manufacturing operations. In a larger sense, this revolution has remade an industry formerly dominated by commercial artists and other specialists. Today, because of far less reliance on specialized training and skills, managers have more flexibility in directing their workflow and personnel.

On the other hand, the continued importance of neon signs, sign installations and electric-sign maintenance tend to preserve, to some degree, the specialist's role in the industry. Prior to 1990, many sign company CEOs also had practical experience in special skills such as commercial art or neon fabrication. Today, however, such experience is no longer considered as a precondition for success.

Technology has clearly exploded and does not appear to be slowing down any time soon. One of the most important things that we, as sign company business owners, can do is to be sure we invest wisely in technology that will enable us to achieve a return on our investment before moving on to the next "latest and greatest" this or that.

As you might imagine, the government has been ready, willing and able to roll with the changes. Sign codes have changed right along with new developments in technology. Whereas, traditionally, local officials focused mostly on size and height requirements of a sign, Electronic Message Centers (EMCs) have brought into play questions involving movement and brightness. The International Sign Association's (ISA's) government relations team, comprised of Government Relations Director, David Hickey and State and Local Government Manager, Kenny Peskin, works with cities and member companies across the country on these issues, including a recent success in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where a proposed six-month moratorium of EMCs was defeated. According to our government relations team, issues regarding "supergraphics" and environmental safety are also of growing concern to local officials and, therefore, to sign shops that use digital printers.

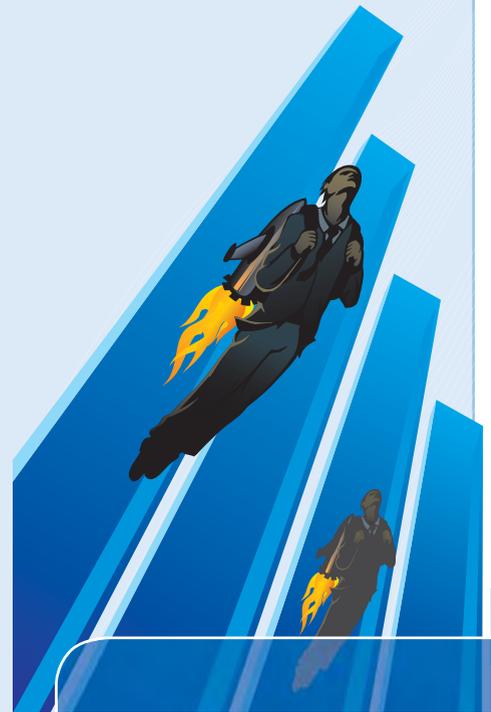
In the pages that follow, you will find a tremendous amount of valuable information about dynamic digital signage, which is clearly one of the new waves of the sign industry's future. Without question, we work in an ever-changing industry that is exploding with new opportunities every day. If we want to "keep up with the times," we will pay close attention to the dynamic digital signage revolution. Just remember, the key is to take your time and invest wisely, or else you could potentially go broke by trying to keep up with new technology on a daily basis. One of the best lessons of my life has been that not all future predictions come true. For example, my jetpack is still in the mail. Do your homework and stay tuned in to discover more about what the future holds for our industry.

Mr. Crocker is president of Sign Faces, Birmingham, Alabama.

THE INTERNATIONAL
SIGN ASSOCIATION

REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2010



FEATURING:

Let There be Illumination . . . 84

HELLO – My Name is:
Wes Wilkens 84

DYNAMIC DIGITAL SIGNAGE:

Making Opportunity Knock . . 85

*A Growing Part of the
Sign Family* 87

Best Practices 89

LET THERE BE ILLUMINATION

By David Hickey, ISA Dir. of Gov't. Relations

An increasing number of cities across the country are focusing their regulatory attention on the brightness level of on-premise electronic message centers (EMCs). As an industry, we advise against using EMCs in a way that can be irritating or visually upsetting. But all it takes is for one renegade EMC user to program their sign so that people can see it from miles away to catch the unwanted attention of your local officials.

In many ways, local officials are in the dark when it comes to knowing how EMCs work and how to optimize their effectiveness. But this lack of knowledge can provide an opportunity for the sign industry. In the case of EMC brightness, ISA offers a guide based on peer-reviewed research that includes recommended EMC brightness guidelines and an overview of the importance of ensuring appropriate brightness levels. The research in the brightness guide was conducted by Dr. Ian Lewin of Lighting Sciences, Inc. Dr. Lewin is a leading lighting expert with over 30 years experience in the lighting industry, including a term as president of IES, the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America.

In essence, Dr. Lewin's recommendations establish levels of lighting for EMCs depending on the level of ambient lighting nearby. It's common sense – if such a sign is placed in an area where there isn't much lighting around, then its display can be dimmer and still remain appropriately legible; but if the EMC is in an area that has more illuminated signs, parking and street lamps, etc, then a higher brightness level could be necessary in order for the sign's message to be seen and understood.

This fall ISA will be releasing an easy-to-read and use reference publication on Dr. Lewin's research, including recommended legislative language and a DVD that demonstrates how to use different lighting measurement tools. All members will be receiving complimentary copies of this useful publication. Until then, if you'd like a copy of Dr. Lewin's research or the more digestible EMC brightness guidelines immediately, please visit www.signs.org or contact me at david.hickey@signs.org.

ISA staff wants to work with you to help local officials understand the issues involved with EMC brightness and to help the communities where you do business come up with reasonable and effective sign code language. Together we can help local officials see the light. | 

INTRODUCING... WES WILKENS



It would be easy to see that Wes Wilkens, senior staff engineer with Persona Inc., thrives on change. He's in the perfect spot—working for an employer who understands the need to change in an industry that relies on it. Wes, however, doesn't wait for change to happen; he makes it happen.

"I like change, as long as it's for the better, not change for change's sake. We all change over time and learn something every day. We learn something from other people every day. That's what makes life interesting."

Wes grew up on a dairy farm in North Dakota, then worked in several construction trades. At 32, he started college, working part-time while he completed a degree in industrial and mechanical engineering at North Dakota State University. Though he began college a little later than most, his working life already had brought plenty of lessons. "The construction industry gave me a lot of insight into industrial disciplines," he said. "With farming, it was how to improvise. Not everything is going to have an engineering solution. Sometimes you have to improvise."



"The construction industry gave me a lot of insight into industrial disciplines,"

In 1989, he moved to Watertown, South Dakota, to work for Midcom, a manufacturer of transformers for tele-communications. Then Wes had to shift gears again when the telecom bubble burst. Fortunately, his employer also owned Persona and offered Wes a job in the sign industry.

"I went from an ISO 9000 company to the sign industry, which was completely different," he said. "In general, the sign industry isn't up to the level of ISO 9000 standards, but that's changing. That is what I am working for, to get more conformance, to be more technology-driven and more proactive. That's why I've been involved with ISA and UL."

The list of Wes's industry involvement runs almost as long as his various careers. He serves on the UL Sign Industry Business Panel and several task forces within that panel. He also serves on ISA's Technology and Research Committee and three subcommittees: Electrical; Energy; and Mechanical and Structural. Wes is Chairman of the Mechanical and Structural subcommittee.

Wilkens helps with just about any electrical issue that Persona faces, including all UL and engineering/structural matters. When he started his current job for Persona, Wes began studying LEDs and he now leads the company in LED design, layout, and choosing LED vendors. He believes LEDs will be "a huge player in the future." With so much of his professional life invested in standards, technology, and engineering, Wilkens still finds time for his hobbies. He works in a home-based shop, restoring two-cylinder John Deere tractors and is a licensed pilot, often behind the controls of his Piper Archer II aircraft. | 

STATISTICAL FACTS • • •

Sign deficiency is the second leading cause of serious traffic accidents on primary roads and interstates. (*Federal Highway Administration study*) •

DYNAMIC DIGITAL SIGNAGE:

MAKING OPPORTUNITY KNOCK

••• *By Bruce Goldstein*

Dynamic Digital Signage is well suited to grow your sign business.

Digital sign technology is becoming increasingly popular and the industry continues above average growth year after year, even in the current economy. Anywhere you go today you cannot avoid seeing an electronic display with information, advertising or promotional material. More and more companies, both large and small are learning how to offer digital signage solutions and services. Consequently, those companies are growing their businesses, adding more value, and making more money for their clients and themselves. Are you?

As a society, we have not yet stopped purchasing printed material. However, whether it is a Kindle or an iPad, electronic books of all kinds are becoming more and more popular. Printed magazine and newspaper subscription levels continue to decline and the last time you opened the Yellow Pages to search for something was when? So it stands to reason that the same dynamic is in play with printed signs as well. More information, efficiency, convenience and ease-of-use rules the day. Recent digital sign technology advancements have made digital sign solutions easier to use, more reliable and more affordable than ever before. In addition, the technology has made it easier to improve same store sales and customer experience.

Turn the clock back 25 years to the desktop publishing revolution. WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) page layouts and graphic designs displayed on screen with a computer and printed out in high resolution

was a giant step forward. It was embraced not only by the computer industry, but the sign industry as well. Desktop publishing improved such things as efficiency, quality, creativity, and time to market. As a result, setting type, T-squares, stat cameras, burnishers and wax machines all became things of the past. Sign companies of all kinds welcomed the new technology as a natural progression of their business.

Fast forward 25 years to today and dynamic digital signage is the new revolution. Signs no longer are fixed. They can include moving images and can change their message multiple times throughout the day. Digital signs also use an electronic display instead of printed or dimensional material. Print is fixed and updating a printed or dimensional sign is time consuming, labor intensive and costly to install. A digital sign connected to a media player can display motion and video and change based on a schedule. It can be updated instantly and produce immediate results. While the transition to digital signage may take longer to dominate the landscape than desktop publishing did in the 80's, the advantages are just as beneficial to the sign industry. If you have not taken advantage of it yet, you still can. However, the train is leaving the station.

So what do you need to board the train?

Your business already possesses strengths that will enable it to offer digital signage and be successful. At the outset, you already have employees with strong visual communication



skills. They are able to understand your client's objectives, what their end-users are looking for, and translate that into compelling visual messages. These skills are fundamental to the successful development of any dynamic digital sign. Importantly, while IT firms are installing most digital signage systems, they typically lack the necessary visual communication skills. As a result, the experience you already have in the design, production and sales of visual communications products will enable you to easily transition into selling dynamic digital signs.

Moreover, sign companies already have a sales force and in-house designers in place that can become digital sign communication experts. Finally, most businesses only require a simple digital signage system. Therefore, an advanced understanding of information technology is not always necessary.

Once a digital sign has been sold, the need to keep the content or the message displayed on the screen fresh and effective will be paramount. Doing so will help your client to achieve a quick return on their investment and provide you with continuous revenue updating their content.

Since most of your customers will only need a simple off-the-shelf digital signage system, selecting a simple solution to sell and promote is a good way to start. It will not require a major reorganization or investment in a significant amount of new technology and will appeal to both existing and new customers. It will also allow you to become familiar with the technology and grow your business without getting in over your head. It requires a basic understanding of how the dynamic digital sign technology works, its capabilities and benefits and how to incorporate it into your product and service presentation to your clients.

A simple dynamic digital sign solution is like a digital photoframe. It consists of the same main components: a media player and a flat panel display or LCD. The difference, however is that the components of the digital sign solution can be all-in-one or separate, but more importantly they are built for extended use and offer a lot more features and capabilities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

Digital signs can be used in a variety of environments, some of which are pictured here (Photograph ©2010 NEC Display Solutions of America, Inc.).



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85

Simple digital signage media players can be purchased for well below \$1,000. They play media files like jpeg images and mpeg videos and can be programmed to play the files in any order based on any schedule. They can be updated using a removable memory device or connected to a network. They can also be programmed to divide the display screen into separate areas called zones with different media files playing in each zone.

LCDs are available in many sizes and can be used in any orientation. For example a countertop digital sign can use a 19-inch display (which is available for less than \$250) in portrait (vertical) orientation, and take up minimal counter space. A digital menu board can use a 40-inch or larger display (starting at around \$1,000) mounted to a wall in landscape (horizontal) mode, which can replace several printed menu boards. The countertop digital sign and the digital menu board could use the same kind of media player. The key difference between the two is the content or messaging displayed on the LCD.

Content: the key to success and making you and your clients more money

No matter how big or small or how sophisticated or simple, the key to the success of any dynamic digital sign is having a content strategy and plan, along with a professional designer to create the message displayed on the digital sign. Like printed signs and displays, a message on a digital sign needs to be eye-catching, compelling, include a call to action and leave a lasting impression. With the ability to add full-motion graphics and daily scheduling, the content strategy should make sure the content is always kept up-to-date and achieves your clients' objectives. With a skilled in-house designer who can design for print and motion, you will be able to offer content subscription packages for each digital sign you sell. You will then be on your way to increasing sales revenue and growing your business in dynamic digital signage.

Bruce Goldstein is a professional designer and digital signage certified expert. His consultant firm, Designage, offers expert advice to companies interested in selling digital signage systems and services and to end-users interested in installing a digital signage solution for their business. He can be reached at: bruceg@designageco.com website: www.designageco.com blog: http://designageco.blogspot.com

Dynamic Digital Signage Basic GLOSSARY

Connected: A digital sign media player that receives content and program information from a network connection.

Content: The information displayed on a screen often consisting of text, images, motion graphics, and video, usually created by a professional designer.

CMS: Acronym for content management software that includes capabilities such as; importing, organizing, scheduling and distributing content, creating content playlists and display layouts, managing connected media players and LCDs, and reporting the overall status of a connected digital signage network.

Day Parting: Scheduling content and playlists for playback at specific times of the day.

Dynamic Digital Signage: An electronic sign that can change quickly and easily, deliver targeted messages to an audience based on time of day, day of week, etc., without having to physically change the sign itself.

DOOH: Acronym for Digital Out-of-Home and refers to digital signage that is displayed in public spaces, social places, and retail.

Dwell Time: The approximate time the audience spends in proximity to a digital sign.

Landscape Orientation: An LCD in typical horizontal orientation.

LCD: Acronym for liquid crystal display, a thin, flat-panel display technology commonly used for displaying digital signage content, preferably designed for commercial grade extended use.

Loop: Content or a playlist that repeats itself for continuous play.

Media Player: Typically a single use PC or solid state device that outputs content to an LCD, preferably designed for commercial grade extended use.

Playlist: A list defining the order and duration of content to be displayed.

Portrait Orientation: An LCD rotated 90 degrees to display content in vertical orientation.

Standalone: A digital sign media player that receives content and program information from a removable memory device.

Zone: An area of a display designated for a particular use based on audience considerations and messaging objectives. | 

POPULAR MARKETS

For Digital Signage:

CORPORATE

Display of corporate, employee and local news and information

HOTEL

Wayfinding, local news and information and hotel events

PUBLIC SPACE

News & travel information, advertising

RESTAURANT

Menu boards, customer facing promotional information

RETAIL BANKING

Display of local news, information and bank promotions

RETAIL SALES

Wayfinding, product and promotional information

Digital signs can be updated easily to change such things as: design theme, layout, promotions, items, prices, etc. (Photograph ©2010 Pei Wei Asian Diner, Inc.).

SMALL PLATES

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Mixed Chicken with Cool Lettuce Wraps <small>chicken, mushrooms, green onions, carrots, garlic, soy sauce, vinegar, sesame oil</small> | 6.73 |
| Vegetable Spring Rolls  <small>Cabbage, shrimp, carrots, celery, scallions, onions, black mushrooms, green onions, mild chili dipping sauce</small> | 2.00 3.95 6.95 |
| Pork Egg Rolls <small>pork, lettuce, cabbage, black mushrooms, carrots, scallions, mild chili dipping sauce</small> | 2.00 3.95 6.95 |
| Crab Wantons <small>Crab, shrimp, chicken, scallions, bell peppers</small> | 2.00 3.95 5.95 |
| Edamame  <small>roasted soybeans, butter, salt</small> | 3.25 |
| Hot & Sour Soup | Supp. 2.25 4.95 |
| Thai Wonton Soup | Supp. 2.25 4.95 |



Pei Wei Spring Rolls

SALADS

| | |
|--|------|
| Asian Chopped Chicken Salad <small>chicken, carrots, shredded lettuce, Napa cabbage, carrots, hot basil, tomatoes, crispy wontons, hoisin sauce, chili, green onions, sesame oil</small> | 7.75 |
| Pei Wei Spicy Chicken Salad <small>chicken, carrots, shredded lettuce, Napa cabbage, carrots, tomatoes, crisp wontons, scallions, chili, hot sauce, lime dressing</small> | 7.75 |
| Vietnamese Chicken Salad Rolls <small>chicken, lettuce, carrots, green onions, scallions, tomatoes, peanuts, rice noodles, sweet chili sauce, lime dressing, wrapped in rice paper</small> | 6.75 |

Pei Wei mobile app: MVEE

STATISTICAL FACTS • • •

Digital out-of-home media (DOOH) increases sales in grocery stores. Four out of five product brands tested showed increases of up

DYNAMIC DIGITAL SIGNAGE:

A GROWING PART OF THE SIGN FAMILY

••• By Lyle Bunn



The use of Dynamic Digital Signage continues to explode. Technology and service revenues have increased by 24+% annually in each of the past 10 years to be almost \$2 billion in North America, “content” production spending is estimated at \$3.5 billion annually and close to one million

displays are providing messages in places where people shop, travel, visit, gather, work and study.

It is a very “good news” area of the economy and for those who are knowledgeable about static signage and digital graphics, because dynamic digital signage can add to revenues, applications and customer service.

Two excellent articles written by Eddie Wieber make this point with several examples that could illustrate industry developments in any town in America.

In the “melding of old-time craftsmanship with digital signage” Wieber reflects how electronic digital displays are placed in well crafted enclosures to present more information than a standing sign.

This same rationale drove a Fastsigns-delivered project reported by Regan Dickinson in which static signs on the wall behind a credit union’s teller counter were replaced with digital signage. This resulted in better promotion of credit union services, added visual

cantly easier to source from and work with, look to relationships and partnerships that can leverage their capabilities with market presence.

Dynamic displays are serving shopper, patron, staff and student-facing communications needs across the economy. Retail, food services, entertainment facilities and corporate environments are leading the market.

Quick serve restaurants (QSR) which must comply with the new 2010 Health Care Reform Act for nutritional labeling are accelerating projects based on the need to reduce sign costs while more effectively promoting products, presenting nutrition information and serving branding and other communications goals.

The “perfect storm” of market need and supply continues to bubble, but a “log jam” exists. Despite proven results that are driving market demand and “prime time” technology capabilities, possible projects are advancing slowly for lack of suppliers to meet the demand.

The “perfect storm” of market need and supply continues to bubble...

This means that the full benefits of digital signage and place-based media are under-realized by end users while many individual suppliers and integrators experience slower revenue growth, challenges in forecasting and higher cost of sales due to extended sales cycles.

Despite proven results that are driving market demand and “prime time” technology capabilities, possible projects are advancing slowly for lack of suppliers to meet the demand.

vitality to the branch, helped reduce perceived waiting times and delivered new hardware and ongoing content creation revenues to Fastsigns.

Digital signage is a natural for long-standing sign and digital graphics providers.

The technology that underpins digital signage has evolved rapidly with supply, deployment and operations being easier than ever. At the same time, digital signage suppliers and integrators, which have become signifi-

The log jam is an economic tragedy from every perspective, but is a huge opportunity for sign and digital graphics providers.

The log jam appears to be caused by five problems, each of which will be addressed at the ISA International Sign Expo, April 27-30, 2011 in Las Vegas. A conference education series will focus on addressing the following:

Insufficient knowledge about digital signage by existing sign providers, end users and planners who could advance its planning, supply, deployment and ongoing operations. Knowledge of digital signage application, its technology ecosystem and how to get the most from the investment lead the list of training.

Lack of accurate information about return on digital signage investment. (ROI). Every suitably planned deployment shows significant results and achievement of communications goals, so structures for planning for and assessing ROI will be presented in several sessions.

Confusion about technology and sourcing options: Many projects have long “product investigation” and sourcing cycles, often resulting in greater confusion. While the response to confusion is always “no,” resulting in longer sales cycles, various sessions will help sign providers to more effectively define suitable technologies.

The lack of use of proven structures for advancing digital signage projects: Digital signage is a business application that applies information technologies. By cutting corners on System Development Life Cycle processes that are typical of business application planning and deployment, and focusing on technology selection and sourcing, the milestones and checkpoints of investment do not occur as project elements, which stalls and distorts project progress. The ISA International Sign Expo, April 27-30, 2011 sessions will provide structures for success project “selling,” planning, fulfillment and ongoing operations.

A mountain of information about digital signage is available: The log-jam is caused in part by the challenge of navigating mountains of information to get to what would be most useful. Objectivity and direct access to experienced, knowledgeable people will allow sign providers and end users to move initiatives forward efficiently.

The rewards always go to “the capable” and capability in Dynamic Digital Signage, as in other areas is defined by knowledge and experience.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 88

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 87

Information and education can provide structure and approaches that can, and will reduce ambiguity, confusion, frustration, time and cost while assuring project and company success.

A 3-step approach as follows provides useful structure:

- Define the communication needs and intents.
- Define the project path (size, scope, applications).
- Select software and other technologies based on the expected scenario.

a) Define the communication needs and intents (The Critical Success Factor)

Digital signage can be a revenue-generating “business” based on third-party advertising revenues, but is typically used to improve core business and communications goals, such as sales lift in retail and consumer service environments, reduced perceived waiting time, improved awareness on the part of staff, students or patrons, or to improve the experience offered by a location. Tangible benefits might also include cost deferral/avoidance. Some examples of network objectives include for example;

- Revenue growth*
- Cost Deferral*
- Engagement Objectives*
- Improve the experience in the environment*
- Increase attention*
- Align with and fuel consumer aspirations*
- Clarify the offering*
- Present a “call to action”*
- Offer ways for the viewer to engage*
- Communicate “values”*

b) Define the project path (size, scope, applications).

Technology selection will consider the overall life or planning horizon of the network including, in particular, the growth in the number, type and configuration of displays, playlists and content as well as interfaces with other systems.

Approaches to operations and sources of future funding will be considered since actualizing future opportunities may be impaired by the software under-specification.

Digital signage has the inherent capability to present images and messages that “speak to” and engage viewers to compel actions. The software selection decision should consider the required strengths in the following areas of capability:

High quality presentation of the media in order to make the visual images as appealing and compelling as possible. This is, in part, achieved by using media in its richest possible, “native” form through the digital media supply chain. Reducing the need for media reformatting and transcoding reduces the degradation of the media.

“Local” input and control of a predefined area of the display or the playloop can enable individual locations to schedule and present information relevant to achieving their goals through local branding and promotions.

Ease of campaign placement. Defining parameters such as the date, time, location and other display criteria allows media to be presented to best achieve the intended results.

Content “layering” to “localize” content to improve revenue achievement. Compiling and rendering media spots in multiple content “layers” is a very efficient way of managing campaigns while having graphics, text, pricing and other elements reflect the local environment, demographic, weather, events, celebrities/personalities, inventory and other situations.

Ease of message targeting by display location, target demographics, time and specific circumstances.

Ease of use to allow for cost-effective operations and maximizing the benefits that digital signage.

Interface with data inputs and integration with other systems such as point-of-sale, inventory and traffic patterns so that media presentation and revenue achievement are maximized.

c) “Test-drive” the potential software on the expected scenario.

Using candidate technology (including software) in an expected network scenario will very clearly identify the strengths and limitations and is a suitable “test drive.”

Just as the test drive of a possible future vehicle would include its usual passengers and cargo on expected road conditions in a typical usage scenario, the same should apply to a software test drive.

The fastest path to the rewards is by drawing on knowledge, experience and proven best-practices.

Lyle Bunn is an independent consultant and educator in North America’s digital signage industry. He is a member of the Academy Faculty of InfoComm and serves on the Advisory Boards of Digital Signage Expo and Customer Experience Technology World. He has assisted hundreds of organizations to plan and deploy digital signage and has published over a hundred articles and industry whitepapers. His CD ROM ebook “Digital Signage Planning Guide was recently released in its 5th edition. Lyle@LyleBunn.com



STATISTICAL FACTS • • •

Digital signage, which grew 34 percent from 2007-2008, is expected to double again by 2012. (MultiMedia Intelligence) • Employment of

DYNAMIC DIGITAL SIGNAGE:

BEST PRACTICES

The dynamic digital signage industry has grown too big to ignore. Sales are rapidly approaching the \$1 billion mark and are growing every year. But terms like “firewall” and “IP networks” may cause fear and trembling in the hearts of sign professionals.

“It is something that is so different,” said Teresa Young, President and CEO of Sign Biz. “It is Greek for the first few years; six years from now, everybody will have the lingo down.”

Young likens the dynamic digital signage as a call to “Go west, young man.” But others have blazed a trail into this new territory and offer tips for those who are looking to join them.

“It is something that is so different,” said Teresa Young, President & CEO of Sign Biz. “It is Greek for the first few years; six years from now, everybody will have the lingo down.”

AT ASI, LESSONS COME WITH EXPERIENCE

The dynamic digital industry at ASI Signage goes back to the late 90’s, when the company’s former owners, Modulex A/S, brought Ariadne, one of the first digital sign solutions, to the marketplace. However, there were plenty of lessons learned over the years since, said ASI Corporate President Grady Brown. “The primary lesson was, as an architectural sign company, we can produce hardware and housings, but we’re not really software people.”

Digital signage software is an update-intensive product, and one that users expect will undergo consistent improvements and innovations, which takes significant resources with the right expertise. Eventually, Modulex A/S spun-off the software portion of their Ariadne product to a well qualified software partner and continues to deliver Ariadne to the US market.

It’s a lesson that stayed with ASI after the company separated from Modulex A/S ownership in 2008. When ASI rolled out its Helix Digital Signage solution late last year, it had engaged with an alliance partner to provide the software portion of the offering. “We didn’t want to become a software company,” Brown said. “That is a specialty in itself that requires dedicated resources and expertise. We followed an extensive RFQ and RFP process to create an alliance partnership with the best qualified partner to provide development, updates, custom solutions and most impor-



tantly the technical support of our digital signage software systems. We at ASI provide the sales efforts, wayfinding consultation, standard and custom housings, project management and installation services, first level support as well as the traditional static signage that creates a comprehensive solution for our clients.”

ASI, Corporate employed Andy Shevak as its Manager of Digital Signage earlier this year; Shevak had previously worked with ASI’s software alliance partner. It was part of a strategy to address one of the greatest obstacles to dynamic digital signage, what Brown termed “the fear factor.”

“It’s an internal perspective of individual sales people or the individual project manager, who are intended to promote and implement this product in the market,” Brown said. “Digital signage requires them to address technology, networks, electronics, and software, in addition to the traditional acrylics, aluminum, paints, and vinyl. It requires a higher level of knowledge and understanding of the product itself and how it integrates into a customer’s network and software systems.”

Brown said that digital signage sales calls typically include the client’s IT manager. “And this is commonly the gatekeeper. IT managers are either going to promote your offering to the project team as a proponent, or they are going to be a road block. Our ability to provide the technical answers effectively will have a large impact on which way this goes.”

Today, ASI sales people will identify and qualify digital signage opportunities and engage in an introductory sales call. If the discussions move forward, ASI’s technical sales team will become involved. “When you’re in a sales meeting and begin talking about firewalls and networks, the traditional sign salesperson may be out of their realm,” Brown said. “We have to achieve a level of expertise and it takes putting your personnel through appropriate training where they can talk the talk. ASI has been successful in this area by utilizing internal and external training resources to provide this knowledge and every one of our offices has at least one if not an entire team of people armed with the technical skills to sell and deliver digital signage solutions.”

Once the sale is made, a long-term relationship with the client is begun. Unlike traditional signage, it requires a much greater level of customer service and support, Shevak said.

“You can’t just sell a solution to the customer, install it, and walk away,” Shevak said. “You have to assist the client to maintain the system and grow it. There’s a cost associated with that level of engagement and people are concerned about that. The beauty is that this investment pays back over and over. Next year when the client establishes their new budget, they may want to add 20 more digital signs.”

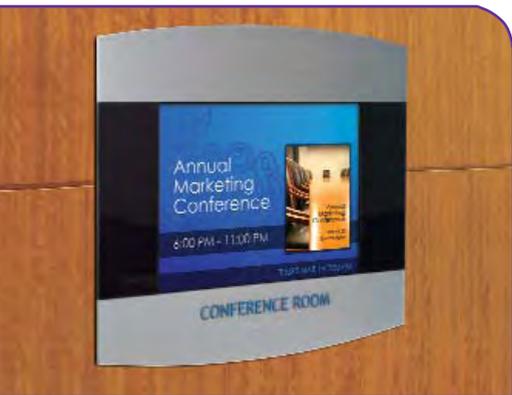
ASI has long been a leader in architectural signage and the move to digital has included several products in that general category. Helix is a prepackaged but customizable digital signage solution that offers interactive directories, wayfinding, information boards and room schedulers in several different sizes and configurations. eFlex, another Modulex A/S product offered by ASI, fits into the category known

You have to assist the client to maintain the system and grow it.

as “hotdesking” or “hoteling.” It allows users to log onto a system and reserve a desk, making it perfect for telecommuters who may not be in the office much, or that mobile workforce who travel from location to location and need a desk in each for just a day or two. Through this type of system on a scheduled day, the user’s name is on the cubicle.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 90

The company also has begun to install video walls and sees a great future in integrating touch-screen technology into this offering. In his previous position, Shevak worked on an installation in a waiting room of a children's hospital. Kids could play games on a 24-inch touchscreen monitor, with the results displayed on a bank of four high and six wide 46-inch screens. "The kids were wowed and it really got their minds off of where they were," Shevak said.



Brown first saw the power of video walls when working on the headquarters of Union Pacific, the large railway firm based in Nebraska. "The video wall was planned to promote their marketing messages, 'Building America' slogans and also tied into the architectural graphics interpretations that were done through the rest of the building," Brown said. "The graphics were intended to create that sense of where you were and who you were visiting."

But not just any digital solution will do. For a video wall—or any aspect of digital signage—to be most effective, it must be more than just a monitor hung on the wall. "There are three key components to digital signage: the software and content, which is paramount; the hardware, which is a necessity, and the enclosure that goes around that digital display," Shevak said. "It's putting it on the wall and making it look like it was part of the environment when the building was designed. It is in blending of those three components that make a total consultative solution that creates the situation where on installation day, they can't wait to turn it on."

That, said Brown, is a key area in which ASI and the sign industry can differentiate itself from competitors in digital displays. "Combining digital signage technology with

our understanding of the architectural environment, wayfinding philosophies, the ADA, and other codes as well as our traditional static signage offerings creates total solutions that meet technological, aesthetic, and functional needs of our clients."

SIGN BIZ: FOCUS ON DOING ONE ASPECT WELL

Because Sign Biz was relatively early to the dynamic digital signage industry, it took its time, offering several years of research and development then a couple more of testing with a small group of its members. The end result is Lobby Pop, a division that offers customized content for dynamic digital installations in waiting rooms.

This customizable package entails all of the needed equipment, including a high-definition movie that is tailored to the specific industry, with several "commercials" for the specific business. It's a far cry from CNN on a TV in the lobby.

"Content is not just taking a PowerPoint and creating jpegs that move back and forth," said SignBiz President and CEO Teresa Young. "That's one of the technologies that's out there that sells because people don't know there's something better."

Lobby Pop allows the user to choose the industry segment, brand it with their logo, watermark and colors, and choose three or four selections of royalty-free music.

Lobby Pop works in conjunction with other brand-building lobby enhancers: murals, floor graphics, and traditional POP displays.

"Everybody has been satisfied so far," Young said. That includes the SignBiz members who have joined the program and attended the intensive training that accompanies the new line of business.

Though it is a relatively easy-to-understand concept, the technology is still complex, including five manuals on various associated processes. "Starting out is easy," Young said. "You order the movie, the wrapper, type up some commercials. In 10 days, your movie is back to you. But once you want to push or pull throughout screens in the building or from

Sign Biz Members Linda Levitan and Michael Quigley designed a showroom to feature the LobbyPOP system. (Sign-Age, Clearwater, FL)



one building to another, there's a little more to it."

Lobby Pop works in conjunction with other brand-building lobby enhancers: murals, floor graphics, and traditional POP displays. To continue the brand building after-hours, the company recommends its clients install a screen near a main window and include an articulating arm, allowing the screen to point out the window when the lobby is closed.

By thinking about brand building—something the sign industry has long excelled in—sign professionals can compete with others who sell dynamic digital signage and may fully understand the technology, but not brand building.

With several years of experience behind her, Young warns those new to dynamic digital signage, "Don't go cheap. Don't try to go out and buy an HD camera and then to edit that video footage with the software you get with Windows. You'll make a customer shrug their shoulders. If you're going to do it, do it right. Make sure your client base is ready for whatever fees you'll be charging." | 

STATISTICAL FACTS • • •

More than two-thirds of teens and adults have seen a digital video display in a public venue in the past month. (2010 Arbitron Digital Place-Based Video Study)