

Digital Signage in Corporate Communication

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By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
Digital Signage Today



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Digital display technology has long been recognized for its ability to communicate messaging in settings such as retail, transportation, education and elsewhere. Nearly every retailer today incorporates digital signage into their advertising arsenal, and digital screens at the airport or train station show arrival and departure times as well as other news of interest to travelers. Displays on campus aid a professor with lectures, while screens in a doctor's office outline the benefits of medical procedures and promote a healthy lifestyle.

One area where display technology has been making inroads lately is at the corporate headquarters. And while many of the applications of digital signage in corporate communication are similar to those of other areas, businesses are coming up with new and innovative ways to use those screens to help improve their operations.

Impressing the visitor

There are two distinct audiences for digital signage content at the corporate office: Those who work for the corporation and those who may be visiting. From the viewpoint of visitors, the function of digital signage parallels that of deployments in other settings.

Consider, for example, a design firm that frequently meets with potential clients to demonstrate their work.

“Video walls in the lobby can show off new designs or examples of that company’s work for folks who are sitting and waiting to take a meeting,” said Eric Farkas, engineering manager with Pittsburgh-based digital signage and multimedia solutions provider Black Box Corp. The company serves 175,000 clients in 150 countries with 200 offices throughout the world.



“You might even incorporate interactivity to allow those visitors to find out more about those designs,” Farkas said.

Those screens can also incorporate content and color schemes to reinforce a company’s brand. For example, when Bell Helicopter Textron Inc. was building a new headquarters at its corporate campus in Fort Worth, Texas, the company decided to install a convex video wall in their main lobby.

The entrance area not only serves to welcome visitors, it is often the setting for company events. The screens, from German firm Eyevis, are mainly used to display marketing information and the internally produced content for the company’s Rotorvision employee news channel, but also offers local signal inputs for content used in presentations.

And mining equipment manufacturer Joy Mining Machinery deployed a network of digital video displays in the lobbies of 55 facilities around the world, with screens conveying both local and companywide information, unified under a consistent graphic look. The system is driven by iCOMPEL digital signage appliance platform from Black Box.

“The screens are typically subdivided, with about two-thirds of the message area reserved for companywide content such as product information, company news, videos and the like,” said Chuck Fickter, marketing information manager for Joy Mining. “Stock prices, local weather, and general news are conveyed by a crawler at the bottom of the screen. There is also a message center that can be controlled by the local office to post specific messages like on-time delivery statistics or to welcome guests or customers.”

At large corporate campuses, screens can be used for wayfinding, guiding visitors to their destination while at the same time helping to reinforce the company’s brand message.

New York-based commercial real estate company Lordae Property Management has installed digital building directories throughout its retail and office locations. The screens have cut down on the time and cost associated with keeping traditional directories current, and are improving the tenants and visitor experience, the company said.

“We decided to install digital building directories when we realized the expense and time it took to keep our office directories current,” said Lordae spokesman Jim Murtha. The

company estimates it costs \$400 to add a tenant's name to a directory, a process that can take up to three weeks.

“The digital directories not only add visual appeal and modernize our locations, but they also improve our guests’ experience by providing directional and navigational assistance,” Murtha said. “The directories have enabled us to save the time and money it would take to order, approve, receive and install an update to our physical directories. In fact, it has reduced the errors in our directories to zero.”

The other side of the counter

For corporate staff, digital signage can carry information ranging from meeting times and CEO speeches to staff-related announcements such as birthdays and anniversaries. In addition, interactive screens can perform scheduling functions such as reserving conference rooms, tying into a central database that tracks when specific rooms are available.

More and more, though, screens are serving to educate employees.

A use case normally seen in retail and restaurant operations involves leveraging digital signage to display training information. The main office would typically send out a DVD to individual stores or host a webcast, and employees would view that information before the store opened or after it closed.



But with retention rates for information delivered via digital signage anywhere from 30 to 50 percent higher than information delivered via print, companies are realizing that those digital screens can be used as a training tool in a corporate setting as well.

“Corporations seem to be adopting the idea that, ‘Hey we’ve got periods throughout the day, especially during lunch, where we can get a fairly wide audience’,” Farkas said. “We also see it in banks, where they are teaching processes and procedures in conference rooms during breaks.”

In the employee cafeteria or throughout the corporate hallways, digital screens can display information such as the number of days without a lost time accident or productivity and work goals. Messages can include the promotion of a virtual online suggestion box for employees to offer tips on how to improve operations. In the event of an emergency, those displays can serve as a quick way to inform staff of the proper course of action.

Birmingham, Alabama-based Motion Industries, for example, was seeking a more efficient way to communicate company news, benefits updates, HR announcements and other

vital information to its employees and deployed a network of digital displays from technology provider ViewSonic at its corporate headquarters and nearby distribution center. The company serves the industrial marketplace with MRO (maintenance, repair and operation) replacement parts and services from 500 locations across North America.

“Our employee intranet doesn’t give us the ability to run continual announcements, and we have to simply hope that employees will see the messages,” said John Seay, senior IT architect. “We weren’t running into any issues necessarily, but we definitely wanted to take a step forward technologically.”

Motion Industries is seeing employee communications happening faster and more efficiently, contributing to an improvement in its day-to-day processes. Due to the success of its original deployment, the company plans to deploy additional displays in each of its 450 branch offices around the country.

Screens can serve to notify management of impending deliveries, so if it’s 4:00 p.m. on Friday and the crew is alerted to a delivery set to arrive at 4:15 p.m., supervisors can know to keep a few employees until 5:00 p.m. to help unload a truck or get a few more products out the door.

On the factory floor, displays can be used to help lower the number of safety issues that occur.

“For example, you may see a printed sign notifying you that hard hats are required in a certain area, but people still walk through without a hard hat,” Farkas said

“Some of our customers have used a motion-sensing setup where as soon as you walk up to the door the screen plays a safety video,” he said. “It catches peoples’ attention, and they are seeing a much lower rate of violations.”

And for the sales crew, one of the most innovative uses is for what Farkas dubbed “sportification,” a concept that traces its roots back to software tools designed to motivate the staff and make the team a bit more competitive. Digital displays can be used to show the progress of the team in meeting its goals for the period, showing who’s in the lead and who might need to make a few more calls.

“It could be a simple bar chart or graph to show sales goals, or it could show an announcement that so-and-so just closed a big deal,” Farkas said. “That could have the effect of energizing the sales floor, generate some friendly competition and help drive up revenue even more.”

About the sponsor:

An industry-leading digital signage and multimedia solutions provider, Black Box helps customers build, manage, optimize, and secure their professional AV, signal distribution, and digital signage networks. More than 175,000 clients in 150 countries trust Black Box for digital signage content management systems, networked digital signage players, and professional AV equipment, including extenders, controllers, splitters, converters, and presentation systems. Along with leading-edge visual technology solutions, Black Box offers expert application engineering and award-winning 24/7 lifetime technical support. No one is better suited to bring customers the total digital signage solution than Black Box.