Getting Started with
Digital Signage

A professor once said that "identifying the problem (or questions) is 80% of the solution".

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Key Steps in Designing Your Next Digital Signage System

1. Define the purpose for your digital signage:
   a. Who will be viewing your digital signage content?

      One of the first steps is to define who will be viewing the content on your digital signage. Some demographic analysis is helpful here. It can be very detailed by targeting age, gender, and why these profiles would have an interest in reading your content.

      It can be very specific or more general, such as whether they are: visitors, clients, residents, employees, etc. However you break them out will then provide you with guidance on what you want to say to them.

   b. What will be relevant content to the viewer?

      Each type of viewer is likely to have a different preference for meaningful content. One way to look at content is how you could best create an experience for that viewer. Think of content through the eyes of your viewer. Perhaps you want your content to be:
      - Educational and informative – perhaps about products and services you offer.
      - Entertaining – bring in a splash of information such as weather conditions, trivia, or headline sports.
      - Aesthetically Pleasing –give the viewer something pleasing to look at. Use some color psychology to reinforce your message. Don't forget to use animations to grab attention.
      - Escapism – Bring your viewer to a temporary "happy place". It might be a place of beauty from the outdoors or a work of art; a short walking tour in a quaint village.

      When you can draw the viewer into as many of these realms as possible, you are likely to create a memorable experience for that person.

   c. How will you measure if digital signage is accomplishing your goals?

      This is relevant to the goals that you set to achieve through your digital signage system.
      Remember that goals should be SMART:
      Specific
      Measurable
      Attainable
      Relevant
      Trackable

2. "Content is Key"
   a. Who will be responsible for ensuring the content stays current?
      Clear assignment of content management is key to a successful digital signage system at your location. That role can be from a designated person who is a content writer that gathers important topics from various department heads to an administrative

person that simply inputs data that they receive from others. The key is to have specific expectations and roles clearly defined for all stakeholders involved. Assigned responsibility must be followed-up with accountability for fulfillment of the tasks.

b. Will you want to schedule new content throughout the day, week, or year?

Making content relevant often includes scheduling time-sensitive content. Content that is relevant to the time of day, day of the week, time of the month or year; makes your content relevant to their viewing experience. This could include:
- Day-Parting – such as Good Morning, Good Afternoon, etc.
- A holiday greeting that starts one week before the holiday and ends the night of the holiday.
- Seasonal content showing fall colors during Autumn or budding flowers in the Spring; all resonates with the viewers.

c. Do you have a communication calendar with planned content for the next 90 days?

Planned content is a great way to make sure you deliver the "Right Message at the Right Time to the Right People". You will have unplanned content that needs to be updated on the fly, but it will not interfere with other important content. Plan and gather input from others.

This is a key consideration if you want to make a big impact on your viewers. If you have internal graphic design resources, you are fortunate and they will create some great-looking content for you. They need to be aware that designing for a digital signage screen vs. print are two different design approaches. Content should be designed with a "billboard" mentality.

If you don't have in-house design services, you may want to consider outsourcing this task to a design agency that understands design concepts for digital signage.

If you want to tackle this yourself, there will probably be pre-designed templates that you can use. Just be aware that a series of templates can often look like "sleepy elevator music" to the eyes. It's not likely you'll get the impact you are looking for.

3. Have you identified your hardware needs?

a. How many screens will you need to display the content to your intended audience?

This is a tough question to answer without looking at the physical floor plan or foot traffic paths. Here are some common locations that might meet your needs:
- Entryways
- Receptionist area
- Waiting areas or lounges
- Waiting lines: such as retail, grocery, banking, etc.
- Dining areas
- Employee break-rooms
- Resident's rooms

b. Will all screens be playing the same content or will you need some screens to play different content?

This is an easier question to answer once you have identified who your audiences are. The goal is to customize your content to make it relevant to the viewer. For example; if you are in a Senior Living Community, you might want to have 3 different playlists. One playlist targets residents, one targets visitors, and the other targets employees. It is fine to have overlapping or shared content between the 3 playlists

while having some unique content for each of your targeted viewers.

c. Do you have hardware configuration?
    i. Will it be on a network or a stand-alone environment?

This will depend on the scope of your digital signage project. Stand-alone options certainly can work, but you will want to ensure that you can connect to your hardware via an Internet connection. Gone are the days of using memory sticks and having to physically update content by inserting another memory stick.

Most digital signage networks are connected to a server that is running Content Management Software (CMS). It is very convenient and efficient to log into the server and make your changes to the content. The server will update the player/displays for you. This is particularly important if you have multiple locations.
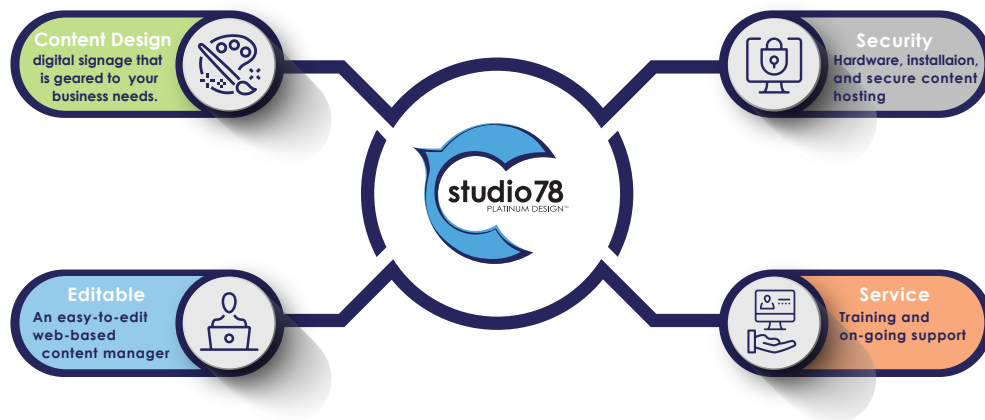
    ii. Will your content reside on an in-house server or a cloud-based server?

If your digital signage network will be large enough to require a Content Manager Software that resides on a server, either option has its pros or cons.

If your company has a server(s) with room on one of its servers to support a CMS application, then an in-house solution may be your best bet. Your IT department will be able to handle much of the hardware installation and connectivity of your signage to the server. Backing up your content will be part of their responsibility as well.

If you choose to have your content manager software run in a cloud environment, then your IT support can rely on the vendor for backups, OS upgrades, and other maintenance items.

    iii. Will your IT department need to be involved to ensure your digital signage meets your company's security policies?

Depending on your company's security environment, you will want to ensure that this area is not overlooked in your digital signage deployment. Proper security protocols need to be in place. This includes secure logins, strong passwords accommodating firewall rules, and preferably a cable Internet connection over a wireless connection.

v. Will you need independent players or will you be using displays with an Onboard Chip System?

There are a variety of player options, along with their associated price range. A big factor is the graphic card requirements needed to play your animations and transitions smoothly. Another factor that impacts the quality of playback (is the display's resolution. While the standard has been HD (1920x1080), 4k 3960x2160) will soon become the native resolution of most new displays. Keep in mind that more animations and hire resolution requirements will need to be matched with the player's capabilities.

4. Once the scope of the digital signage network has been designed and hardware has been determined, the next step is a timeline:

a. Hardware installation and testing?

It may take 6-10 weeks for hardware to arrive and be installed. If you have in-house resources, you may have the hardware installed faster, however, if you need to hire an outside resource to install and test the hardware, it will be based on availability.

b. Content Development and Approval?

Once the hardware has been ordered, your content developer and graphic designer can start composing your messages. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Stay true to your branding. You want to ensure your corporate ID standards are being followed. Your digital signage content should have a similar look and feel to your website and collateral materials.
- Keep your content short and to the point. Paragraphs of text will not be read.
- Have a second set of eyes to proof the content and the timing of each screen.
- Average screen time should be 8-12 seconds
- Obtain a sign-off from all major stakeholders before you Go Live.

c. Deployment and Go-Live?

Test – Test –Test. Setup a staging environment and let the content run for a couple of days. Make edits to your content to ensure updates are happening.

5. Your Digital Signage is up and running – now what?

Finally, after all of your planning, creating, designing, and deployment, you can sit back and relax, right? Not much!

Observe if people are reading the content. Ask employees if they saw an important announcement that affected them. Listen for comments, good or bad, then adjust content as necessary.

You will find that your learning curve will peak after the first 6 months. Your limits to your digital signage system are only limited by your creativity.

6. Finding the right company(ies) to partner with for this project.

There are many types of companies that have a specific role in digital signage. We've spent 20+ years developing the type of company we feel best serves our clients' needs, and we will discuss who we are in just a minute.

There are hardware manufacturers of displays, servers, players, and many types of hardware accessories.

- Inherent to the hardware is the Operating Software, such as Windows, Linux, Chrome, and Android; just to name a few.
- Don't forget hardware needs to be installed. Servers need to be mounted,

displays hung, cables and Internet connections run. They all need to talk together.

- Ongoing Support is needed when upgrades or add-ons are needed. There are also digital signage software companies that give you the ability to create and design layouts for your content. Schedules when you want your content to play and assigned to the correct player.

There are other third-party design and animation softwares that allow you to create your layouts and then import them into your digital signage software.

Of course, there are other sources of content: such as live weather, news, or trivia feeds that can be integrated into your playlist as well.

Let's not forget we need people to run and support all the hardware and software we just mentioned. This could include:

- Graphic Designers and Animators
- Content Writers
- Marketing and Brand Strategists
- IT Support
- Etc.

You might say "Whew! That's a lot of hats and expertise that is needed". Typically one or two persons can't do it all. So you must choose, who to partner with and what areas you will need help. Each type of stakeholder brings their own set of expertise, but just like you, they cannot do it all without the participation of others.

Studio 78 has been delivering digital signage solutions since 2001. We function much like a general contractor when hired to help build someone a home. Some of our clients have a strong IT department that can have an important role in the hardware and the network side of things. Other clients are more geared to the marketing side of managing the content and getting the right message out to the viewers. And there are certainly a lot of clients that fall somewhere in-between these two spectrums. Studio 78 can step in and fill in where you need us.

We also offer turn-key solutions. We can support your digital signage projects from concept to completion. Our knowledge and experience provide us with the opportunity to take what can be a more complex project and deliver solutions so that non-technical people can manage their digital signage network on a day-to-day basis.

Our approach is to deliver a system that is easy to learn and easy to use. We are also there when you have questions or need support after digital signage has gone live.

Studio 78 offers:
- Scalable digital signage platforms: you can start small and grow as needed.
- Digital signage server, player, network and configuration options.
- Ongoing hardware support
- Cloud-based hosting and backup
- Content management solutions
- Graphic design and animation services
- Ongoing content management and support
- Training: initial and ongoing

We're here to help you make digital signage your most effective communication and marketing tool.