

Designing for Digital Signage

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One thing I recall over the years is that of elaborate storefront windows – especially those decked out for the Christmas holidays. Even today we have some pretty creative store fronts in our malls. There is only so much a store can convey in such limited space and the cost of changing out an elaborate storefront can be expensive. The one thing I am convinced of is that we will gradually and continuously see an increase of digital signage in our lives. Whether it is a kiosk application, advisement in our airports, large display booths at trade show or billboards along the expressway, we will see the emergence of digital displays gradually replace many traditional printed as well as back-lit illuminated signs. We have already seen the impact of flat panel displays in sports bars where multimedia is the attraction. And some trendy places have even placed them in their restrooms where they have a captive audience.

A number of the major companies such as Sony have offered displays just for digital signage applications. Engadget recently reported on Shinoda's giant curved plasma display

which is 145-inches (12 feet) diagonal. The display which is made of 2-meter by 3-meter panels stitched together. Impressive, but the 7.2kg (15.8 lb) weight is even more impressive. Throw in the fact that the panels are only 1-mm thick and the applications of such a display should overwhelm you with ideas of various applications. Such a display would be excellent for digital signage applications.

Such a display could be the complete backdrop for a trade show or the backdrop of a brick and mortar store front. They would also fit nicely in any corporate lobby to showcase the company's image. The list of uses is endless. There are a few questions that come to my mind. Should we start designing our business to support such signage? Will such displays start popping up in store front windows? Will our future city buses have the outside of them covered with electronic displays? And will our school and corporate white boards be replaced with such massive displays? The answer of course is yes. But with all things, as we gaze into the future we have to ask ourselves what other changes we will likely see. Some of the traditional signage companies may see a drop of printed signs. But we will see an increase in businesses that sell and install digital signage. Some implementation issues include the concern of someone throwing a brick through a storefront into a 12 foot display. And what types of issues arise with such a display on the side of a bus or a delivery truck? Well, such displays would be an expensive item to replace if they were spray painted with graffiti. Store fronts might also simply use such displays as backdrops to traditional items such as mannequins. Imagine mannequins wearing beachwear while a constantly changing backdrop of people playing volleyball on the beach or laying in the sand appears in the background.

In time, electronic displays will be everywhere from grocery store in-aisle advertisement to large displays covering large portions of buildings exteriors. It is really not a matter of if but a matter of when the technology will surround us. If you are a designer, the question you should be asking yourself is how you can effectively integrate this technology into your marketing?