

Three Crucial Steps to Creating Effective Digital Signage Messaging

Messaging projects must be intuitive, intelligent and creative to succeed, with campaigns methodically planned and guided by efficiencies, strategy and design.

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Digital signage can be a powerful medium, but to develop the most effective message possible, efficiencies must be assessed, strategies crafted and powerful designs created. To deliver an effective message and take full advantage of the technology, messaging must be intuitive, intelligent and creative.

Say, for example, that a teenager is walking through a mall. Messaging at a clothing store must be dynamic enough to catch the attention of a shopper who is likely text messaging, and effective enough to make the shopper stop and enter the store. Creating such messaging can seem daunting, but with careful planning and a thoughtful strategy, effective campaigns can be created.

Effective messaging is not created in a vacuum. While developing and deploying content certainly can be handled in-house, consultants are available who can streamline the process and ensure maximum return on investment.

The power of messaging

These days, people are exposed to an unprecedented amount of messages in

their daily lives. Americans see more than 3,000 advertisements a day, according to author Kalle Lasn in his book, "Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America." It is therefore critical that messaging is intuitive; the audience must be able to quickly grasp and relate to the message, and do so with minimal thinking. The faster messaging is understood, processed and inspires the desired reaction, the more effective the messaging.

At the same time, messaging needs to be intelligent. Messages need to be practical, relevant and timely to the target audience.

Additionally, content must be developed using the technology best suited for conveying the messaging. Intelligent messaging delivers content in the appropriate formats, such as 3-D, video or dynamic Flash. Intelligence also considers the message length that will best engage

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the audience given the environment. Business development company Gaebler.com states that someone walks by a store window in only a few seconds. Messaging that quickly engages people and inspires them to enter the door needs to make the most of those few seconds.

And, of course, digital signage messaging must be creative. The best content creators consider the goal of the endpoint (where the message is delivered) and find creative ways to achieve that goal.

"Sometimes the goal is high-impact messaging that has the 'wow' factor and interrupts people in their daily activities," said Dos Dosanjh of San Jose, Calif.-based Cisco Digital Media Creative Services. "Sometimes the goal is to make the messaging part of the environment, blending in so that the message gives the impression of being a part of that environment, thereby feeling familiar and welcomed."

No matter the messaging, however, the goal is to inspire action, whether that be encouraging a shopper to buy a specific product, visit a website or ask about a special offer.

Dosanjh says that in order to achieve optimum messaging as a deliverable, the project should be guided through three specific stages of development, and guided in the proper order. These stages are efficiencies, strategy and design.

Efficiencies

The first stage is solidifying efficiencies required for the project, beginning with assessing how business objectives may be feasibly met using digital signage messaging. Once it is determined that



It seems paradoxical, but the best place to begin is at the end. A team should determine where the message will be delivered, such as a smartphone, and then the best way to achieve the delivery can be determined.

digital messaging will contribute to business objectives, it is time to identify available and optimal channels. The team assesses endpoints where messaging can and should be delivered, such as mobile devices, kiosks, desktops, virtual environments and digital signage. When the channels are determined, the team can apply efficiencies by assessing which channels already exist and how to best make use of those channels.

It also is important to evaluate the messaging to ensure it still meets business objectives. The most dynamic content in the world is useless if it contradicts the brand's core message.

Assessment of efficiencies also includes evaluating impact on the network to ensure performance can be delivered reliably with little or no impact on other network operations.

The content may be evaluated at this time for fiscal efficiencies, too. One suggestion is to use affordable virtual environments as endpoints to recreate the same messaging

as delivered to the more expensive live-action environments. Virtual environments (such as Internet destinations) may deliver the desired perception to the desired audience at a fraction of the cost.

In addition to using virtual environments, look at existing content to see if it can be repurposed. Not only does that help minimize cost, it decreases the amount of time needed to produce content and ensures brand consistency.

Strategy

The second stage is determining how, based on the efficiencies, the messages will be created, displayed and disseminated, so that the required message is on the right screen, at the right time and in the right format.

Evaluating capable formats for the content is fundamental to content strategy. The team needs to identify, for each endpoint, media formats, possible templates, ideal layouts, sizes of templates and displays capable of delivering the message. The digital canvas (i.e., the display) will dictate how the content will be viewed.

Next, the team should look at each of those endpoints and identify content distribution capabilities (local, regional or global). Each endpoint also is subject to its own content management strategy, with evaluation that determines optimum scheduling of content (time of day, day, week, month) determined by expected audience behavior at that location.

Say, for example, a makeup company wants to promote its new line of long-lasting lipstick. It might create messaging that is deployed at a national drugstore

Strategy best practices

When creating a strategy, consider:

- How the content will be viewed and what the ideal display format is
- Where and how the content will be distributed
- Content management, i.e., how often content will be refreshed, at what times of day it will be viewed, etc.

chain on weeknights at 6 p.m., touting the convenience of putting on lipstick once in the morning and having it last all day without having to take time to reapply. Since that is peak shopping time for women who work, the message speaks directly to a need they may have. At the same time, the company might have ads online targeted to college-aged women who want a lipstick that can stand up to a night out.

It is in the strategy stage that the team identifies methodologies for measuring results, including return on investment and return on experience. It also is in the strategy stage that plans will be developed for achieving excellence with ongoing improvements.

Design

Design, the final deliverable, should show creative options that adhere to identified efficiencies and optimal strategies. The layout of the content needs to be meaningful and purposeful based on the efficiencies and strategies defined.

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It is vital to approach the design by ensuring delivery of not just content, but perception of content. This perception must be created using the technology tools that best deliver that representation to a particular endpoint (selecting among media such as live action, graphics, Flash or video; designing to messaging goals; and assigning lengths of time).

Finally, the design must deliver creative in ways that achieve the desired goal of inspiring the audience to action.

Effective digital signage can offer high-impact messaging, but the process of creating such signage can seem daunting. Thoughtful consideration of efficiencies, strategy and design, however, can help

create a successful campaign. Consultants also are available to streamline the process and ensure maximum return on investment.

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