

Digital Signage: The Road to Good Content

BY DAVID ALLEN MOSS

Let's say you're on course to create your very own digital signage program. There has been a lot of legwork already. Your company and colleagues finally get it; they're in this for the long haul, ready to make that long-term commitment, to charge ahead of the curve.

What you envision is a clever mix of customer-centric programming, balanced with the right mix of brand promise and state-of-the-art design techniques, to pull off a truly intelligent in-store media network. You've nailed the technical specs for the displays and secured the budget for hardware and integration.

So, all that's left is content.

Hold on. Have you considered how you're going to keep this program fresh? How much blood, sweat and tears it's going to take to keep up with the demands of running your own "television network?" Ok, so maybe you plan something smaller in scale, to walk before you run. Good plan.

Even if it's a simple promotional loop you're after, you'd be short-changing your marketing objectives to simply throw a mix of music videos in with a haphazard assortment of product promotions, vendor spots and brand promise. It's probably not the sort of program that's going to turn heads — not for long, anyway.

INSIGHT:

1. Good content is hard to find.

In media design circles, there's a lot of tall talk about the power of content. You know, creative media that's compelling, entertaining, informative, relevant, and timely — content that may even spur sales uplifts. Remember, the key ingredient to getting your digital signage or retail media program to speak from the heart of your brand (and seamlessly integrate all these lofty goals) is to make sure you have access to quality assets in the first place. Depending on your products, services, and brand identity, this may call for original video shots, or using a resource that caters to these specialized needs like stock photography and video houses.

2. Garbage in, garbage out.

There is no such thing as good content without quality assets, but don't be surprised if it seems there's just never enough content to fill the time slot. The age-old burden of broadcast is no stranger to "narrowcast" (a term used for digital video broadcast for a private, specialized in-store (out of home) experience.) Be sure to think twice about using content as filler. Spare your customers and resist the urge to include the kitchen sink. In the case of your store or restaurant environment, less truly is more.

3. Broadcast spots can be overkill.

Chances are your customers have already seen your ads—online, at the ball game, on TV. Sure, you spent a fortune on those broadcast clips, but your in-store video network should not be viewed as just another dedicated channel to extend that investment. Re-purposing portions of your broadcast content is definitely an option, but keep in mind that your audience needs a compelling reason to pay attention to your in-store content, not a reason to tune it out.

4. Know your audience.

What inspires them? What could possibly be on their minds when they visit your store? Are they looking for information or a recommendation? A reminder of why they are shopping in your store in the first place, or are they simply needing a reason to buy? Whatever the answer, your creative content should be in line with your messaging objectives.

5. Even your best creative has an expiration date.

Don't feel bad when you run into asset fatigue. Asset fatigue is the term used when a specific segment in a program loses freshness before updated content is created, and the program is refreshed. It happens to companies big and small, even corporations with full-size in-house multimedia agencies.

One way to keep the content fresh is to schedule that content to swap itself out. Another way is to develop a strategy for growing your library of content over time, and stick to it. This helps reduce the necessary cost of custom creative work over the life of the program.

You can also infuse third-party content into your program by purchasing from sources such as Associate Press, National Public Radio and a number of cable networks. This helps keep the content dynamic and useful to the target audience. Be warned, however, that pre-existing content and timely news data come with a price.

6. Explore your creative kingdom.

Assets come in all shapes and sizes. Messaging can be created from existing art, copy, photography and digital video. Whether these motion graphics are created by an internal marketing group, agency, or design consultant, it is possible to get a lot of mileage out of what you already have. By carefully re-purposing existing assets into a creative program, you can launch a signage pilot or initial in-store application at a comfortable price. (Of course, comfort depends on who's approving your budget.)

IN SHORT:

Whether you're facing the challenge of developing compelling creative, building that dream-like mix of clever in-store video with trendy motion graphics and an overall vision to heighten your customer's retail experience — or you really just want a hotshot program to turn some heads — just remember, if your "content is king," your "kingdom's" wealth is measured by its creative resources.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN CENTERSTAGE: IN-STORE ENTERTAINMENT REPORT
VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1, MARCH 2005
PUBLISHED BY PLAY NETWORK