

Responses to questions from QuickBite Magazine

What are the main benefits of using digital signage?

Today's digital signage gives businesses in food retail the chance to use dynamic video, text or graphics to get their message straight to customers at the moment of greatest impact, boosting sales and speeding up service.

Instead of being baffled by the choices or distracted by friends and fellow customers when a store is busy, anyone entering a restaurant or take-away can immediately see the menu and the range of choices available on high-quality, robust screens, located for optimum visibility.

The dynamic nature of the content means businesses can use the screens to publicise menus, special offers, forthcoming promotions, new items, or to communicate their history and values. It is also now very easy to tailor content to particular groups of customers likely to be in a store at a particular time of day, such as students

The use of interactive kiosks, which use touch-sensitive screens, is another aspect that can alleviate the pressure when a store is busy, allowing customers to create their own choices and place an order really quickly.

How easy is digital signage to manage and update for the business owner?

Digital signage is now really easy to manage if it is professionally installed and maintained by a managed services company with the right combination of experience and expertise.

Content can be streamed from a central server at the head office via secure Internet connections, making it very straightforward for management to update content or to ensure that different menus or features are displayed at different times of the day or week.

A business can even divide screens to show different types of content (including news or lifestyle programming from a third party) or introduce a news ticker along the bottom to hold the attention of customers waiting for their orders or eating in-store.

Many systems allow for individual store managers to display content approved by the head office, perhaps in relation to in-store promotions or community events. These have been shown to be highly effective in generating extra sales.

What developments have there been in the market over the last few years?

Since businesses tend to know more about their customers now, either through customer relationship management systems or by using technology to monitor footfall, flow and customer profiles, it is now possible to relate digital display content far more closely to the preferences and habits of segmented groups. Schoolchildren, pensioners or parents may come in at different times of day and content can be altered to target their preferences.

The use of interactive kiosks is also taking off. Younger customers are much more attuned to the idea of using screens to make menu choices. One of the key developments in this field is the incorporation of printers, bar-code scanners and payment devices, which means not only can customers print off their order at a kiosk, they can also pay for it without having to spend time at the counter. All that remains is for them to pick up the order.

How can businesses see a return on their investment in digital signage?

Investment in digital signage gives returns when properly implemented. Studies show that impulse buying goes up by as much as 20 per cent when a store correctly deploys digital signage, while special promotions specific to a particular outlet double the amount of attention from viewers.

Since content is streamed, it is easy to adapt, so a take-away operator can use the screens to flash up key phone numbers for orders, allowing customers to put them into their mobiles while waiting or eating, ready for future use.

Poor technology choices and downtime are the biggest barriers to achieving these gains. A managed services provider will make sure businesses get it right. They will eliminate downtime by providing different types of broadband connectivity so that if one goes down, the other will operate as backup.

Using a managed services provider also makes things simple, as there is only one company to deal with for the whole system.

A provider that is not tied into a specific brand or type of technology is also best, as such companies will also only install what really helps the individual business overcome its specific challenges. It is important that the provider is not wedded to one solution, because an open mind and plenty of experience are crucial to providing the best fit.

Can digital signage be used for a number of purposes, if so, what?

As well as communicating with customers, digital signage can also be used to update staff on product developments and company news. The content can be delivered to staff after hours or via screens in staff rooms.

Modern systems make it easy to adapt what is shown as the content is streamed from the server at head office. This may seem unnecessary, but there is evidence that sales of seasonal promotions are boosted by double-digit percentage points once staff have been shown videos giving them the information about what to sell and how to sell it.

Where can digital signage be used and what will I need to get started?

Digital signage is very adaptable. Its uses range from petrol stations to upmarket fashion stores, and it is equally effective across all industries. It is ideal in a fast-paced, and probably noisy, quick-service environment where speed is of the essence and customers want to absorb a limited amount of information, such as menu choices, very quickly. A good piece of content can be worth a thousand words shouted by a harassed waiter or a server behind a counter.

The first port of call for anyone considering digital signage has to be an established managed services provider with a proven track record in delivery and maintenance. Infrastructure is important because effective digital signage has to be underpinned by robust broadband connectivity. A managed services provider that is well-versed in many kinds of technology and connectivity will take care of what is required and ensure it is fully maintained.

It is important to have one good provider, because achieving the full potential of digital signage and realising all its potential gains will not work if a business relies on bits and pieces from different suppliers, installers and maintenance companies. In fact it is a real recipe for failure.

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