
Key Success Factors for Digital Communication

A. Start with the Audience

It may seem counter intuitive, but a key success factor for digital communication is to start with the customer, and incorporate the technology second. Today's technology offerings are boundless. The first priority should be the customer experience. You should be thinking first about how you can improve the customer experience and how technology can help you communicate more effectively.

When identifying the key drivers of your target audience, here are some items to consider:

- Who will make up the typical audience?
- What is the technological sophistication of the target audience?
- What are the customer's goals vs. what are the company's goals?
- What method of communication resonates with your target audience?
- What are the cultural, language, and demographic issues to consider?

B. Media Durations

Digital Signage media does have an "expiry date" as the captive audiences for a particular display typically change rapidly. The surrounding environment is a significant determinant of the average viewer attention span so it is important to keep this in mind when building your templates. A display located in a storefront window is subject to a different audience than the display mounted above the cash register of the same store. Optimally, the content should be different on each display both in terms of messaging and in terms of length. Users of digital signage should always be cognizant of this fact and keep media clips to lengths at or below the average audience attention span.

There are many ways to measure the average length of your captive audience but below is a guide for typical applications. Plan your deployment strategically around these factors for maximum ROI.

- Walk by time: 7-11 seconds
- Retail check-out line time: 15-30 seconds
- Drive by Time: 3-5 seconds

C. Playlist Management

firmCHANNEL provides the tools to maximize your creativity. When building a playlist, consider the environment in which it will be displayed and compose the clips with appropriate color schemes, logical transitions, and strategic placement of clips within the playlist. Repeat visual elements of design throughout a playlist. By repeating colors, shapes, textures, spatial relationships, line thickness and object sizes, the playlist will carry a sense of purpose and enhances branding power.

Consider the total length of your playlist so that you are aware how often each media clip will be played. firmCHANNEL provides all the measurement tools required for this. There likely are clips in the playlist that



carry more importance over others. Schedule your playlists so that the important clips are displayed appropriately. Use the “Save As” feature to replicate a media clip so that it can appear numerous times in a playlist.

It is also important to keep in mind what type of information you are communicating over your network. If you intend on displaying the latest updates from the New York Stock Exchange, you will have to have long cycles that update frequently. Conversely, global news updates can occur less frequently.

D. The Complete Environment

Digital Signage applications are not universal. Each location has its own set of key success factors and challenges to overcome. At your location, note what the area provides for lighting, sound, audience distance from the displays, attention spans, and demographics. Lighting factors will influence what type of display is best for your location. Lighting conditions will also affect visibility of colors and text. As a general rule, LCD displays perform better in ambient light than Plasma displays. Understanding the dynamics of the surrounding environment is essential as it will guide your decisions in implementing and maintaining effective digital signage.

To create a complete environment, the technology has to collaborate and incorporate well with the surrounding space. When making any implementation choices, analyze how the decision matches with the customer’s expectations, brand experience, and the operational, logistical, and ergonomic issues of the environment.

E. Simplicity

In the world of digital communication, less is more. Simplicity is often the best way to target your audience, communicate clearly, and improve message retention. The probability that the audience will view the content improves if less information is displayed. People are continually bombarded by text and most often avoid having to read long scripts. Keep text simple to improve message delivery.

When inputting text, avoid forcing readers to over-think. The message should be concise and direct. Perfecting digital signage content is a balancing act. If you provide the audience with too much information, they will be inclined to pass over and ignore it. If you provide too little, you risk interpretation and comprehension problems.

Adding extravagant graphics, while attractive and unique, can actually distract the audience away from the core message of the content. Studies show that the use of elaborate graphics does not improve message effectiveness nor does it promote message retention. The goal is to provide attractive media that focuses the audience’s attention to the message at hand. When designing media, it is helpful to ask yourself if your attention is directed to the brand or to the elements surrounding it. By avoiding complex images, text, and visual effects that compete for attention, your messages will be delivered to the audience in a lasting and impressionable manner.



F. Language

When composing your digital communication text, avoid using language that is more complex than it needs to be. Choosing the longer word is not necessarily the best word. Complex language opens the communication up to interpretation, confusion, and reduces retention rates. The wrong language can also alienate an audience that is not accustomed to communicating in such a way.

As with all decisions, it is important to consider the environment and ensure that the delivery speaks effectively to the target audience.

G. Media Testing

With the simplicity of firmCHANNEL's internal content creation engine, there is often the tendency to compose content in seconds without much regard for testing for effectiveness. This is perfectly acceptable under most conditions, but in sensitive applications, users are always encouraged to monitor audience responsiveness towards each media clip. In doing so, users will become familiar with the key success factors within their respective location and they can then apply the effective characteristics in future media developments.

H. Repurpose Content

To save time while developing media, use the "Save As" feature to create a copy of a desired media clip in a different playlist. Once in the new playlist, edits can be made to the clip to make it appropriate for the theme of the new playlist.

I. Media Organization

As your media library expands, there will be a tendency to name newly created media clips with generic titles such as "bar 1" or "birthday". Overtime, you may find that as a result, it becomes increasingly hard to differentiate between clips. To avoid scheduling errors or inconvenient searches, users are encouraged to label media clips with a descriptive titles that can easily be referenced at a later date.

To help quickly identify the proper clip, firmCHANNEL provides for you the detailed information regarding when and by whom the clip was created. This information can be viewed at any time when organizing media clips within a playlist.

J. Content Strategy

Digital Signage is a powerful communication tool that has proven to have dramatic a influence at the point of purchase and provides great support in the sales cycle. To achieve this, it is important to have a well thought out strategy in regards to how digital signage fits into your sales process. Communication can often be wasted without a clear direction or instruction for the audience. Consider what you would like the



audience to do after they view the media clip. Should they purchase a product? Redeem a coupon? Visit a location? Navigate to a website? Attend a meeting? Digital signage provides tremendous options in the way of influencing consumers at the point of purchase. To maximize the return on your digital signage investment, ensure that your content correlates and supports your ultimate goals for the audience.

Another suggestion is to offer incentives to follow the requests for action. This is a powerful initiative to draw the audience to a desired end. As a caution however, be prepared to deliver upon your incentives as breaking consumer trust will jeopardize the effectiveness of future marketing initiatives.

firmCHANNEL Digital Signage is unique in that it also offers the capabilities of firmWEB. Use these toolsets collaboratively to maximize your communication. Signage at the point of purchase (with an average captive audience time of seven seconds) could be used to direct individuals to your website (where the average captive audience time is much longer).

K. Font Size and Text

A popular concern among digital signage content developers is the proper font size and text to use. This is a vital consideration relative to the overall effectiveness. The keys to success in a digital world differ from traditional print media.

In terms of font size, clearly bigger is better. A general rule of thumb is that font 2" tall can be seen from 25 feet and that relationship holds as you move farther from the screen. It is often speculated however that displays generally have 30 feet of "Impact" distance. This suggests that an audience farther than 30 feet will not strain to read the text on the screen, and as such, message retention rates are considerably reduced. Keep in mind that digital screens do not have the resolution rates that a typical print poster would carry thus you would have to use a larger font size in digital format to maintain the same visibility afforded by print.

With digital communication, it is very important to consider the ambient lighting of the environment. This influences what type of display best suits the application as well as the visibility and effectiveness of media in the environment.

Consider contrast at all times. Outlines and drop shadows generally improve text visibility. Use color combinations that soften the transition from the background to the foreground. For close range viewing, words beginning with uppercase and followed by lower case are easily readable. From longer range, all uppercase letters provide better visibility.

In the digital world, fonts that are "Sans-Serif" generally provide better visibility and thus, better message comprehension and retention. The opposite is true with print media, but with the lower resolution rates of digital displays, fonts with cleaner edges generally provide greater visibility from distance.



L. Memory Retention

Aside from the above visibility related suggestions, users can significantly improve message performance by implementing psychological tactics into their content development. For example, when presented with a list of items, we generally will remember the first and last items on the list more so than the items in the middle. This is called the “Serial Position Effect”. Also, we recall the items at the bottom of the list more often than those at the top of the list. This is the “Recency Effect”. The relevance to digital signage is that often lists are used to display text in a given media clip. Keep this in mind and list items strategically in order of importance to increase the probability of message retention.

The visible duration of text is visible also contributes to retention. Leveraging firmCHANNEL templates which animate text slowly will increase this effect as it provides more time for the brain to store the message in long term memory. Setting the duration of the media clip 1-2 seconds longer than required is also an effective way of allowing the text to be displayed longer and thus improving the Recency Effect.

Again, simplicity always trumps complexity in the digital communication world. Keeping lists to only two items avoids the physiological games as people will generally retain two items with ease. Recall that communication is the ultimate goal at hand. Use these helpful hints to guide your content to make your digital signage experience a success.

M. Display Orientation

In some instances, it may be beneficial to change the orientation of your digital signage display. firmCHANNEL currently supports, and creates media for, 4:3 (Standard), 16:9 (Widescreen Horizontal), and 9:16 (Widescreen Vertical). Generally, 16:9 is the most popular however 9:16 demands attention due to its uniqueness.

In retail applications, portrait mode (9:16) is often more effective due to its aesthetics and functionality with the surrounding environments. Places such as public squares, retail stores, and theaters have traditionally used poster format print media and as such, portrait orientation digital signage is an attractive and natural alternative. Conversely, settings such as hotel lobbies where information is placed at a premium are serviced well by landscape orientation which provides better visibility and more space to interact at eye-level. A combination of orientations may create the best ambience for the environment.

As with all decisions, there is no strict rule for application as each environment is unique. Consider the needs of the target audience and provide an orientation that delivers the best communication results.

