

# Digital Signage for Beginners

What you need to know to set up your screen



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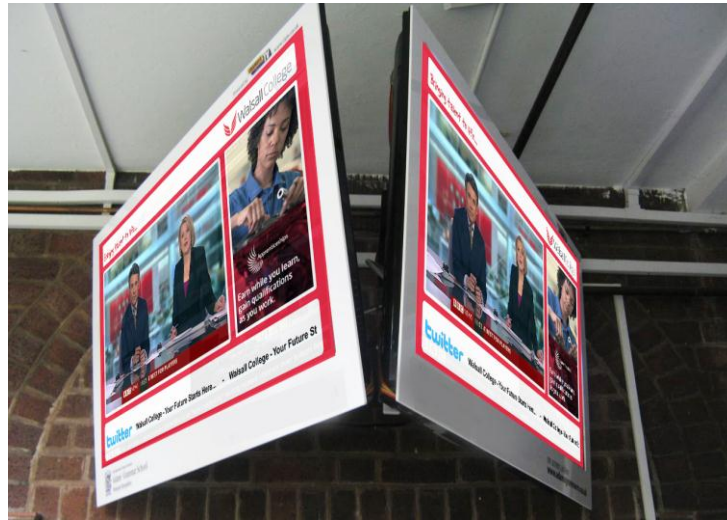
Dynamax



# What is digital signage?

From our experience digital signage is a rather uncommon term with no meaning to others than the industry professionals. Despite its sophisticated name it's not one of those concepts you need an IT degree to understand.

So in plain words **digital signage** is....



**-a form of electronic display showing advertising and public information in private and public areas** (shopping malls, hospitals, colleges, retails, small shops, waiting rooms, restaurants) both outdoors and indoors.





In its simplest version, the system has three elements:

- **The content** (the message you are going to display on your screen. In digital signage terms this translates into types of files your screens are going to display: HD videos, bitmaps, flash content, RSS feeds etc.) Your project should revolve around this aspect- how are you going to transmit your message depending on what message you are trying to transmit;
- **The hardware:** the screen itself (LCDs, 10" digital signboards etc.) and the computer or media player that stores your content and sends it to the screen(s);
- **The software:** it's the critical piece that allows you to upload the content and the media player to read and transfer your information to the screen(s).





# Choosing the right type of digital signage system

At the moment, there are two options on the market:

1. **An open system architecture**- the digital signage **software and hardware are agnostic of each other**, offering you flexibility and the possibility to re-use components when changing others so you don't have to start rebuilding your system from scratch.
2. **Closed proprietary architecture**- the hardware and the software are designed to work together, no intermixing with other outside elements. This system's **advantage** is that is being very tested, the rate of errors is very low.

**The disadvantage** is that you're locked in a system unable to grow with your business. If the manufacturer gets out of the business, or stops supporting the software/ hardware you are using or if the system doesn't responds to the needs arising with the time, you will have to renew the whole system and change both the software and hardware used, taking up a lot of your company's resources.

Should you go for an open source or for an off- the-shelf digital signage software?

An open- source software is usually a **community- developed product** that everyone can contribute to and it's therefore offered for **free**. Despite the fact that the software will cost you nothing, it is not a safe enough structure to build your business on. When problems arise there will be **no customer support department** to offer an immediate response and you will have to read blogs in the hope of finding an answer to your problem. As digital signage is quite a niche product, **support and maintenance must be taken very seriously**.

**An off- the -shelf digital signage software** is developed by a company who takes responsibility for its quality, maintenance and bug fixes. You



will be able to get timely support and solutions to your problems all with the minimum technical effort from your side.

How high a priority should the ease- of-use have?

A very high one. A good digital signage software should be written with the end-user in mind and hence easy to use even for people without technical training. **Don't commit any resources until you've tested it and seen for yourself how easy it is to understand and deploy.**

Because you will be using the software frequently to manage your content (there is nothing worse than stale content on your screens that will either annoy people or will make them totally ignore them) you need a product you feel comfortable with and safe- knowing that support is always available.

Other features you should be looking at

**Scalability.** This feature implies that your system should allow you to start small- with one or two screens- and then expand it to a multi-screen, multi-site installation, as your business and communication needs evolve, without unnecessary complications (switching to another software/ hardware provider etc.)

**Flexibility.** The software should allow you to schedule different content to play automatically at different times of the day, in different days of the week, on different screens so that your message is timely and relevant. If several persons are managing the system, you should be able to assign different degrees of authority according to their role within the company (headquarters- full access, branches- limited to their branch/ screens).

**Remote control. You should be able to access the system at any time from any location with an Internet connection,** that's what the cloud- based feature is all about in the end. Your main tasks should be limited to opening your browser, connecting to your portal and scheduling and modifying the content you want your screens to play.



**Versatility.** A modern digital signage software will support **full HD video and image quality** as well as **live news feed formats**. It will also **allow the partitioning of screen** (or the creation of "multi-zones") allowing you to display complementary information simultaneously (or in other words different type of files at the same time: a photo, a video and Twitter feeds) making the screen more eye-catching and more informative.

Should you host it or should it be in the cloud?

**A hosted system** implies that you will have to buy the server software (thus owning it), build your servers and maintain them. **The advantage** is that the system is very secure, if you are hosting your digital signage software nobody from outside your organization has access to your servers. **The downside** is that you have to become a specialist in that piece of software; you are maintaining it as you are maintaining the servers too which takes up time, effort, money and IT staff. This is the option usually preferred by large companies who have the necessary resources to host the system themselves.

**Cloud- computing** is a popular technology nowadays, as it relieves the end user of the task of maintaining servers, backing up data, worrying about band width and data storage. This implies that the technical knowledge and effort required of you as an end user is minimal. With **automatic and free of charge software updates** you will always use the latest and best version of the digital signage software without paying anything extra.

The **set-up of a cloud- based digital signage software will be quicker and easier** than that of a hosted one and the [costs](#) associated with it **will be considerably lower** (as there are no licenses to buy and no maintenance work to do).

Unlike a hosted (or premise- based) digital signage software, a cloud-based one comes with an **annual subscription fee, free of charge system updates and** (sometimes) **free customer support** (at Dynamax, we offer free email customer support).



### How it works

After creating and publishing your content, **this will be loaded** in the **cloud** (on the Internet) from where it will be **redirected to the media players** that will store it and **send it to the screens** within your store(s), venues(s), office(s) etc. This entire operation is done within seconds ensuring that your message appears on screens in almost real-time. That's it- you've now started to communicate to your audience.

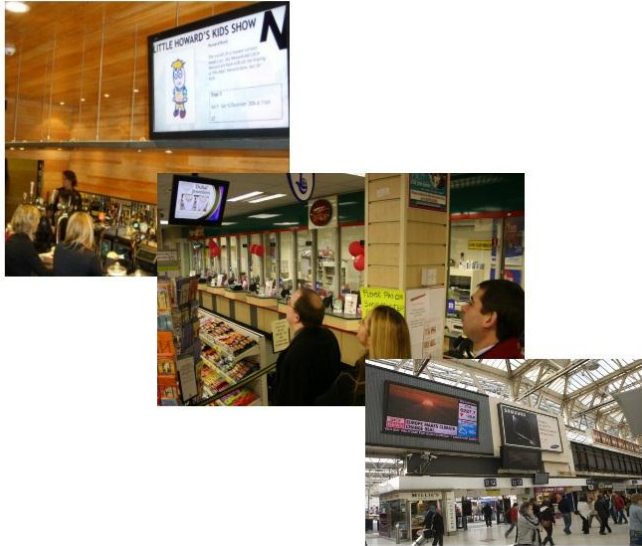


**Cloud- based digital signage**





## What type of businesses is digital signage useful for?



Digital signage is suitable to any business or institution that:

- **has a message to send;**
- **and an audience interested in that message.**

The two conditions remain true for establishments from both public and private sectors that want to enhance their communications.

If you own a venue, a local store, a coffee shop, a cinema, a theatre any location that is visited by people to whom you'd want to **tell about your offer and services** and keep them up to date with current information then **digital signage can help you do this**, in a quick, easy and cost-effective manner.

Perhaps you will find the following articles of interest:

[Top 5 reasons why Higher Education institutions need digital signage](#)

[Top 7 reasons why healthcare institutions need digital signage](#)

[How could digital signage help restaurants](#)

[5 ways librarians could use digital signage to improve communication and cut down costs](#)

[Fitness centre uses digitalsignage.NET to show news and generate ad revenue](#)

[Digital signage in Swedish supermarket engages consumers in making prices fall](#)



# Digital Signage and Other Types of Advertising



If you've got a limited budget and are thinking about maximizing the efficiency of your marketing campaign, digital signage is a worthwhile investment for now and for the future.

Digital signage differentiates itself from other advertising channels in a number of ways but mainly in terms of cost, reach and timeliness:

1. **Newspapers.** Besides the fact that posting an ad in an influential newspaper, be it local or national, is expensive, the newspaper is usually read only once. This means that: 1. **you've only got one chance** to make a good impression; 2. there's **no way to measure your ad's number of views**; 3. **you're relying on the reader** to remember your message and do something about it. With **digital signage** you can overcome these risks by **making sure that your ad is seen, read and delivered** in an environment where people can take an immediate action (purchase, register, ask for more information etc).
2. **Magazines.** The cost per ad per issue easily reaches hundreds of pounds/ dollars/ euros and **you can't update the ad copy until the new release.** This usually takes two weeks so if your



ad/ message contains any incorrect or outdated information you can't do anything about it. The main advantage of digital signage is the **instant update of data**. You can update your screen content in a few clicks and publish the news within minutes. Flexible, quick and at a cost of less than 20 pounds a month.

3. **Yellow Pages-** are **updated once a year** and its category-style implies that your ad is grouped with those of your competitors'. When **advertising and communicating via screens on your premises** you get the spotlight and **your audience's undivided attention**.
4. **Radio-** remained a good way of reaching a large audience. Yet you can only hope the listeners will remember you and important details about you such as your website address. As most people are visual, a written message brought in a meaningful context has a much higher chance of being recalled and acted upon.
5. **Internet.** Online advertising is indeed a cost- effective, flexible way of reaching your target market. Its only limitation is that you can't control **where** your ad is going to be viewed. **Digital signage** complements your online marketing strategy by ensuring that your message is seen not only by the right people but also at the right time and in the right place (while on your premises).

Implementing a digital signage project doesn't eliminate the need for other marketing efforts. Clear Channel's study and the [2011 UK Digital Out of Home report](#) both acknowledge digital signage's complementarity of other advertising vehicles, provided the communication strategy is clear and harmonious across all channels. **Digital signage has the potential of not only increasing sales but also enhancing the sales produced by other media too.**



# The Got To Have Check List



As you've downloaded this whitepaper you're probably thinking of implementing a digital signage system whether now or in the future. One of the most important questions you will be/ are confronted with is:

### **"What do I need to buy?"**

For making things easier for you we've highlighted the main purchases you'll need to make. This is not an exhaustive list and it's likely that you might need other bits and pieces, depending on the specific needs of your organisation.

**The software.** It's one of these things which though intangible, are very important. **In order for your content (photos, video, text etc.) to appear on the screen you need a software** that will help you upload it, schedule it, update it and deliver it unto the screens. For a cloud-based solution, you won't have to buy any licenses; you'll only pay a yearly subscription.

**The screen.** You can choose a **small size screen** (like a digital signboard or a photo frame) which, having its own operating system eliminates the need for a media player. **Due to its size (10") it can be easily placed on reception desks or near the cashier allowing you to save space.** If however you're opting for a **larger screen** (usually a 24", 40" LCD) then **you would need either a media player or a PC** to complement it.

**The media player** would cost you around £170, offering enough capacity for storing thousands of still images or 120 minutes of video. It's **a basic tool that achieves a basic task:** deliver your content- in the form of signals- from your computer to the screen.

**The choice of a digital signage software** is arguably the most important one because it affects the type of content you can display (and thus the form your message is going to take and consequently its effectiveness).



### Why TVs aren't suitable

If digital signage is like having your own TV Channel, then why can't one just use a TV? Simply put, because TVs weren't designed for commercial use or for outdoor environments. At the same time, LCDs became the most popular type of digital signage displays according to an industry study (POPAI), due to their technical features as summarized below:

1. **LCDs are more resistant than TVs in terms of amount of usage**, as they were specifically made to play day in and day out and last for considerably longer than a normal TV.
2. **LCDs have built-in temperature controls** which- if missing, as in the case of TVs, lead to overheating and image display problems. Besides that, TVs are not covered by warranties when used for commercial purpose.
3. **They have a larger viewing angle and a higher brightness** for capturing an audience on the move, being clearly visible over long distances.
4. In terms of design and feel, **LCDs are meant to attract attention** and appear as more interesting objects to look at than the plain TVs. Once this happens, the message is safely delivered to your audience.
5. **LCDs are accompanied by media players and the software behind them**- that allows you to upload, schedule and deliver **your own message to your own audience**. With TVs, you display somebody else's news and ads, irrespective of the particular needs and interests of your audience and organization.
6. LCD enclosures are a type of protective gear specifically created to impede the stealing and the physical abuse of LCDs. In the same time, **there is no bespoke equipment for securing TVs when used in public areas**.

In conclusion, if you're using a TV- you're not in the business of digital signage (yet) and are limiting yourself to only entertain but not communicate with your audience.



## Go social! Social Media and Digital Signage



**Digital signage shouldn't be seen as a separate communication medium**, but should be integrated with your already existing platforms. The more connected and uniform your communication strategy is the clearer the message you want to transmit and the easier to recall and act upon. **Wiring your social media channels to your venues' screens** will only enhance your marketing strategy **by making your screens more attractive** while also **raising awareness about your social media presence**. So stream your tweets on your screens and let your audience know they can connect with you on Twitter.



**Stay tuned** and find out from your audience what other types of location-based marketing efforts are needed and beneficial to your business.



# Glossary

**C**ontent management software- software used to schedule and manage the delivery and playback of content on one or several devices (also known as digital signage software, digital in-store merchandising software).

**D**igital signage- a form of electronic display showing advertising and public information in private and public areas

**D**isplay- the screen; the device you are going to show your message on (LCD, LED, photo frame etc).

**D**OOH- digital out of home, a form of electronic display showing info and advertisements in public and private areas (shopping malls, colleges, hospitals, waiting rooms etc).

**D**well time- the average time people spend consuming advertising and information in the defined space- store, shopping mall, reception area etc. (The 2011 UK Digital OOH Handbook)

**L**CD- Liquid Chrystal Display. Screens capable of displaying high quality images with good brightness and high levels of ambient light (The 2011 UK Digital OOH Handbook)

**O**ut of Home (OOH) advertising- any type of commercial message reaching consumers while they are out of home.

**O**ut of Home TV (OOH TV) - screens in public areas (local shops, hair dresser salons, waiting rooms, malls etc.) displaying content (ads, news) with or without sound, for informing and entertaining an audience (The 2011 UK Digital OOH Handbook)



## Digital Signage in Pictures





## Want to know more?

Try the system for yourself and see how digital signage responds to your needs. Contact us now and get a free 30 day trial of our software-[digitalsignage.NET](http://digitalsignage.NET).

Go to <http://info.digitalsignage.net/free-trial/> or click on the button below.

**Free Trial!**

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