

Interactive Digital Signage: Doing it Right, Right Now

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By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
Digital Signage Today



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In the early days of the personal computer, developing new programs or applications required significant coding experience. Over time, though, new programming languages and development tools were introduced that made the task of creating applications much easier (though still a developer's job). It's similar with Web page design; when the Internet became widely available, setting up a Web page required HTML experience. Now, anyone with a working understanding of Web design can create a basic website using widely available design tools.

Interactivity in kiosks and digital signage is following the same path. When interactivity first came on the scene, touchscreens were expensive and developing an interactive experience required a development team whether internal or via their favorite design agency. Today, though, there are tools on the market that allow nearly anyone to create interactive content. And unlike many of the app and Web design tools on the market, users aren't always restricted to a set of pre-formatted templates.

Why interactivity?

Digital signage is a natural extension of the television screens that have become an integral part of our everyday lives. Most early attempts at digital signage were in fact televisions hooked up to videocassette players, endlessly repeating content designed to promote products or services.

From there, digital signage has grown to incorporate displays of 4k resolution or higher, specialized media players and cloud-based content that can be updated at a moment's notice. Estimates of the size of the digital signage market vary, but a Markets and Markets study predicts the global digital signage market is expected to grow at an annual rate of more than 8 percent between 2015 and 2020, reaching \$23.8 billion by 2020 from \$14.6 billion in 2014.

The introduction of the iPhone in 2007 helped cement an added dimension to the screens we see every day: (multi-touch) interactivity. The intuitive nature of touch technology has prompted today's digital culture to elect touch gestures as its favorite interaction technique. People now expect to be able to touch the screens they see to elicit a personalized reaction.

"Personalized, reactive experiences are more engaging," said Geoffrey Bessin, chief marketing officer for Toulouse, France-based IntuiLab, producer of IntuiFace, the leading no-coding platform for creating, deploying and managing interactive-based applications for a wide variety of verticals

And that expectation is translating to growth in the marketplace, with interactive displays expected to make up more than 60 percent of the digital signage market by the end of this decade, according to Markets and Markets studies.

"Virtually everyone has a touchscreen in their pocket and, increasingly, touchscreens are finding their way into homes via PCs and tablets," Bessin said. "What vendor, museum or sales team hasn't thought about leveraging those modalities?"

Along with satisfying the desire on the part of consumers to be able to touch a screen and get a personalized reaction, interactivity offers a number of benefits for the deployers of digital signage as well. Every touch of a screen is a recordable event which, if tracked, can then be used to gauge the effectiveness of the content displayed.



"Perhaps the most critical aspect to ensuring a successful signage deployment is identifying and implementing a means for tracking data to highlight what is and is not effective," Bessin said. "Static signage is hindered by an unavoidable limitation - there is no direct evidence of its effectiveness."

In addition, interactive displays enable the triggering of additional content, reinforcing the deployer's intent. Touching content related to a specific product, for example, can trigger the display of more detailed information about that product or suggest add-on purchases. Further, those touches might also be used to automate marketing and supplement an omnichannel retail strategy, triggering content designed to steer customers to other products

that may offer the retailer a higher profit margin, help move items that may be stacking up in inventory or set the stage for follow-up communication.

Records generated by interactive content can also incorporate external data such as time of day, changes in the weather or inventory levels that fall outside of desired levels to give additional context to the customer's touch. Fast food giant McDonald's, for example, is deploying digital menu boards that will recommend certain menu options based on the weather in the areas where its restaurants are located.

"It can monitor temperature outside and it will know which products sell better at hotter or colder temperatures and promote those products," McDonald's U.S. President Mike Andres said at a company meeting with investors in New York.

The boards recommend coffee on cold days or cold drinks on hot ones, feature automatic dayparting and display moving images of menu items to increase customer engagement and call attention to certain products. They're set to be installed in all U.S. locations by the end of 2016.

Per-transaction check amounts increased wherever the menu boards were tested in Canada, Andres said.

Overcoming the challenges

Although the value of interactive displays has been demonstrated time and time again, there are a few issues that need to be overcome on the path to widespread acceptance. A key challenge is the perception that touchscreen displays are significantly more expensive than passive displays.

While that may once have been the case, as with any technology the increasing acceptance of interactive displays means the price of touchscreen displays is falling to the same price point as passive displays.

Another major challenge facing deployers of interactive signage is content development. The transition from passive displays to interactive ones has relied largely on adapting existing approaches to creating content.

The solution typically has been to adopt HTML5 – code-heavy websites with single touch capability, compatible with existing content management systems, display technology and distribution networks. Unfortunately, few signage deployers have HTML5 skills of any kind, let alone advanced skills for touch-enabled HTML5. The result is bespoke development using custom code, locking in the end user who ultimately pays for custom development and content evolution.



In response, a number of interactive software companies have introduced template-based tools to smooth the content creation process. As a result, unfortunately, those tools tend to leave deployers with unoriginal content, a restricted list of devices and a never-ending professional services bill.

IntuiLab, though, has addressed that issue by developing IntuiFace, a platform for creating user experiences built specifically to incorporate interactivity. IntuiFace provides users with access to the latest in interactive technologies such as multi-touch, tag readers such as RFID/NFC, beacons and others without having to learn how to program. Users can integrate front-end experiences with any public or private data resource or API-based business service to ensure up-to-the-second information and full-service capability for everything from email to point-of-sale. This approach also enables users to avoid the risks that accompany most software development, such as inflexible architectures, poor scalability, limited portability and weak security. IntuiLab is doing the technology heavy lifting so the deployer can focus exclusively on content.



“The majority of applications targeting no-coding interactive content creation rely on templates because of how hard it is to build a freeform editor,” Bessin said. “For these template-driven options, if you need to go outside the bounds of a template you pay for custom development services – services that, of course, are quite expensive.”

IntuiFace, on the other hand, imposes no template restrictions, using a drag-and-drop interface to create interactive applications comprised of the user’s own content and designs. And rather than having to wait days or weeks for a content creation agency to make changes to an application, IntuiFace users - including the agencies themselves - are able to make changes on the fly; for example, updating displayed prices or sales dates.

If the deployer decides to take their design work to a new content creation agency, there is no need to begin the development process from scratch. The new agency can simply take the existing content and update it to meet the deployer’s needs.

“One of the fundamental value propositions of IntuiFace is the speed and ease with which one can make changes,” Bessin said. “Not only can you make and deploy changes right away, it doesn’t cost you extra to do so. When hiring someone to do custom work via coding, every change can take a week and has a price tag.”

About the sponsor:

IntuiLab makes IntuiFace, the world’s premier platform for creating, deploying and managing deeply interactive digital signage without ever writing code. From Fortune 500 to the smallest design shop, IntuiFace is used world-wide to build dynamic, expressive content driven by mobile devices, multi-touch displays, connected objects and much more.