

How Interactive Digital Signage is changing the dialogue with consumers



As anyone who was around before its invention knows, the Internet changed everything—from shopping to news cycles to the concept of friendship to entertainment to education.

And some of the most profound changes occurred in the world of advertising, particularly when it comes to what was once the backbone of the traditional ad campaign: the humble sign.

It wasn't too long ago that a sign's only purpose was to capture the attention—however briefly—of the sign maker's intended audience. If Burma Shave succeeded in getting travelers to read through four lines of amusing roadside rhyme, the company's marketers could consider it a job well done.

But in the fast-paced age of digital interactions, today's signs can—and should—do much more, according to Johann Conforme, Executive Creative Director with the internationally acclaimed ad agency Ogilvy Mather.

“We now live in a ‘point and click’ world, and for most consumers, there’s nothing more natural in the world than wanting to touch something, to interact with it,” he says. As a result, It’s no longer enough for advertisers to offer static, one-way communication with the consumers they’re trying to reach—to cut through the clutter of media vying for our attention, an sign has to be able to speak with you, as well as to you.

Interactive Advertising in Retail

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But sometimes, smart phones can be too much. They offer “everything everywhere” while interactive digital signage delivers relevant information based on context.

That’s where interactive digital signage, or IDS, comes into play. IDS enables advertisers to create ads and other promotional programs that actively engage the consumer in a two-way, highly personalized dialogue. Instead of offering up a single new “look” for this season’s new fashion line, for example, IDS-based advertising can proactively identify the age and gender of the consumer passing by and display clothing and accessories targeted to appeal to that demographic.

“We’ve entered a stage where people are actually moving away from the computer and out into the world, thanks to smart phones, but they want to take all the information and the options that their computers offer with them wherever they go,” says Conforme.

The technology that is embedded in the average smart phone makes interaction with the larger technical world possible, and automatic, he continues.

“You can program your smart phone to hold your information and allow that information to be shared with a retailer, or a hotel or an airline, for example,” Conforme says, “and through IDS, you can make a purchase, get personalized information, or share travel plans or other data with your social network.”

Restaurants, retailers, cab companies and local entertainment venues can reach out and grab the attention of visiting tourists right in their hotel lobbies through IDS. Interested in seeing a show? Need a reservation for two at a nearby seafood restaurant? Want to find the nearest branch of your bank? Just touch the screen and IDS puts the information—and the messaging—right at your fingertips.

That kind of personal touch—one in which the products and information on offer are automatically modified to appeal to the viewer—will soon be the expected rule rather than the futuristic exception to today’s media savvy consumers. In fact, most experts predict that it won’t be too long until we can barely remember when signs did anything less.

“Digital signage has become the standard in selling ideas to clients,” says Conforme. “Every client sees the value

immediately. Digital signage—particularly interactive digital signage—brings our clients brands to life, instantly.”

Creating ad campaigns that will capture both the imagination and the attention of the desired audience is now—more than ever before—both a science and an art, says Conforme. “Because we can do so much more with the medium of a sign, we really have to stretch the boundaries of what it means to create an ad and get a message across.”



To extend the metaphor, if Conforme and his colleagues are the artists painting these new fantastic, engaging new signs, then manufacturers like TE Connectivity are the new sign builders.

“Too few advertisers are using IDS for advertising yet and they’re missing out on a huge opportunity,” explains Neeraj Pendse, Product Line Manager for TE Connectivity’s Elo TouchSystems IDS portfolio. In Pendse’s opinion, IDS is possibly the best way to cut through the clutter of marketing messages that are vying for the customer’s attention.

“You walk into a mall today and there are many displays that are saying things to you, and your natural reaction is just to ignore them,” he continues. “We’re being targeted with so many marketing messages these days that ignoring them is almost a defense mechanism.”

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The solution, he says, is for advertisers to find a way to reward consumers for paying attention.

“Imagine you’re looking for a shoe store in the mall, and you go to a way-finding display, touch what you’re looking for and are instantly presented with a coupon that saves you money on a purchase you wanted to make anyway,” he says. Because the advertiser provided you a message at a time when you were looking for that kind of product, the impact will be significantly enhanced and you are more likely to make a purchase.”

And interactive digital signage—signage that invites the consumer to interact via touch—solves the problem of what Pendse calls the “buckshot method” of advertising. “Static, traditional advertising has one message and the advertiser has to hope that someone in the advertisers target demographic will happen by and respond to the messaging,” he says. But touch-enabled ads offer the advertiser some intelligence about the consumer right up front.

“When the advertiser knows who the person is and what they are looking for, they can serve them with better, more effective advertising. The cost per impression (CPM) may be higher than non-interactive or static advertising, but the impact or value of each impression is several times greater.”

In addition advertisers who run ads on a large mall display, for example, can recommend consumers take a particular path to reach their destination and then offer ads for shops or products they’ll encounter along the way. Finally, advertisers will know almost instantly how effective their ad campaigns are, says Neeraj. “There are many kinds of metrics that can be captured in the background, enabling advertisers to maximize the value of their ad dollars.”

But way-finders aren’t the only way to reach an audience with IDS, he continues.

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– Neeraj Pendse,
Elo TouchSystems IDS
Product Line Manager

For example, one branch of the US military installed touch-enabled IDS units at a popular bar/restaurant chain as a recruitment tool. Instead of traditional advertising, the units offered consumers the chance to play a simple game, says Neeraj.

“It showed you a swamp and invited you to try to make your way from one side to the other as fast as possible. And to get your results, it asked you to enter your email address.”

But just getting the consumer to touch the sign—to interact—isn’t going to be enough to ensure a successful campaign, he continues. “If the campaign is about getting the public to interact with the sign—to touch it, to click on something, then the sign needs to be able to stand up to that kind of interaction,” he says. “The color has to be true, vivid and accurate, the screen has to be responsive, and the whole system has to be durable enough to handle thousands and thousands of interactions without requiring service.”

“The potential of digital signage is so huge that it’s only a matter of time before we start seeing these kinds of signs everywhere,” says Conforme. And those signs that shine brightest, that hold up the best, and serve as the perfect medium for the ideas, images and information of the future?

“For years, customers have been relying on us to provide the products they count on, so you can continue to count on Elo TouchSystems products to meet the market needs,” Pendse says.



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