Tips for using digital signage at tradeshows

by Bill Yackey * 08 Jul 2009

In addition to retail, hospitality and education, one sector where digital signage seems to be gaining momentum is in tradeshows. Exhibitors are learning that using digital screens are a new way to grab attention, stand out from the crowd and even save money.

International Specialty Products, a provider of specialty chemicals, found this out first-hand last year during the InformEx tradeshow in January 2008. After replacing lightboxes in the International Specialty Products office building with digital signage, ProActive, Inc., an Oakland, N.J.-based electronics integrator, was again tapped to outfit the company's tradeshow booth.

Marc A. Wolfe, CEO of ProActive, Inc., and his team used nine portrait-oriented 46-inch NEC MultiSync LCD screens, which were positioned on the outside of the booth and showed content representing the multiple business units of ISP.

Not only did the screens help the booth stand out at InformEx (competitors took pictures and it was featured in the show daily), but ISP achieved a positive ROI much sooner than they thought by switching to digital signage.

When implemented properly, digital signage works. But when it comes to tradeshows, new challenges arise due to the temporary nature of the installations. Below are several tips to make sure all bases are covered.

Internet connectivity

Anyone who has ever exhibited at a tradeshow knows about the potentially outrageous costs of broadband internet connectivity. However, there are a few ways to sidestep that cost and still get content to screens.

The first method is to take advantage of the 3G networks available through mobile phone carriers. Content can be uploaded, downloaded and distributed through wireless access cards or even by tethering 3G smartphones to laptops.
The other option is to not connect your screens to the Internet, but play previously downloaded and stored content from media players, PCs or even USB drives. Most digital signage software can play multiple channels of content over several screens as long as the appropriate number of media players is present.

In the ISP tradeshow booth described in the case study to the right, Mac Minis were used to house and play out different channels of content to the screens in the booth.

**Content**

What is shown on the screens is what is going to draw customers into the booth, and especially in a “sensory overload” tradeshow environment, content can make all the difference.

"Keep your content snappy," said Jason Cremins, CEO of [Remote Media](#). "Don’t just show a long corporate reel at the back of your booth, because people aren’t going to sit and watch it with a cup of tea, they’re going walk in halfway through and have no idea what you’re offering as an overall proposition."

Jean McLaughlin, senior product line manager for NEC Display Solutions, says that tradeshow content should always be to the point and geared around the product or service.

“You also want to ensure that it’s interesting and that there’s movement involved,” she said. “People aren’t going to sit and watch a PowerPoint presentation on your product, so you have a very short amount of time to get your messaging across.”

**Screens**

There are many options for screens out there, ranging in sizes from five- to even 108-inches, but when it comes down to screen selection the key is to make sure the size and type of screen integrates with the overall booth design.

In the ISP example, the screens were integrated into stainless steel laminate and wood paneling, which covered up the bezels and only left the viewing area exposed.

“It wasn’t highlighting the screens as much as it was the information,” Marc A. Wolfe, CEO of ProActive, Inc., said. “A lot of times people set up digital signage so the screen takes dominance, and you really want it to be the imagery.”

McLaughlin said that generally people are choosing to use 46-inch displays in their booths. She says in the past 40-inch models were most popular, and sees 52-inch models taking over in several years.

That’s not to say you can’t go big. NEC, [Wireless Ronin](#) and others have used the NEC 82-inch LCD at tradeshows recently, and there have been tradeshow implementations this year for Panasonic’s 103 plasma and Sharp’s 108-inch LCD.

**Placement**

The next consideration is where to put the screens in the booth. The general rule of
thumb is that the bigger the screen, the further back in the booth it should be placed, according to McLaughlin. She also said that the center of the displays should be at eye level if possible.

There have also been some good examples of using screens on the outsides of the booth to draw people in, then using them on the inside of the booth to demonstrate specific examples. (See LG’s Digital City at InfoComm09, Remote Media’s stand at Screen Media Expo 2009, right, and ISP’s booth at InformEx 2008.)

**Future applications**

Just as digital signage is evolving in the marketplace, its tradeshow applications are becoming more sophisticated as well.

Experts say that touchscreens are poised to play a bigger role in tradeshow booths going into 2010, and that interactivity is going to be a key driver in attracting and retaining attendees at tradeshow booths.

"Anything you can do to draw people into the booth, make it more interactive and make them learn more and know more about your product is always a good thing," Wolfe said.

Also, more companies are installing video walls in their booths to have order to have flexible and expandable options for large displays, without the price tag or burden of transporting 100-inch-plus screens. Companies like Samsung and NEC are making this easier with stackable video wall solutions and ultra-thin bezel screens that make large walls appear virtually seamless.

Read more articles on this topic: [Tradeshows/Conferences](#)

Related Articles:
- 27 May Digital signage preps for InfoComm
- 02 Jun Strategy Institute announces Brand Activation conference
- 03 Jun DSE East announces lineup for Sept. show
- 06 Jun InfoComm: Minicom to release digital signage remote support system
- 09 Jun Show review: DisplaySearch Flat Panel Digital Signage Conference

[Return home](#)

[Close this window](#)