



It's easy to confuse buying digital signage with buying a TV. After all, they share the common denomina

By Sean Matthews - President, Visix

Furthermore, since you've had the experience of buying and setting up a TV in your home, you may think the process for buying and setting up digital signage is the same — just set it up, plug it in and turn it on, right?

You couldn't be more wrong.

Buying digital signage requires an understanding of the key elements involved in a digital signage system and their interaction, including not only the specialized hardware and software required for the system itself but the personnel needed to install, operate and maintain it. Not to mention the content to fill the screen and keep it interesting.

Those who have bought digital signage know the path to a successful deployment can be rocky or smooth, depending on how carefully you do your homework. So, to help you get off on the right foot, let's talk about the mistakes we see people make when they buy a digital signage system. Based on our observations, here are the top six:

Mistake No. 1 – Short-sighted budgets

Make sure your budget doesn't just cover the initial system costs, but also includes software upgrades so you can stay current and get new features. And don't forget new hardware — no PC or screen lasts forever and you might want to add more players or bandwidth in the future. Other budget items might be training — not just at the start, but ongoing training as you add

new features or users — and creative services. You may want to hire designers once in a while to refresh your look. And don't forget technical support. In general, try to budget for 18-24 months if you can.

Mistake No. 2 – Not thinking about expansion

If you buy an inflexible or closed system, you won't be able to add to it or change the configuration when you need to. Odds are that you'll get good results with digital signage and then other buildings or departments will want it for themselves. Another possibility is that you move locations or upgrade to a bigger facility. So make sure you don't box yourself into a system that can't be added to, or you'll spend a lot more money buying a bunch of small systems instead of one that can grow.

Mistake No. 3 – Relying on one person to do it all

If you buy digital signage software that sits on one computer, you'll only have one person who cares about it. Consider a licensing agreement or a Web-based system so more can people participate. You don't want to have to jumpstart your efforts every time a new person takes over, and you want as many people as possible to be involved and excited about your investment.

Mistake No. 4 – Not involving the people who'll use the system until after you've bought it

Nobody wants too many cooks in the kitchen, but it's better to get everyone's input earlier rather than later. Think about content designers, schedulers and managers; IT staff; security folks if you're using the system for alerts; and even purchasing to manage that budget we talked about earlier. Involving people early will give you insights you may not have considered, and it makes folks more enthusiastic and much more likely to use the system to its fullest.

Mistake No. 5 – Falling in love with hardware

Maybe you've found somebody who's offering you a big discount on media players or flatscreen displays — don't do it until you know which content management software you'll be using. Remember, it's the software that people will interact with, so make sure the hardware supports the software, not the other way around.

Mistake No. 6 – Not doing a networking survey

Lastly, the people buying your digital signage don't always know what's under the hood of your network. So make sure you have a qualified IT person involved early on and have them do a survey of power, network connectivity and IT security policies for every location where you'll have digital signage running. There's nothing worse than hanging up a new screen and not being able to put anything on it because you didn't know ahead of time about some firewall or cabling issue.