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Digital Signage for Education

What you need to know to manage your displays

Connect with your students!

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CHAPTER 1:
The case for digital communications

Students are today's most connected persons, tweeting, blogging and posting with the typical legerity of the generation Y, preferring digital sources of information to the standard ones (Platt Retail Institute[1], 2010).

According to the 2008 Survey U, the generation Y or the Millennials are **multi-tasking, multi-media individuals** and the 1st to be **more technologically advanced than their parents**.

Therefore it's time for universities, colleges and other educational institutions to adapt their communications in accordance to this shift in preference, a measure still not universally embraced as revealed by the Platt Retail Institute :

''*Universities continue to use older, less effective mass media channels, disregarding their inherent weaknesses'*

Ineffective communication methods increase today's information clutter and cause important messages to be crowded out by irrelevant ones.

How do you organize all your information while creating and maintaining a ''clean'' messaging environment enabling you to reach your targeted audiences (students, visitors, staff) with **timely**, **relevant information**? With so many communication options available you need one focus for all your information, to ensure that all those concerned correctly informed and not confused.

Image credit: Pascal van Hecke, Flickr
Menno van der Horst, Flickr

[1] Communication Effectiveness in Higher Education

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Why digital signage?

Networks of screens offer you a **dynamic, exciting method to communicate** with your staff and students. It becomes simple to inform them about events, display messages or exhibit work.

Information can be streamed in real time from websites to display the latest newsfeeds or live video and TV.

Digital signage can be used to:

Display time-critical and instant announcements

Inform about news and events to create a sense of community

Show students' work to instill a sense of pride and achievement

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Examples of digital signage in education

Here are just a few examples of different ways that digital signage is used in colleges and student unions across the UK:

•The [Holly Hall College](#) uses digital signage to promote its Media students' work (a video on global and local health & social issues). This has allowed the college to reduce content- creation costs and reward its students at the same time.

•Thanks to this new communication system, no student at [Walsall College](#) will hear about the Skills Competition too late and no visitor will fail to be informed about the next Open Day. Their digital signage network became **a focal point of information for over 3,500 year that attend the college each year.**

•[Warwick Students' Union](#) **displays 3rd party advertising on its network of screens**- as part of a 3 year- plan to generate ROI via advertising.

•[Adams Grammar School](#) combines digital signage with IPTV to stream videos of and offer information about its students' theatre performances and other events to **promote those and encourage students to join in.**

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Digital signage delivers on campus

Digital signage is a marketing & communication medium free from competitive noise. You can use it to promote the programmes, courses & qualifications you offer to both existing and prospective students without incurring extra- costs every time you amend your curricula.

Jean- Marie Angelo's article title summarises the idea well'' *Digital Signage Delivers on Campus: Affordable wide-screen digital signs are finding multiple uses on campuses, and may even generate revenue*" ([University Business](#), 2004). He argues that the millennial generation has high expectations when it comes to media that digital signage can fulfil.

He adds: '*If there's a sale in the bookstore, a new mobile phone plan for students, or a concert on campus, a digital sign can deliver the message. Even better, that message can be punched up with animated logos, text, photos and video clips that change every few seconds. No print poster can do that.*'

The Chief Technology Officer of John Marshall Law School, cited by Lyle Bunn in his whitepaper,[1] acknowledges **digital displays as one of the first information points students go to while on campus.**

Video wall powered by digitalsignage.NET

[1] Campus Dynamic Signage Networks, April 2011.

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One of the first questions you will need to ask yourself before deploying a digital signage system is where should your screens be located.

The answer is simple: in those key areas where your target audience (students, staff, visitors etc.) is to be found. Use a Life Pattern Marketing Approach to identify their daily routine and spot their most appropriate locations. Usually, these are:

•**Reception areas**. First impressions matter. Present key facts about your institution, achievements and other news to first-time visitors, prospects, parents and other third- parties that cross your…

•**Corridors**. Given the large foot-fall of this area, a screen in this location will enable you to reach a large proportion of your staff and students with no extra-effort. For maximum impact, keep your message short and poignant and use imagery to attract their attention.

Message is king but location is no less important

•**Libraries**. The display of booking conditions and deadlines will prevent students from incurring fines and the library from losing its resources[1].

•**Canteen areas & cafeterias**. Lunch breaks are ideal moments to send more elaborate and informative communications to staff & students and deliver a sort of digital newsletter that nobody can miss.

[1] See The 5 Ways Librarians Could Use Digital Signage to Improve Communication and Cut Down Costs

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- **Career centers**. Advertise the latest internships and job opportunities, communicate the application procedure and share interview tips & advice to students looking for work experience.

As you might have noticed, **the type & length of your messages depends on the location where these will be delivered**. Long messages will never work in corridors and highly trafficked areas as students & staff will not be able to take them in.

Call- to-actions such as ''scan this QR code to download the application form'' are also inappropriate in busy areas but they are ideal for places where students spend more time (restaurant areas, cafeterias etc.).

Interesting read!

A teacher expresses his support for the use of display as a mean to harness learning In an article of British publication, The Guardian. The ones he is giving as examples are static, so imagine how much more can be done with a digital.

> "Moving people read static messages and static people read moving messages"

Stephen Beasley, Fitch

Screen run by digitalsignage.NET in UK college

Need more inspiration?

See what makes and breaks good technology leadership in educational institutions.

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Promoting communication through digital signage

Dynamic digital signage could address a virtually unlimited number of communication needs & requirements such as:

•Efficiently inform students about key events, deadlines, opportunities etc.;

•Present the institution's achievements more effectively and enhance its image;

•Encourage a certain action, response or behaviour (visit website, enquire, register etc.);

•Increase sales of on-campus goods (by advertising special offers, products etc.);

•Improve awareness of policies and regulations;

•Harmonise communications across geographically scattered campuses (by displaying ''headquarter'' messages on all screens);

•Gain greater flexibility in messaging (update & correct the displayed information within minutes from any computer with an Internet connection when using cloud-based digital signage);

Image credit: The Guardian

Promote your Social Media presence on your screens

Social media is at the heart of students' communication nowadays and ignoring it means losing immense opportunities of connecting to them and bridging generation gaps. Yet, teachers are not unaware of this channel's potential. Just a few months ago, Mashable featured teachers using Pinterest for course assignments*.

Digital signage, far from being a communication medium on its own, can be used to complement and enforce your social media presence.

Stream live tweets on your screen to let your students know you're there and to prompt them to follow your institution for real-time course & student events information.

Fresh communications will also make your screens more attractive to watch, transforming them into reliable sources of information worth monitoring.

How it works:

Your Digital Signage Network directs viewers to **Social Media** which prompts them to visit your **Website.**

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Social media is fun. Rather than denying its importance, embrace it and use it to your school's advantage.

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*''Teachers pin with their students'', Mashable, March 22, 2012
http://mashable.com/2012/03/22/teachers-using-pinterest/

Your Digital Signage Network can reinforce your other communication channels too:

Magazines. Advertise the latest issue of your magazine or draw your students' attention to other educational publications of interest.

Newspapers. Got a news in a newspaper? Let your staff and students know!

Radio. Raise awareness about your student- run radio station, the interview of a member of the staff or educational programmes on other stations.

Your IPTV channel. Stream live videos on screens in the cafeteria, fitness centre, choir rooms, corridors, conference rooms, wherever they are relevant.

The internet. Direct students to your website through a medium impossible to miss. Using their smartphones, students can follow your call to action immediately.

CHAPTER 2
Digital signage in technical terms

The goal of a digital signage system is to deliver targeted, timely communications to a certain audience. But for this to happen important technical details must be sorted out before the actual start of the project.

In its simplest version, a digital signage system is made of three main elements that you need to consider:

• The content (the message you are going to display on your screen in formats such: HD videos, bitmaps, flash content, RSS feeds etc.) Your project should revolve around this aspect.

• Installation. Your screen will need to be wall mounted and media players will need to be configured. This is usually the job of audio- visual integrators that are specialists when it comes to these things.

• The hardware: the screen itself (LCD, 10'' digital photo frames etc.) and the computer or media player that stores your content and sends it to the screen(s). In this case, the rule is simple: the same content –one media player; different content - different media players

So if you want to *display the same information on all your screens* you will only need one media player.

The software

3) <u>The software</u>: it's the critical piece that allows you to upload & schedule your content and allows the media player to read it and transfer it to the screen(s).

The rise of cloud- computing has made digital signage available to organisations and institutions of all sizes. Here's how the system delivers your message to your screens, via the cloud.

Everything related to the files you want to show on the screens is managed within your software (i.e. digitalsignage.NET). After uploading, scheduling and publishing them, **they will be loaded** onto the **cloud** (i.e. Internet) then **redirected to the media players you've selected**, which will store them and **send them to their associated screens.**

The entire operation takes seconds allowing your message to appear on your screens in almost real-time.
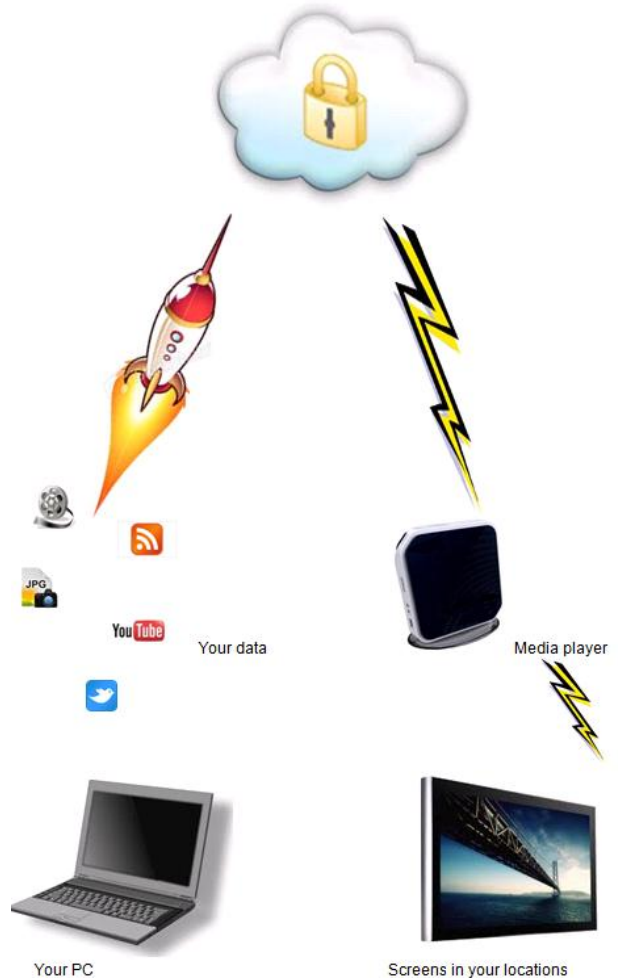
[Sign up to digitalsignage.NET for free!](#)

Cloud- based digital signage

Your data

Media player

Your PC

Screens in your locations
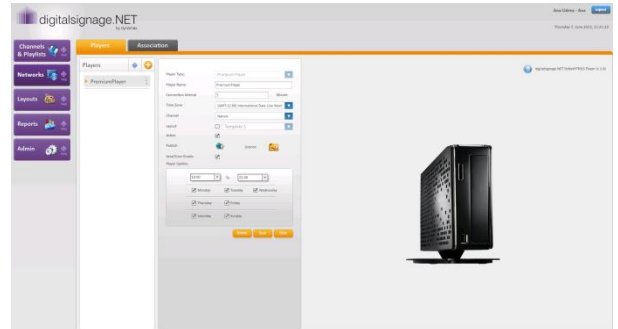
Tips for evaluating digital signage software

Your software should allow you to get started quickly.

SaaS applications should be suitable for DIY digital signage systems (provided you can handle the installation). You should be able to set up your account in less than a minute and manage files within the system seamlessly.

Ask for a User Guide and if that doesn't seem to streamline the process, then get to the next vendor.

You should be offered a free trial.

The software provider should allow you to test their product for free before you commit any resources. A live demo isn't enough when it comes to such an important project plus it doesn't allow you to see the different facets of the product.

Can you know where and when your files have been played?

A reporting feature would allow you to keep track of your files and check the system's health. If you're accountable towards a 3rd party then this feature will prove particularly useful.

Make sure it's there.

Look for a proven history of successful, scalable deployments.

Search for case- studies and press releases to assess if the vendor has a solid- enough business for a long-term partnership.
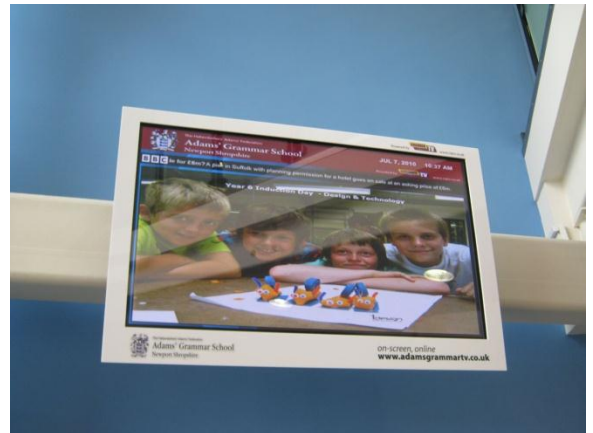
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Examples of digital signage applications

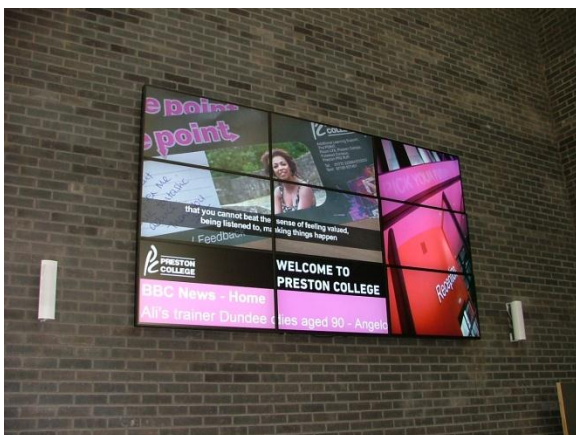Time Capsule of Preston College powered by digitalsignage.NET

Part of the digital signage network at Adams' Grammar School

Streetly Academy uses digital signage powered by our software

Digital posters in Warwick Student Union

Video wall at Preston College

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