

DIGITAL SIGNAGE

The dazzler has arrived

When was the last time you saw a big TV-like screen playing high quality video content, graphic and ads screaming for your attention at public places? If you're in a city like Mumbai, probably you didn't see it until recently. Adoption of these TV-like screens, known in the trade as digital signage, which use a series of large LCD, LED and plasma screens for content display, is growing in India. Businesses are realising that it is the most effective way to reach out to consumers and grab their eyeballs with dynamic content, controlled by sophisticated software.

It is only in recent years that digital signage displays' concept and benefits became cheap enough, leading to its increased usage. The digital signage industry in India has huge growth potential, which is waiting to be tapped. A signage is the screen displayed over public areas, mainly indoors or semi-indoors. It can be a stand-alone screen or multiple screens connected to a server. Multiple screen signages are popular and widely used across the globe, as it allows for content displayed on all the screens to be changed remotely, literally from anywhere.

Companies and brands regularly allocate money for various mediums such as TV commercials (TVC), print media and radio, but digital signage is not yet a part of media plans and remains an unorganised entity. But, "It is changing as the digital signage industry in India is growing at 20 per cent annually," says Vineet Mahajan, head, display products, Panasonic India.

Increasingly, content is produced and consumed in digital format and with that, awareness and demand for digital signage displays is also increasing. Among the early adopters of digital signage were airports, and it has kept on increasing. At airports, it is difficult not to find a screen showing information or advertisements, whichever direction you look. While, earlier, LED displays



Potential waiting to be tapped

were usually confined to a single moving ticker type, technology has allowed the size of signages to grow dramatically in recent times.

It is also being adopted in the retail sector, where brands like to talk to customers directly through the rich multi-media content. "Digital signage screens used in retail, which includes shopping malls and in-shop signage, contributes to about 35 per cent of the total signage installed in India," says Mahajan. "Pegged at ₹500 crore, the digital signage market is still at a nascent stage and is expected to continue to grow. One of the fastest growing adoptions of digital signage is in cinema, to display movie trailers, advertisements and offers."

Banks and financial institutions are also increasingly using digital signage at their branches to display new offerings, schemes, foreign exchange conversion rates and customer benefits. "Brands need to make their customers aware of their products and

services and new launches," says Sanket Rambhia, technical director, Xtreme-Media, a digital signage software and LED video wall solutions provider. "It is used here for internal consumption and brand building."

Digital signage displays are generally more expensive than conventional TVs as they are made using heavy duty components, as displays are often on 24x7. They are also expensive because the government is still treats them as TVs and classifies the displays used as entertainment. "Although signage displays are used for displaying information or advertorial content and not entertainment content, it attracts the same import duty and taxes as television sets, which are entertainment displays," says Rajeev Singh, country head, Benq India. "However, as taxes are lower on PC monitors; the same should apply to signage screens."

Lack of familiarity Since digital signage is expensive, "the challenge is to explain the RoI in digital signage, which is not tangible," says Rambhia. "Getting them familiar with the new medium is also a challenge. The penetration of digital signage is low, but, awareness is increasing. We're at an inflection point. After leading companies have launched digital signage displays, a lot of corporate customers are now coming on board. We no longer need to explain and sell the concept."

For the signages to be effective, brightness and the size of the screen are important factors. "The demand is coming for larger size," says Singh. "Earlier, the preferred size was 32 inches; now, it is more than 42. And full HD screen resolution is a standard feature." Also, the content displayed has to be suitable or tailored for digital displays. Due to unfamiliarity with the medium, "often, the TVC and print media content is played on digital signages, thus not utilising them to their full potential. It just kills the medium," adds Rambhia.

The potential for growth in this field is huge, with digital signage screen hardware getting better and cheaper.

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