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Digital signage is a critical tool for brands and retailers

For 30 years, **The DSI Group Inc.**, Maspeth, N.Y., has been in the business of solving problems for brands and retailers. The company specializes in design merchandising, POP displays, store fixtures, and store-within-a-store programs. **Ben Weshler**, the founder of the company, is something of a digital signage crusader. He says digital signage systems, plasma screens, and similar technologies have transformed the retail landscape.

The reason for this, first and foremost, is those items exist and are obvious to the consumer.

"The whole digital signage idea, or the active use of video in stores, has been around for a while," Weshler says. "In the beginning, what you saw were little TV sets with video players showing loops.

"That expanded into the next phase, which was the use of audio visual technology at retail -- many times with no real purpose other than to put a flat screen or plasma screen into a location. Typically, it had some animated content that did not relate at all to the brands being sold or the specific brand it was put there by," Weshler continues. "For example, if you were walking through **Bloomingdale's** and there is a **Ralph Lauren** jeans shop, you'd see a flat screen TV hanging in the department showing a music video. That was totally unrelated to the brand itself, other than it was young and hip and the brand was young and hip. But it was not providing information about the product, or addressing the product in any way."

Digital salespeople

Now, companies like Weshler's are helping manufacturers and retailers implement technology that defines and communicates the brand to the consumer.

"In a retail mode, where a consumer is faced with certain time constraint or attention-span problems -- such as a mom who is shopping with her kids -- digital signage can disseminate information clearly, intelligently, and succinctly," he says.



Digital signage and screens can provide customers with product information.

To make the most of digital signage, retailers must understand it is all about the content.

"I'm talking about sound bites or video bites that attract the consumer's attention," Weshler explains. "That's the first thing you want to do: attract and engage the consumer. Then you want to provide information about products, or help them shop in a more efficient way. You want to give them the ability to scan various products or services you offer, and learn about them quickly and simply."

Merely having a screen in the store isn't going to accomplish much, unless the entire program is thought through comprehensively,

Weshler notes.

"The placement of the system, the information it provides, the simplicity of it, and how the message is disseminated to the consumer all have to be properly done," he says. "Our results

prove unequivocally there is more engagement with the consumer and higher takeaway sales -- with less of a salesperson's time invested -- when the entire system is properly planned and designed."

Every aspect of the digital signage must take into account the consumer's perspective.

"What is the consumer going to see? What are my package and my display? What are my presentation and communication to that consumer? What steps do I have to take to guarantee the consumer is addressed properly at the point of purchase?" Weshler asks. "You only have a few seconds to make that connection with the consumer."

Smaller retailers need digital signage, too

While this may sound like something only big retailers and manufacturers need to worry about, Weshler says smaller stores need to take advantage of digital signage as well.

"Let's say I'm a shopper looking for a digital camera. I'm coming to the retailer for information. I go into a small mom-and-pop store on a Saturday. It's busy, and mom and pop are both tied up with customers. What exists in that store to capture me, to keep me there, to give me some information about various products available?" Weshler states. "What if I want to know what's new, or what the store recommends from **Canon**, but the sales staff is all busy with other customers at the moment and can't talk to me yet?"

"A digital signage system allows the consumer to shop the store and get to know the brands, even while the salespeople are tied up," he adds. "By the time that customer speaks to the retailer, he knows what cameras he's interested in. He's in the buying mode. He hasn't walked out of the store or spent the last 10 minutes twiddling his thumbs while you have been occupied with other customers."

Indeed, Weshler says, a single store or small chain can achieve the same sort of presentation, product array, and information with digital signage as a store like **Best Buy**, on a physically smaller scale.

"We have in our system the ability to solve almost any retailer merchandising issue in terms of interacting with the consumer, delivering information, and helping the consumer develop more knowledge about products," he says. "A good digital signage program can enable the consumer to make a purchase decision or get very close to making that decision."

Consumers expect technology

Today's consumer is used to looking to screens for information, making digital signage a more important part of the sales process than ever, Weshler says.

"Savvy consumers are engaged with screens all day. They have a cell phone, a computer. Their children have computers. They see value in a screen that is going to give them information and provide them with knowledge," he says. "By not having this in your store, you're saying to the modern consumer, 'I'm yesterday's news' -- especially in a field like imaging. You're selling technology; and to sell tech, you have to be tech."

"The consumer has to understand you use technology in your relationship with them. Technology is driving everything today," Weshler adds. "Now there are technologies specifically designed to enable and empower a consumer to learn more about your store and your offerings. It's something every retailer should be using."



While you and your staff are busy helping others, customers can learn more about potential purchases.