

C-store signage network focuses on scalability, measurement

By James Bickers,
contributing editor

A digital signage network serving convenience stores needed a software solution that could accommodate a growing number of screens — all of which require different content.

The problem

Founded in late 2006, Digital Promo Network is a privately held company that places digital screens in convenience stores, then sells advertising space on those screens to the brands whose products can be found on the shelves nearby.

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Company founder and president Jim Colony said DPN launched its initial pilot using entry-level digital signage software, but quickly realized it needed something more.

“We tried a smaller software company for the initial deployment, but after about four months we decided that, although they were great to work with, they couldn’t demonstrate to us the ability to manage a network with thousands of sites,” he said.

Colony said scalability was and is his No. 1 criteria for software to power the network. DPN has 200 screens deployed and another 500 under contract, with plans to reach 2,000 by the end of 2008.

Making the decision more challenging was the need for flexibility and ease of scheduling



content to each screen. Advertisers such as Coca-Cola, Frito-Lay and Red Bull pay to be featured on the screens in rotating slots, but the products advertised need to sync with the products in stores.

“The content that we have is customized for each location,” Colony said. “If you think of a chain of c-stores that are in multiple locations, they may not carry the same things in all of their stores. So we have to make sure that, if we’re advertising something, we don’t send an ad to a store that doesn’t carry it.”

DPN already had a content management system in-house to determine which ads are routed to which stores. The problem came in connecting that information with the right screens at the right time — an especially tricky problem as the number of screens escalates.

“We have figured out how to route our content, but we needed to be able to communicate that to the content distribution software,” said Colony. “And this is a lot of heavy lifting. As soon as you get above 50 sites, it becomes obvious that you either have to work this out to get it highly automated or you’re going to sink.

“The last thing in the world we want to be worried about is, are all these things going to the right places at the right times,” he said.

The solution

After several months of research, DPN settled on BroadSign’s hosted software solution BroadSign Suite.

BroadSign’s software engineers worked with DPN to create custom middleware that allows the network’s content routing and managing system to connect directly with BroadSign Suite’s campaign execution

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functionality. The result, Colony said, is a system that is as close to fully automated as it can be.

In addition to delivery of the right content to the right screen at the right time, BroadSign's solution for DPN gives powerful marketing information to the brands that are buying ad space. Proof-of-play reports easily can be correlated with data from the POS, allowing brands to track the efficacy of their spots. The data has shown a sales lift of advertised products ranging from 10 to 200 percent.

The system recently received some powerful validation in the form of a first-of-its-kind audit from Arbitron, an international media and market research firm. Two tests were conducted at DPN-networked stores in Vermont using the Arbitron Portable People Meter (PPM), a mobile device that "listens" for special codes embedded into media files.

In both tests, DPN transmitted the encoded media files and playlists via BroadSign Suite, under normal operating conditions and surrounded by other scheduled content. Arbitron's PPM detected the embedded code in 100 percent of the tests performed, matching the media file play times to the BroadSign-generated proof-of-play logs.

"In convenience stores, all advertised products are close to the screens, so it's a classic model for gauging advertising effectiveness," said Brian Dusho, chief strategy officer of BroadSign International. "BroadSign's auditable proof-of-play reports provide indispensable rich base data for any marketing analysis and research."