Build community and empower staff with **Digital Signage for Healthcare**

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

You have different audiences to communicate with for different purposes – visiting hours in your lobby, upcoming classes for outpatients and policy reminders to staff. Sharing relevant information in a timely fashion with those who need to know is crucial to the smooth operation of your healthcare facility.

Doctors' and dentists' offices, clinics, hospitals and other healthcare providers are finding that using digital signage to communicate with staff, patients and visitors has clear advantages – it's flexible, dynamic and engaging – which can improve your patient and visitor experience, build community and empower your staff.

Streamline and unify communications in your facility:

- Post news and announcement in real time
- Change what's being displayed often, so it's always fresh
- Attract your audience with bright, dynamic content
- Reduce paper, waste and printing costs
- Replace outdated and messy bulletin boards
- Broadcast safety announcements and instructions

What is Digital Signage?

Simply put, it's using any kind of digital display to present information, usually screens, in a rotating playlist. These screens are placed where people often go – waiting rooms, hallways, cafeterias, near elevator banks. If you use a web-based digital signage platform, you can extend your reach to sites over any geographical area, connecting multiple buildings and campuses in a single system.

These digital screens are much more appealing than lots of flyers and posters, and don't need to be taken down later and recycled – they simply go away when the event, or cafeteria menu, or announcement is no longer valid. Digital signage is clean, and green.

And because the displays are digital, you can also have movement – messages with animations, video, motion graphics; and can even add audio, if that makes sense for where a display is located.

People today, especially the younger generation, are used to receiving information in this way. For example, in shopping centers people see and react to promotions on digital signage, and often go right in and buy what they see on the screens.

All digital signage systems have three main components:

Display
Also called a screen – this could be an LCD or projection display, electronic billboard, scrolling message board, video wall, or even desktop PC monitors. Nowadays, digital signage has also extended its reach to include mobile devices like smartphones and tablets.

Software
This is how you create, manage, approve and schedule your messages to your displays, and even choose how long each message stays up, when the message should drop off the playlist, and which messages go to which displays. You can choose a single image that takes up the whole screen, or multiple windows including tickers, all working seamlessly in a unified screen layout that reinforces your brand and your message. A single person with a computer can accomplish all this, or many people at different locations can interact with the system across a network.

Hardware
These are the machines that distribute and play back your content – anything from network-distributed media players to individual stand-alone players showing PowerPoint slides. In a networked environment, content can be pushed to multiple players at once, or content can be pulled from a server.

The Benefits of Digital Signage

Hospitals and other healthcare facilities can be stressful places for people to go to, plus the size of many facilities can quickly overwhelm them. Anxiety negatively impacts the body's ability to heal, so anything that can be done to reduce this is a health benefit. Anything that gives people information and allows them to make informed decisions reduces their stress.

Healthcare digital signage is modern and dynamic, allows real-time updates, reduces printing costs and clutter, integrates with safety alert systems, and allows you to tailor content.

Because digital signage is dynamic, you can show video, or live TV news and traffic feeds in addition to still messages. You can even create custom targeted programming that will be of interest to your audience: informational videos, a short overview of your facility, doctor profiles – the list is endless.

For Patients and Visitors
You can really connect to people who come to your hospital or office, and make them feel comfortable while giving them information they need.

In addition to health and safety tips, you can add news feeds and tickers, current weather and forecasts, upcoming events, support group meetings, and more. Adding facility information and interactive screens with wayfinding also improves the visitor experience, making them feel more informed and in control.

Interactive kiosks where patients can check themselves in, input their insurance information and arrange future appointments not only give people a way to engage with your organization, it frees up your staff. Combining this with directories and wayfinding gives your visitors a one-stop source for information.

For Your Facility
You can use digital signage to build community and increase connections between your facility and your visitors and patients. Hospitals can often feel impersonal, but well-designed messages can go a long way to putting people at ease and giving them something they want and need.

For internal use, digital signage is invaluable for communicating with staff. Workflows and efficiencies improve when people are well-informed, and your communications become centralized, rather than fragmented. It might take a busy person some time to get around to reading an email, but with digital signage you are immediately reaching your employees where they are – in the rooms and corridors of the facility, break rooms and offices. And the information can be updated instantly, so you can be sure that the information your people are receiving is accurate.

Putting your communications on displays can also reduce the workload on your already busy staff. Updates on insurance and billing policies, health tips, upcoming events, educational opportunities, services and products for sale, cafeteria menus and queuing data – if your digital signage is communicating these things, then your staff doesn't need to, freeing them up for other duties and empowering your visitors.

However, just putting screens up in your building is not enough – you need the right strategy to be effective in an information-heavy environment like a hospital.

Planning Your Strategy

Places like hospitals are information-heavy and things are always changing, so it's important to carefully plan a system that can manage the flow. It is vital to develop your objectives in a clear, logical and consistent way. The objectives in turn inform the strategy, which determines the roadmap to deployment and execution – including which software and hardware to use.

The technology you use will be determined by what you want to use it for. Some hospitals have a paperless system where the staff have access to tablets, while others offer wireless keyboards and internet access in patient rooms. Consider the needs of your staff as well as your patients and visitors when developing your objectives and strategy.

The Right People
While your IT department may be instrumental in successfully deploying and maintaining your system, they will probably not be the ones who will be using it on a daily basis.

Include everyone who might contribute content in the early stages. This could be marketing, HR, admin, web staff, department heads, purchasing agents – even your security team. Getting everyone involved and on the same page early can give you insights you might not have had and gives everyone a sense of ownership in the new system. It's crucial to get buy-in at every level, or people won't use your digital signage system to its fullest potential.

The Right Goals
What is it that you want to achieve? Outline these goals in as much detail as possible – this will help clarify workflows implementing and using the system, and help you figure out how to measure return on investment once the system is up and running.

Think about how people will use your digital signage system, and what their objectives might be. Once these are clear, consider how it will operate within your facility or network. What kind of content will be displayed? Who creates and approves it? Where are those approval standards? Where the hardware going to be and who will maintain and upgrade it? Who manages the software?

Write up a detailed project plan with key action items, timeframes and resources. The more you can cover in advance, the fewer unwelcome surprises, like unexpected costs or delays, will hit you later. Consider things like:

- Where the displays will go
  - Think about traffic flow past them – high traffic areas get more views
  - Placement – putting them too high makes them hard to see or interact with
- What kind of content to use
  - Should you use static images or moving ones? What about video or news feeds?
  - Do you want a color scheme to integrate into your décor? Or should the displays stand out?
  - Should you use audio? (This only makes sense in areas where sound will not be intrusive)
- IT issues
  - Connectivity
  - Bandwidth
  - Network security policies
- Potential revenue sources
  - Philanthropy or grants
  - Advertising by gift shops or food courts
  - Advertising from local businesses your patients and staff frequent
- Outsourced services
  - Content creation
  - Paid data subscriptions
- Crisis communication plan
- Future expansion of the system

The Right Infrastructure
Get a qualified IT person involved from the very beginning - have them do a survey of power, network connectivity and IT security policies for every single location where you want to place a digital display. You wouldn't want to purchase and hang a screen, only to find out later that there's no way to get power or data to it.

The Right Content
You need to know exactly what you want to show on your screens. Once you have figured out your overall goals, the kind of content you should display will become be clear. Get into a much detail as you can.

- Who creates, schedules and approves content? How many people? What's the procedure?
- List the content that needs to be regularly created by topic or department
- List content sources or file types (MP4, Flash, event schedules, RSS feeds, etc.)
- Will you include interactive wayfinding or kiosks?
- Will you integrate queuing or calendar systems?
- What is your alert notifications plan?

The Right Budget
You need to think about more than just initial costs, but about the foreseeable future – try to budget for 18-24 months, at least. What about software and hardware upgrades in the future, or additional displays, players and bandwidth as your system expands. What about training your users – at the beginning but also on an ongoing basis. Will you hire designers to periodically refresh your look? And think about technical support costs.

A closed or inflexible system will lock you in, making it difficult to change configurations when you need to. Your digital signage system is sure to attract the attention of other buildings or departments, and soon they will want a piece of the action. Or you might expand your current facility. Don't box yourself in at the start – it will end up costing you more time and money in the long run. It's better to have a single, well-though-out system that can grow, then creating a series of smaller, ad hoc systems that have to somehow link together.

Choosing a System

Again, work a lot on the front end to save yourself headaches later. Do some research and get a clear picture of your options before you buy anything. And doing things in the right order really helps in the long run.

Software First
A local company has offered you a great deal on flat screen displays, but if you don't how you will be managing your content, hold off on that big purchase. It's the software that people will be interacting with day-to-day to create content and run your digital signage system, so make sure the hardware supports the software, not the other way around.

If your system is going to live on just one computer and be run by just one person, you might limit yourself in terms of flexibility and expansion. A web-based system, or purchasing a licensing agreement, enables more people to participate, and gets more variety in the process and the type of content you deliver. The more people who get involved and get excited, the better overall for the long-term success of your digital signage system.

Consider these points when choosing which software to run:
- It needs to be user-friendly - easy to use, easy to learn and easy to update
- It needs easy import options and high-quality content creation tools
- It should have day-part scheduling and automatic message retirement
- It should include alert notification capabilities, preferably CAP-compliant alerts
- It needs to meet the hierarchy you've already worked out in your plan – allow multiple contributors and separate content approvers, and enable both centralized deployment and individual department access
- It needs to meet your technical requirements – file types and data feeds you've already determined you want to use (calendar and queuing systems, etc.)

Also think about the software vendor. Are they primarily a software company or do they just dabble in it? Do they understand digital signage for healthcare? Will they offer ongoing support and services? Do they have credible references?

Hardware is an Investment
Buying cheap hardware might save you a bit of money initially, but could cost you more in the long run. However, you don't want to get locked into a single vendor or some proprietary hardware. Your software provider should either be able to supply you with industry-standard hardware, or supply you with the proper specs.

Every year, hardware value depreciates, operating systems update and change, I/O interfaces evolve and physical components fail. Make sure your machines are flexible and adaptable enough to still be of use to you in a few years' time, and as your needs change. Otherwise, you'll have to budget in equipment replacement costs, adding to the overall cost of your system.

ADA Compliance

You also have to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which will affect wording and typography (including Braille lettering), placement of displays and kiosks, and more. Be sure to research your ADA options before you commit to any system.

Pilot First

Before launching your system everywhere, run a pilot program in an isolated environment. This lets you evaluate the software and hardware, as well as your processes and workflows. It also lets you evaluate how your content is being received, and what changes you might want to make before rolling out your digital signage system-wide.

This even allows you to test out different branded layouts and content templates, so you are looking fantastic on day one of the total deployment. You'll see which designs work best, and if your content creators need some design coaching.

It's best to run a pilot launch for 60-90 days, getting feedback from all stakeholders during the run, and then check in with your digital signage vendor to go over what was successful and what needs adjustment.

Content Ideas

Hospitals and doctors' offices aren't just about treating illnesses and injuries, but also about promoting healthy lifestyles and wellness.

Differentiated Content

Different audiences need different content, and often go to a particular place depending on their needs.

Consider the different areas visitors may go to, and share relevant information to those locations:

- Check-In Desk – give expected wait times, and available appointment dates and times
- Waiting Room – display health tips, support group info, targeted programming and news feeds
- Gift Shop – promote specials and inform visitors what's available
- Cafeteria – show daily specials, prices and nutritional information
- Hallways – integrate wayfinding into your digital signage to help people navigate your facility
- Chapel or Meditation Room – schedule of services and denominations, operating hours
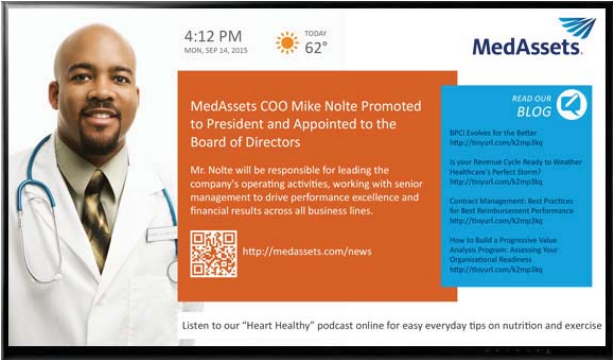
For staff, place displays in break rooms and lounges, or at nursing stations, with separate playlists delivering relevant content:

- Policies and procedures, and changes and updates to them
- Training opportunities
- Safety regulations
- New treatments and services
- Compliance procedures
- Patient room coordination
- Employee recognition and achievements

Consider installing interactive kiosks for staff – these can provide self-directed viewing of dense information and automated skills testing, with compliance reports electronically added to your database.

Attract Their Attention
You need to show timely, relevant information to keep your audience's attention. In a very short while, your viewers will become used to getting news and updates from your digital signage system. But first you have to grab their attention with visual hooks.

Using auto-updating messages and tickers is a great way to include these visual hooks and lessen the burden on your content creators. After an initial set-up, these continue refreshing the information automatically. Your audience always gets the most current data available, and you can concentrate on using your digital signage system to get your own messages out to them. As they become reliant on screens for this info, they'll be sure to see your other communications.

Some examples:
- Day, date and time
- Weather
- News headlines
- Event calendars
- Webpages
- Queuing info
- Data RSS feeds
- Social media

Timely Alerts

No one knows better than healthcare professionals that unfortunate things happen sometimes. A digital signage system can also be an alert and warning system – with clear instructions to the public and staff, such as evacuation procedures and meeting points. With a single command in the software interface, every screen can immediately warn everyone of incoming severe weather, or other emergencies. You can show alerts across your entire system, or select specific locations or screens.

Get Interactive

Today, it seems nearly everyone is interacting with electronic devices – smartphones, tablets, kiosks. We are used to touching screens to get what we need. So, it makes sense to use interactive screens in your digital signage system:

- You have a single source for lots of information
- Your audience chooses what is relevant to them
- It alleviates the burden of support staff
- There are no printing costs, and no waste
- It's clean and modern

Interactive Wayfinding

These are touchable maps that let your audience be self-serve when it comes to getting where they need to go. These can be for a single building, a healthcare campus, or for a wider geographical area that includes multiple locations. You can even combine your wayfinding with a downloadable smartphone app. Adding proximity beacons can deliver turn-by-turn directions to people's phones, and a geofence virtual barrier can prompt people to download or activate the app the moment they get on your facility's grounds.

Touchscreen Directories

A common pairing with wayfinding maps. People know who they want to see, and the interactive screen lets them find where they need to go and how to get there.

Donor Boards

One interactive screen can access as many things as you like, and takes up a lot less space than dozens of plaques. Recognize volunteers and patrons who have contributed to your success with photos, videos and bios. Names can be sorted by individual, group or company, alphabetically or by giving category. You can also promote ongoing campaigns and programs, and provide instructions for people who might like to donate their time or funding.

Menu Boards

In a cafés and restaurants, you have only a short time to get your audience's attention – so use touchscreens to present menu options and nutritional information in a fun way. You can pair this with an ordering system, streamlining the entire process.

Interactive Games

Visitors sometimes have to wait for a long time, and children get bored easily. Having interactive electronic games will keep them entertained and occupied, and relieve the parents in what may be a stressful situation.

Conclusion

Digital signage has virtually limitless possibilities for healthcare facilities – from relaxing visitors and informing patients, to keeping your staff up to date on what they need to know and do.

In an ever-changing environment like this, it's important to be up-to-the-minute accurate and flexible. A well thought out digital signage deployment can replace previous ad hoc systems, increase access to vital information, and improve both the visitor experience and staff engagement.

Want to learn more? Contact us at **salesteam@visix.com**.