

Information Integration

From global networking to looped messaging, is there anything computers can't do? **Jack Gocher** looks into this question and investigates both the new and current software driving digital displays



The electronic display market has matured dramatically in recent times. There are a number of reasons for this, but not least amongst them is the massive advancements made by the developers of the software that drives them. It is no longer a case of plugging a screen into a PC or black box device and simply having a series of images and videos playing on loop. End users can now enjoy an array of integrated applications limited only by the imagination.

Matt Hassock of Pixellent Display Systems has worked in the digital display market for many years and was the person behind the major implementation at Thompson Reuters several years ago. He brought this experience into his own company and has some stark observations about the industry. "The biggest problem in the UK is a lack of creativity. People still don't get the software part and are completely fixated on the screens themselves. The hardware is the easy part. All you need to do there is choose

your display and install it. But if you don't focus on the huge benefits that the software can deliver, you are potentially throwing money away."

Hassock believes the design and installation of a digital display solution should start with some serious consideration about what the system will be used for. "Before you start thinking about how big a screen you want, you really ought to be analysing how, where and why it is going to be used. With some appropriate planning at the design stage there are a host of

potential solutions that can really help meet your objectives, whatever they might be. Think about the software first, then find the right hardware to go with that."

For Hassock, a digital signage solution is all about problem solving, working out what needs to be achieved and developing the best solution to do it. "There are different levels of software available to the digital signage market. Many

Another example of how intelligent software can create a solution, which offers the consumer much more in terms of benefit, is the Destination Shuttle Service (DSS) in Los Angeles. The company wanted a way to effectively communicate with their passengers, welcoming them to town when they arrived and thanking them for their visit when they departed. They decided that digital signage located on their buses would be a great

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companies will use a software-as-a-service (SaaS) type solution based on web browser applications, but this quickly imposes limitations on what you can do. Similarly, writing applications from scratch in Flash or other programming language can be expensive and limits the rollout possibilities. However, there are now modern software applications that allow us to develop one-off applications that are highly functional and also offer great value."

Show some Moxie

One of the software vendors leading the way in this market is Omnivex, with its Moxie content management and creation system. The company's president, Jeff Collard, told me, "Our success, and the success of our customers, is based on the simple, proven principle that effectively informing, persuading and engaging audiences isn't just about good creative or content, it's also about timing, environment and relevance. In a word, context."

The success of a good digital display system is in the way it communicates with its audience. Collard adds, "Most systems are dumb. They just play the content it's told to until it's told to stop. Moxie is entirely data-centric. It is aware of what's going on around it and can make intelligent decisions about what each screen should be displaying. For example, we have installed a system for a mobile phone company where, when the customer picks up a product, the screen identifies it and accesses the content relevant to that device. Digital signage is a powerful, interactive solution providing relevance and will eventually spell the death of simple in-store TV."

way to extend the hospitality experience from the hotel to the airport, by providing passengers with relevant travel, hotel and city information both on the buses and within the hotels. By incorporating digital signage in the 13 partner hotel's lobbies in addition to on the buses, DSS would also have a way to communicate important information to passengers as they waited for the bus while also enabling the waiting passengers to know where the bus is on its route.

Each bus has a Windows-based PC running Windows 7 and Omnivex software, as well as a GPS location device, known as a bud. GPS coordinates are sent via cellular network to the Omnivex server in real time, indicating the current location of the bus. "Omnivex software has the ability to know exactly where each bus is, allowing it to provide intelligent content on the buses based on this knowledge," says Collard. "Omnivex GPSLink is used to combine this information with intelligent rules to determine the most appropriate content to display based on the current location, so that content is more relevant for the viewers."

During May, Omnivex is launching a new version of Moxie, which incorporates several new features, including an advanced wayfinding module. "Customers have been using our software to deploy wayfinding applications for years but with this release, we are changing the way wayfinding will be managed. Rather than a series of pre-scanned maps, Moxie will dynamically generate a path based on current conditions. The map may vary depending on current conditions sending traffic along the most efficient path, not necessarily the shortest path. If you wish, Moxie can





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