

SKYKIT[®]

Digital Signage Guide

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10 Biggest Digital Signage Challenges

10 Digital Signage
Topics You Need to
Know Before Buying

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10 Biggest Digital Signage Challenges

Digital signage has the potential to produce some undeniably cool customer experiences.

And while it's entirely possible to get good results on a budget, looking at what companies with apparently limitless budgets can do is often what fires people up.

For example, take a peek at Under Armour's gorgeous Chicago Brand House^[42], which is a true testament to how bold and futuristic digital signage can make a space look.

They installed no less than five distinct digital signage elements, from interactive kiosks to beacon-integrated stations, to wraparound video walls.

Perhaps one of the most visually arresting elements is the massive five-sided LED cube suspended from the ceiling. Its edges are nearly seamless, and it has 706 square feet of space to play Under Armour's ads.

And then there's the kiosks that use

light sensors to measure how high customers jump, and then email them their record—which meshes super well with Under Armour's fitness-centric brand.

Feeling inspired yet?



Many business owners are in a similar situation.

After reading about the [many benefits of digital signage](#) and seeing [some of the statistics](#) about how it increases sales, businesses are eager to take advantage of the technology.

That's good, but using digital signage in retail isn't something you should rush into, especially if your budget isn't limitless. (I'll be using retail as an example in this chapter, just know that much of this is transferrable to other industries as well).

Rushing leads to more mistakes.

And mistakes make for higher costs and bad results.

Plus, barriers can come up that make it difficult to get the most out of your digital signage as a powerful communication tool. Digital signage successes like Under Armour's Brand House can only exist because of *meticulous, clearheaded planning*. They couldn't just hope for the best.

Under Armour had to anticipate and dodge many possible pitfalls.

When you're implementing digital signage, you should do the same.

While it would be impossible to list every potential challenge, because they depend on your business, industry, goals, and many other factors, I'd like to give somewhere to start.

Consider this as a framework for considering the challenges that might arise with your own digital signage project, so you can create a plan of action to dodge them.

I boiled down this section into action-oriented steps you can take to address these 10 challenges.

The PDF walks through exactly how to approach each challenge. You can print it out or download it and keep it as a reference. [Get your PDF here.](#)

Take the Big 10 Digital Signage Challenge – And Learn How to Conquer Your Technology Fears

The first few challenges are centered around planning. They're ones you're likely to encounter while designing and installing your digital signage system.

1. An Unclear Vision

Digital signage is already a billion dollar industry, and is projected to continue growing at a rate of 11.2 percent YOY targeting \$3.23 billion in 2020, and a 2014–20 CAGR of 13.2 percent.

Industry analysts still predict Retail will lead the charge with upwards of **50 percent** of all digital displays going into this massive catch-all vertical.

Perhaps numbers can be ignored, but when your competitor right down the street installs a digital signage system, you might get scared they now has a competitive advantage over you.

Maybe you've seen a statistic like 42 percent of shoppers would prefer to shop at a store with video displays^[43].

The temptation is to rush and get a digital signage system installed as quickly as possible.

Hold up!

You see, much like any business

strategy, it's best to take the time and plan.

One of the first things you should ask yourself when considering a digital signage network is "Why do we need one?"

"To increase sales" is a decent start, *but it's not specific enough.*

Imagine you're a running equipment shop and installing your first digital signage.

If one project leader is focusing on enhancing brand identity and is pushing for content that is thematic, rather than advertising-focused (footage of local track meets), while another is focused solely on pushing product (all ads, all the time), you'll have conflict.

Solve it!

Clarify what your vision for the project is first.

Your vision will help you choose everything from hardware, to software, to the content itself.

This will also help you determine [how to measure ROO](#) for your digital signage. Different goals lend themselves to different ROO-measuring strategies.

For example, if your goal is to increase your store's exposure, you could track social media mentions.

Read Chapter 2 for tons of information about setting goals and calculating ROI and ROO for your digital signage efforts.

2. Fear of Spending

The cliché holds true: Sometimes you need to spend money to make money.

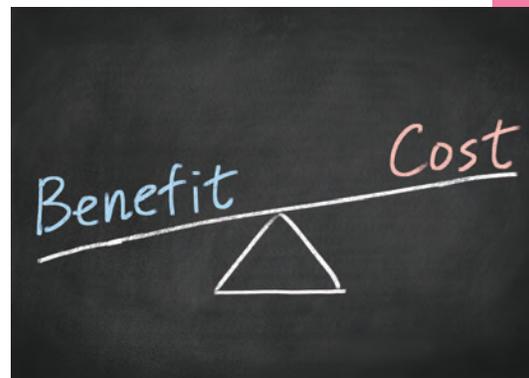
It can be a scary prospect, especially with technology and strategies as relatively new as using digital signage in the retail industry.

In fact, the temptation is to cut your costs as far as possible—in the hopes that if something goes wrong, if your plan fails to deliver, you'll also cut your losses.

And of course, "spend money to make money" isn't a justification for being fiscally irresponsible.

Solve it!

Perform a cost-benefit analysis^[44] to see if digital signage would be worth it for your business, and see what benefits it could bring to your company.



Make sure you only spend money where you need to. That is to say, while spending is necessary, overspending certainly isn't.

Having a clear vision and plan for your digital signage will help you decide which features are needed and which are merely desirable.

For example, let's look at [digital wayfinding](#).

Advanced wayfinding systems can come with a laundry-list of special features, including...

- ◇ 2D and 3D maps of indoor and outdoor locations
- ◇ Dynamic route updates (Meaning if a class at a school changes places, or a sidewalk is being repaired, or—you get the idea—the routes suggested will change to compensate for those conditions)
- ◇ Ability to text directions to your smartphone

It's hard to look at a place like Aventura Mall in Miami and not get a little envious. They recently deployed seven interactive digital directories. The 70-inch touch displays show an image of where you are now and where you want to be, plus detailed directions to help you get where you need to go.

Given the mall is 2.7 million square feet, it's safe to say the wayfinding kiosks and directories were a good idea.



But in most cases, the goal of digital wayfinding is just to help someone

get from Point A to Point B. That's it: no bells and whistles required.

While it's an added convenience for your customers, only the most dedicated of digital signage nerds would actually start shopping someplace just because they have really nice wayfinding kiosks.

If all your customers really need—or all you can afford—is a moderately sized touchscreen with a searchable directory and the ability to visually plot a route, that's okay. There's no need to break the bank!

Weigh the risk against the reward, the must-haves against the might-wants, and make a wise choice.

But sometimes, you need to be bold. Instead of looking solely at ROI or ROO, you should, when the time is right^[45], follow Under Armour's lead and focus on creating an experience.

Take a risk. (And offset the risk with good planning!)

3. Poor Integration

These days, retailers expect their digital signage to be more than just digital versions of static signage^[46].

They need integration with multiple systems to be able to truly leverage all the customer data they gather (buying trends, weather, inventory, POS systems, loyalty programs, etc...)

They want to be able to use the screens for training and corporate communications after hours.

And for digital signage to be connected with the inventory system, so that specials can be offered based on what's selling and what isn't.

They also want the content to be coordinated with other marketing efforts online and on mobile.

Solve it!

Creating an **omnichannel experience** requires a lot of forethought and planning—[we offer some advice here](#).

Make the Most of It

If you're going to put the effort into fully integrating your digital signage, you'll have a powerful tool in your hands. Don't let it go to waste—*come up with creative ways to maximize its utility, both for you and your customers.*

Want an example?

If you plan on integrating your inventory system, don't just use that to create promotions. Put that information in the hands of the customer, too. (Then cross sell and upsell your customer.)

When we shop for something we want and we find something we really like, it can be disheartening to discover our size is not available.

When this happens, we leave the store and seek what we want elsewhere.

Kohl's^[47] has dodged this bullet by installing in-store kiosks that allow buyers to search inventory on the spot.

To make up for the fact that they might not have what you need on hand, they sweeten the deal by offering free shipping right to your door. This keeps the customer happy and makes them feel like they're getting something extra.

Keep Your Customers' Habits In Mind

Let's say you decide to tie together your loyalty program and your digital signage.

Kiosks located in the store could encourage customers to [sign up for your loyalty programs](#) in order to receive special discounts and news about sales.

Then, you could integrate beacon technology to deliver those deals directly to the customer's phone as they stroll around the store, or email them coupons or a newsletter to be used during online browsing.

You'd leave the choice up to the customer^[48], so you could engage them using whatever channel with which they feel most comfortable.

Here's the challenge, though: Kiosks can be expensive equipment depending on their complexity and enclosure, and beacons, while individually cheap, still take time and resources to set up properly.

You need a lot of customer participation to make the system pay for itself.

You'd need to convince customers to sign up for the loyalty program, and then download an app so they can receive alerts.

Think about it. While this project could be highly successful—after all, [81% of customers](#) who receive a phone alert open it—it could also be an expensive flop.

It all depends on your customers' willingness to participate, which you can evaluate in advance by

considering their demographics and surveying them to assess their eagerness to buy in.

4. Not Enough Bandwidth

According to a recent study of major banks using digital signage (typically in retail banking), 16 percent had [difficulties providing sufficient bandwidth](#) for their systems.

In K-12, although internet is being added into many school districts, the bandwidth is less than that of an average home, but has as many as 200 students trying to connect simultaneously.

If you're using the Internet or local VPN to stream your content, you may run into issues with your ISP, who often limit the amount of bandwidth each customer can use.

You might suddenly find your screens **going blank** because your ISP (Internet Service Provider) has cut you off.

That's a problem you want to prevent in advance by knowing whether your current setup can provide for your needs, or whether you'll need to make changes.

Solve it!

Figure out your required bandwidth in advance, and get in contact with your ISP to see if your current plan can handle it.

Larger files require more bandwidth to stream.

Standard resolution video takes about 40 MB/minute, whereas high resolution footage (1080i) requires a whopping 140 MB/minute.

You may wish to invest in a private leased line connection^[49], which will allow you to monitor data flow and allocate bandwidth as necessary to high-demand links. This may also increase your data transfer rate, meaning smoother streaming.

Good news! If you're using **local playback**, bandwidth will be less of an issue.

Local playback means that instead of the media player receiving a constant stream of content, *the content is received only once and then cached on the media player for playback.*

Depending on your CMS, you may be able to schedule these content downloads for off-hours when the demand for bandwidth is low. Most enterprise-level CMS will have this option.

5. Too Many Hardware Options

Here's a fact: not all [digital signage systems](#) are made equal.

Different types of commercial displays play to particular strengths but might be weak in other ways.

If you make a poor decision, you may find that your customers can't read the sign because it's too small and too glare-prone. Or perhaps you purchased a consumer grade display and the screen you placed vertically as a menu board begins to deteriorate the image in the lower portion of the screen because it wasn't meant to be used in that orientation.

Solve it!

Before installing digital signage, it's imperative to research which of the *many options are most suited to your needs and budget*. Otherwise, you'll be limiting yourself when it comes to using your network, or having to spend more money later to upgrade.

Also, make sure that the hardware and software you choose are complimentary and compatible with each other.

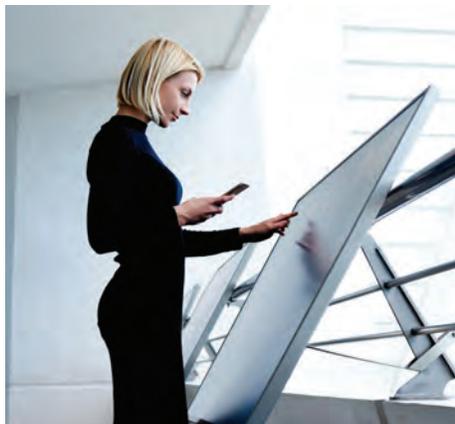
We'll take an in-depth look at hardware in Chapter 5.

To get you started, here are some issues to consider for hardware, [summed up from this article](#).

- ◇ **Size of screen:** Depending on where you want to put it, and what sort of content you wish to display, you might find a larger or smaller screen more suitable. You also have options in building out tiled walls or video walls from like sized or different sized displays.
- ◇ There are simple formulas^[50] for calculating what distance from the screen an image of a certain size will be legible at. Size will, of course, affect price, becoming a

limiting factor in choosing what type of screen will work best.

- ◇ **Type of screen:** There are [many options](#), ranging classic options like LCD and projection to fancy newcomers like OLED, ePaper, and indoor LED.
- ◇ Each has advantages and limitations in terms of size, price, what it's best at displaying, and in what environment it's most legible and eye-catching. It is important to know if the display is indoor, semi-outdoor (or near a window), or outdoor when selecting screen type. Make sure you have an idea of the possibilities available to you, because it may turn out that the best solution for you is an unconventional one.
- ◇ **Mounting:** Floor, wall, or ceiling-mounted? Your answer will vary depending on the space you're in and whether you want the screens to be interactive. Take into considerations ADA requirements when installing touch screens, and consider antibacterial plastics for enclosures in public spaces, schools, and hospitals.



6. Confusing Content Management Software (CMS)

Difficulty in using CMS is among the top three complaints of digital signage users^[51].

Some CMSs are a confusing mess of endless menus, unintuitive commands, and jumbled windows.

Many of the people accessing your CMS (the content creators, the schedulers, and so on) aren't necessarily tech-savvy. Their strength lies elsewhere. Your CMS should allow them to do their job without confusion.

Solve it!

Remember: The functions your CMS has should be defined by your vision for the digital signage.

These are the four questions you should ask yourself when [choosing a CMS](#).

1. With whom do you want to communicate?
2. What message do you want to deliver? (And what action do you want your audience to take?)
3. Who is responsible for delivering this message, and what does success mean for them?
4. Where does the content/message reside today?

Practically speaking, the answers to these questions should **point you toward a CMS** that:

Has the features you need

If you want to display social media feeds, for example, ask your vendor if there's a built-in widget for doing that or if that's something you'll have to develop yourself.

It should also support all the file types you intend to use.

Supports your workflow

You should be able to approve and update content easily and instantly. (See #9 for more on workflow.)

Is easy to use

Alright, this is a pretty obvious one. But do you know what a user-friendly CMS looks like?

The interface *should be intuitive* to navigate, [even for employees who aren't tech savvy](#).

other hand, sometimes these mobile versions are lacking.

Make sure you see it in use before buying.

Built-in analytics should be accessible. If your CMS gathers data on your campaign's effectiveness, you should be able to view and understand the basic stats without being a statistician yourself.

There should be options for viewing it in different kinds of charts and graphs.

Hang in there—we'll be talking even more about what to look for in CMSs in the next chapter.

7. Not Enough Content

One of the greatest advantages over traditional signage is that digital signage isn't static. Even with the content playing on a loop, the image on the screen changes frequently.

This means that even if a customer has seen a particular piece of content before, they're likely to give it a second glance^[52]—paper signage might as well be wallpaper.

Don't forget that to maintain digital signage's effectiveness, it's important to **add new content frequently**.

Many users of digital signage networks report only updating their content every other month^[53], or even less frequently—and that's probably not often enough. If it's always the same, eventually people will stop looking.

And never changing it up means you're missing out on chances to promote daily deals and take advantage of local happenings.

Solve it!

How often you update may depend on how large your company is, how frequently you offer sales and other promotable deals, and other factors.

Determine how often you want to add new content in advance.

You also need to *have a plan in place for producing content when you need it*. Don't wait until it's too late to start planning.

If you find yourself in a pinch, remember that you don't need completely new content—it just [has to feel fresh](#).

Keep a stockpile of relevant stock photos that you can easily swap out in your CMS. Sometime, a few new pictures, a different color scheme, and changing the wording of a header are all it takes to give the illusion of new content.

We have a few more tips for keeping your content fresh and localized in #8.

Also worth mentioning: **budgeting for content production**.

How much are you willing to spend?



Depending on the company you go with, most interfaces are template-based, making it easy to drag and drop images, choose fonts, and create powerful content in no time.

Access from other devices should be simple. CMS providers often tout their software as usable from tablets and cellphones—which is great for updating content on the go. On the

Determine this, and decide who is responsible for producing that content. This is especially important for smaller companies that might not have graphic designers on staff.

Contracting graphic designers or other skilled individuals to produce content may produce visually appealing results, but can you afford to do it all the time?

Perhaps you're willing to pay a graphic designer to produce advertisements for major sales events.

However, you decide it would be more cost-efficient to leave minor localized messaging up to that one guy who took a design class in college and kinda knows how to use Photoshop. Fair enough.

8. Trouble Localizing Content

The ability to provide localized content^[54] among multiple locations is cited in the [top three reasons](#) to adopt digital signage.

Why? Well, like we talked about, producing enough content can be challenging on its own.

But messaging is only effective if it's relevant. As we talked about in the first chapter, modern digital signage is focused on providing information that's important to the viewer.

One great way of doing that: providing **localized content**.

That is, content that's relevant to a specific geographical area, *reflecting the needs and interests of the demographics that live there*. And even content created for a specific store—talk about hyper-local!

Here's the issue.

Half of the banks in the previously mentioned study express difficulties in localizing content among their branches, and the numbers actually localizing content have decreased over recent years.

It's a problem when one of your main reasons for implementing a signage solution becomes one of your main barriers towards using it effectively.

Solve it!

This is a problem where the best solutions involve planning in advance, but you can also start *fixing it now*.

Even if you have a system in place.

If you're still in the planning stage, start considering solutions for making your content locally applicable.

One popular option is *making each location responsible for some of its own content*.

There's a downside here.

This produces uneven results based on the time and personnel resources of each location. You could do the same thing on the regional level, which might allow for more oversight.

Giving access to local managers while reserving approvals for HQ, you can have localized content and brand consistency pretty easily.

Or, you can take advantage of *modern-day data analyzing capabilities* and produce some highly targeted messaging.

For example, your messages could vary based on the estimated wait time in a queue, or by local

demographics such as languages spoken.

Also worth noting: if your signage is integrated with the [Internet of Things](#) and tied into your inventory system, this essentially *solves both your content production and content localization woes*.

Here's why:

By having your CMS [automatically promote items](#) that are overstocked, or appropriate to the weather, or whatever other factors you select, you guarantee that your digital signage's content will be always be relevant and timely.

The catch is that if your system is already up and running, that sort of solution might be more complicated to implement.

Additionally, an advanced system like that won't be right for every business or organization.

Some may have a slim budget, or a lack of advanced technical knowhow.

If all you want is a way to display nice looking ads and pictures, that's absolutely fine! It's all about what's right for you, and everyone has to start somewhere.

On the simpler side, you can *set up your digital signs to display the local branch's social media feeds, or even the local weather*.

CMS will usually include built-in widgets for doing exactly that. It's a small way to make the experience more personal for the customer.

9. Workflow Difficulties

Speaking of content, what's your strategy for evaluating and approving new content?

Referring back to the bank study, over 15 percent of respondents reported **workflow issues** in getting new content approved.

Your new network won't run itself!

And while something like running your Facebook page could be fobbed off on the nearest Millennial, maintaining your digital signage is a much more significant responsibility.

You have to decide^[55]:

- ◊ Who creates content?
- ◊ Who approves content?
- ◊ Who schedules the content?
- ◊ Who's responsible for maintenance?

Often, the system is too complicated, or the people responsible for approving the content are too slow to respond. This might lead to missed marketing opportunities, especially on the local level, among other frustrations.

Solve it!

Have a *clear and consistent* system in place for approving new content, plus readily available guidelines as to what sort of content is appropriate and likely to be approved.

That makes everyone's job less stressful!

Your CMS should also allow you to *set different permissions for each user*. Whoever is tasked with scheduling

content shouldn't need the ability to add more users or edit the content, for example.

Setting permissions that correspond with each person's responsibilities will help you avoid confusion and redundancies.

Don't stop there!

A [cloud-based solution](#) is a good way to centralize the approval process and keep people from having to play email tag.

The ability to create content in outside platforms (Adobe, Google Apps, Microsoft, etc.) and easily upload it to the CMS is essential, too.

It's much easier to collaborate on and approve content that way, rather than wait for the approver to log into another system to see the updated content. This makes for more nimble responses.

Fast updates can help your bottom line!

If a product is in high demand, a slight price increase can beef up your bottom line fairly quickly.

On the other end of the spectrum, if a product has worn out it's welcome, the price can just as easily be reduced for quick sales.

Buy One Get One promotions can help achieve this.

Boloco, a fast casual restaurant based in Boston, operates 22 locations in the Northeast. They [use digital menus](#) in eight of these locations, because they value snappy updates.

Alexandra Dunk, Boloco's director of marketing, said,

“The ability to change content at a moment's notice, as well as potentially minimizing future costs by not having to replace menu boards on an on-going basis, were both factors in our decision. We have the ability to not only change our permanent menu itself, but to also feature content about our limited-time offers or other Boloco happenings.”

10. Workload Division

Even with the best digital communication strategy in place, a well-designed digital signage network won't maintain itself.

Creating and approving content, troubleshooting technical issues, even wiping dust off the screens (if you don't have dust-resistant commercial displays)—all of this takes time.

17 percent of surveyed banks mentioned *problems with providing enough labor^[51] to keep their digital signage network running smoothly*, with 30 percent requiring three or more FTEs.

Solve it!

Recognize that while installing a digital signage network can bring benefits, it, like traditional Point of Purchase signage, requires support in the strategy, design, deployment, maintenance and so on. If you don't have enough manpower resources to allocate you'll end up with stressed employees and subpar content.

Providing sufficient training for those involved in the project and investing in user-friendly CMS will cut down on the difficulties in this area.

You may wish to allocate part of your budget for **paying an experienced person** to manage your digital signage.

Depending on the size of your network this may be a Content Champion/ Manager, a graphic designer, and an IT support member if running an on-premise network. Staffing models will vary by size of network, content requirements, and number of screens.

If it saves untrained and overworked employees from spending frustrating and fruitless hours troubleshooting simple problems, it may be worth it.

Or maybe your story looks more like this.

You have a very simple purpose in mind for your digital signage and want the least troublesome solution possible.

If that's you, many digital signage companies offer packages that are essentially "plug and play."

Don't fall into the trap of getting a more complex system than you need.

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