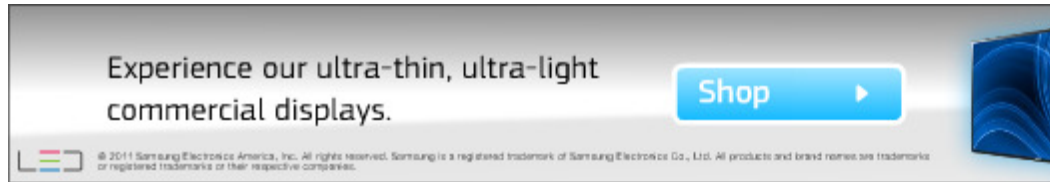


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Creating a memorable drive-thru experience with digital signage (Commentary)

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By *Richard Ventura*

NEC Display Solutions

Many of today's quick-service restaurants (QSRs) are undergoing a digital transformation as they are being retrofitted with the latest technology to drive sales, provide a competitive edge and prepare for the upcoming FDA menu-labeling requirements. The high-traffic indoor areas within QSRs are utilizing digital signage to display standard menu items, promotional specials, video commercials, news, nutrition information and other content. Yet in the drive-thru, these same stores are still utilizing standard static menu boards. Some brands have incorporated digital order confirmation boards within the drive-thru, but this technology is limited in its ability to upsell products.

Every restaurant with a drive-thru faces the challenge of extending their interactive experience outdoors, which results in a lost opportunity. After all, when are customers more captive than when they are sitting in the drive-thru lanes, waiting to place and pick up their orders? By replacing static menu boards with digital signage, QSRs have the ability to create new marketing opportunities that reinforce brand loyalty and help drive additional sales.

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There is more to it, however, than simply replacing the old static signs with digital ones. Here are a few key considerations to make the most out of outdoor digital signage:

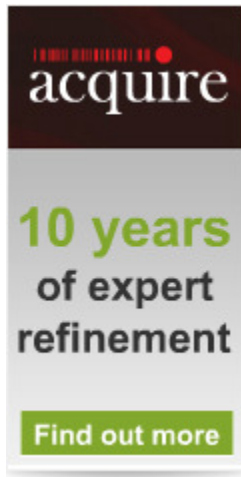
Location, location, location. Digital signage placement is nearly as important as the content on it. Signage that promotes specials (including advertised items) or add-on sales should be visible from roughly three car lengths in front of the ordering screen. This distance gives customers time to see the message and consider it before being prompted to place their orders. This is a critical point of persuasion since studies have shown that 70 percent of customers know what they will be ordering before arriving in the drive-thru. It also gives cash-strapped customers time to decide if they have enough money on hand to add to their orders rather than tying up the rest of the line.

Playing the angles. The angle of the display is another important consideration. Signage that is unreadable due to glare or awkward positioning is a wasted investment. Further, signage that reflects the sun and shines into the eyes of drivers is a danger. Once you've made your decision on signage angles, be sure to put it to the test and view it from inside a vehicle, starting from three car lengths back to the point of ordering. This will allow you to truly see how effective your signage will be for the consumer.

When checking for glare and other reflections, keep in mind that the sun alters its position during the day and has varying brightness throughout the different seasons. What works in the summer may not work as well in the winter, so develop a plan that will make sure the customers in the drive-thru will get the best view any day of the year.

Minimize motion. One of the key advantages digital signage offers over static signage is the ability to incorporate motion. Yet with outdoor signage, using motion is often against state or city law since it creates too much of a distraction for drivers, whether they are in line at the drive-thru or passing by on the street.

If a QSR's city allows motion video outdoors, then use it in small doses. A three-to-five second animation of fries being spilled onto a plate is an eye-catching feature that doesn't fully distract a driver. Spreading out the animations over time is also critical to ensure that drivers aren't constantly looking at the screens while they are behind the wheel. Further, by minimizing motion, QSR



will not distract from the important goal of the menu board, which is increasing sales.

The purpose of a drive-thru is efficiency, serving the customers in the shortest amount of time possible. Anything that distracts them from making decisions, quickly ordering and moving on, such as content overload on a screen, is costly for any QSR.

Incorporate social media. Digital screens can be used as part of large promotional campaigns. For example, try posting a message on an outdoor screen that prompts drivers to use their smartphones and become a fan of the restaurant's Facebook page in order to receive a free dessert or coupon. This is an effective way to drive "Likes" on Facebook, while also encouraging customers to sample an item that might lead to future purchases.

The same can be applied to Twitter. Displaying a message that reads, "Follow us on Twitter and retweet to get a free item," encourages customers to stay connected with the QSR when at home or on-the-go. Use Twitter to market other items which might encourage customers to visit again on another day. There are several ways to take advantage of this "captive" time, and all it takes is a little imagination to capitalize with social media.

Meet government requirements. Just as with indoor signage, the laws about product nutrition-labeling affect outdoor signage as well. Digital signage makes it easy to comply with the law and also allows QSRs to continuously make changes as new laws, or products, are introduced.

By taking these points into consideration, a QSR can ensure the drive-thru experience is similar to the service and environment that customers are accustomed to indoors, leading to brand loyalty and an increase in profits.

Ventura is director of sales – vertical solutions for NEC Display Solutions. He can be reached at rventura@necdisplay.com.

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