visix®

Streamline Communications with
Digital Signage for Government Agencies

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER

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We're here to help! If you have any questions about your application or our products, please contact us at **800.572.4935** or **salesteam@visix.com**.

Introduction

"Government" is a word that covers a large and diverse sector, and can be local, county, state, regional or national – the DMV, post offices, social security offices, city hall, libraries, police and fire stations, military bases, city parks, courthouses, chambers of commerce and much more.

Government organizations have to communicate with both their own employees and the public in an efficient, flexible and fiscally responsible way. Digital signage is a cost-effective, adaptable and modern communication method for today's governmental agencies.

It's much more than just displaying announcements – showing emergency alerts, wayfinding, training and events helps engage both staff and visitors to improve services and build community. Whether you are municipal, state or federal, a digital signage network can save you time and money, increase efficiencies and get your message out to the right people in the right place at the right time.

Streamline and unify communications in your office or agency:
- Post news and announcement in real time
- Change what's being displayed often, so it's always fresh and exciting
- Attract your audience with bright, dynamic content
- Reduce paper, waste and printing costs
- Replace those outdated and messy bulletin boards
- Use PowerPoint to easily create content
- Broadcast safety announcements and instructions

What is Digital Signage?

Digital signage has expanded from single screens to include desktops, websites and personal devices – anything with a digital display. Mounted screens are usually placed in high-traffic areas for public viewing, and in common rooms like lounges for employees.

With a web-based digital signage platform, you can extend your reach to sites over a larger geographical area, connecting multiple buildings and agencies in a single system.

Citizens today are accustomed to receiving information digitally and visually, both from personal devices and in their environment.

Screens are much more appealing than lots of flyers and posters because they are bright and dynamic to draw attention. And unlike print, messages don't need to be taken down later and recycled – the information simply goes away when it's no longer valid. Digital signage is clean, and green.

All digital signage systems have three main components:

Display

Anything with a screen is a potential display for your system – LCD or projection displays, electronic billboards, scrolling message boards, video walls and desktop monitors. Most digital signage platforms also let you publish your messages to mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. Anything with a screen is a potential display for your system.
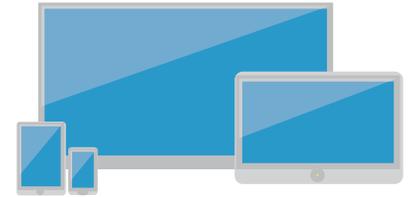
Software

This is how you create, manage, approve and schedule your messages to your displays, choose how long each message stays up, when the message retires from 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, animations, video windows and more, all working seamlessly in a unified screen layout that reinforces your message.

The system can be maintained by a single person with a desktop app, or many people at different locations can interact with the system in a networked deployment via the cloud.

Hardware

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

However, just putting screens up in your building is not enough. You need to develop a strategy for effectively leveraging your digital signage system to use its fullest potential.

The Benefits of Digital Signage

Government institutions worldwide have found measurable benefits in leveraging the power of digital signage to communicate both internally and externally. Information is presented clearly in a timely fashion, notifying employees and the public of announcements, services, opportunities, deadlines, advisories and more in an engaging way.

Digital signage is modern and vibrant, allows updates in real time with just a few mouse clicks, and replaces expensive printing costs with a one-time investment in the system.

The Office

Manage your communications centrally to improve workflows and efficiencies. Use your digital signage system to replace email for internal communications, target specific audiences in specific locations, and increase the connection between government and the community it serves.

- Streamline your operations with centralized internal communications that can be updated from anywhere
- Send internal messages to staff-only areas such as break rooms, and public notices to waiting areas and lobbies
- Display event schedules outside meeting rooms, along with other digital signage messages
- Notify everyone of policy changes, service procedures and compliance requirements

Your Employees

Engage your workers with dynamic content. Use your digital signage system to motivate teams, recognize achievement, reinforce your policies, and keep everyone informed on progress towards goals and deadlines. A well-planned digital signage system can stitch your agency into a seamless, efficient whole.

- Display training opportunities and informational videos to allow your staff to maximize their potential
- Keep everyone on the same page with upcoming initiatives, and reinforce your agency mission statement
- Personalize communications with birthday wishes, messages that mention milestones and goals achieved, and awards won

The Community

Increase public awareness of services, events, policies and opportunities. Reduce stress by displaying wait times and deadlines in offices, and by including wayfinding and info boards at strategic locations where they will get the most use. Putting more information in the hands of the public makes them feel empowered, and reduces the load on your staff.

Information can be displayed in multiple languages as well, negating the need for a large, multi-lingual staff to be always on hand. And, because your messaging is visual, it helps the hearing-impaired.

- Opening hours, news, weather and live streams can inform the public while simultaneously educating and entertaining
- Queuing data in waiting areas lets people know their place in line to lessen perceived wait-times and improve their visit
- Info boards located outside information booths puts the power in the public's hands and the burden on your staff
- Interactive directories in lobbies or near elevator banks help people figure out how to get where they're going quickly
- Wayfinding touchscreens can give visual directions, which can also be delivered right to a person's smartphone or tablet
- Alert notices quickly instruct people what to do and where to go in an emergency

Planning Your Strategy

It's vital to develop your objectives in a clear, logical and consistent way. Those 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. Consider the needs of your staff and managers as well as the public you serve when developing your objectives and strategy.

The Right People

Your IT department will be instrumental in successfully setting up and maintaining your system, but they probably won't be the people 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 for 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 agency. What kind of content will be displayed? Who creates and approves it? Where are those approval standards? Where is 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
  - Do you need separate meeting room signs?
- 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
  - Grants
  - Advertising from local businesses
- 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've figured out your overall goals, the kind of content to display should become clear. Outline it in as much detail as you can.

- Who creates, schedules and approves content? How many people? What's the process?
- 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 social media?
- 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 and bandwidth as your system expands? What about training your users, both at installation and 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 is sure to attract the attention of other departments or agencies, so make sure there's room for expansion. Or you might move to a bigger 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-thought-out system that can grow, than 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. Doing things in the right order really helps in the long run.

Software First, Hardware Second

It's great if you have the opportunity to buy a bunch of displays for a good price, but if you don't know how you'll be managing your content, hold off on that purchase. It's the software that people will be interacting with 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 really limit yourself in terms of flexibility and expansion. A web-based system, or purchasing a site license, enables more people to participate, and gets more variety in the process and type of content you deliver. The more people who get involved and 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, learn and update
- It needs simple 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 – 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 integration you've determined you want to use
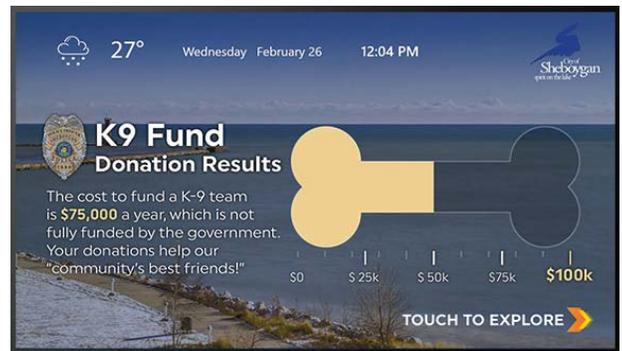
Hardware is an Investment

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 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.

Meeting Room Signs

Government agencies have a lot of meetings, training sessions, community groups and events. Help your employees and visitors find their meeting or book a room on the spot with small displays mounted outside your shared spaces.

Digital room signs eliminate confusion by showing room schedules outside each door, with all calendar data being pulled from your existing scheduling app. This gives you an efficient, centralized room management solution.

Touchscreen room signs can let people book space right at the room sign, and reservations are shared with your calendar system, so you don't have to worry about double bookings. For a more affordable option, you can use wireless e-paper room signs that easily mount outside rooms or on cubicles for office hoteling.

ADA Compliance

Don't forget 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. Find details online at http://1.usa.gov/1ZAjb0X.

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 look 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.
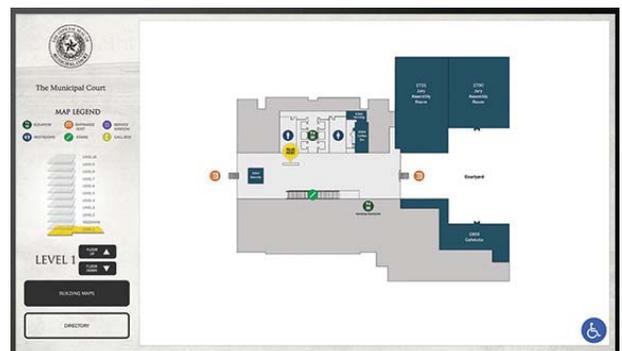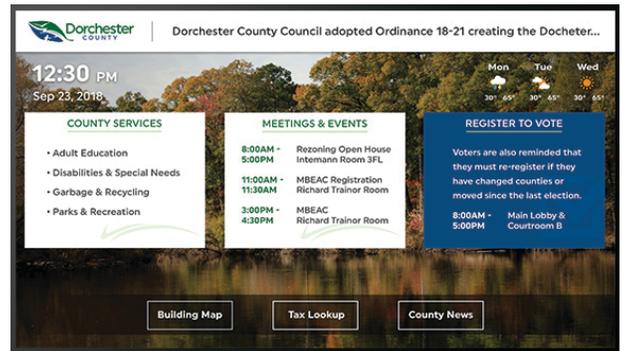
Tailor Content to Your Audiences

Americans believe very strongly that government serves the people, not the other way around. Crafting your communications to make sure people have everything they need will reinforce this idea, letting the public know that they are your number one priority.

Differentiated Content
Different audiences need different content, and the government sector is vast and varied. People in line at the DMV will not need the same information as people coming in for jury duty, and municipal law enforcement employees need different things than personnel on military bases.

Regardless of who and where your audience is, your goal is to provide them information efficiently and transparently in a timely manner.

For the public, make it easier for them to navigate a place that can seem imposing or frustrating:
- Welcome visitors - the general public or specific VIP visitors by name
- Provide digital directories and maps that help people navigate your location
- Include wayfinding features to direct them to where they need to go, including searchable directories and event schedules
- Inform people of special events, and educational or recruitment opportunities
- Share relevant information concisely and attractively, including rules and regulations, safety procedures, and best practices
- Post crime alerts or emergency notices as they unfold, with clear, simple instructions

For staff,
- Place displays in break rooms and lounges, and consider displays in meeting areas so people don't miss important announcements
- Leverage your digital signage system into a mission command center, with mission planning, tactical charting and simulation exercises
- 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.

Also, people are increasingly accustomed to getting information on the go, so consider the possibilities of targeting mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, and publishing your playlists to websites.

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

Seriously consider using auto-updating messages or ticker feeds. After an initial set-up, these continue refreshing their content automatically without you having to do more work. Your audience always gets the most current information available, and by noticing these popular items on screen, they'll also see your other messages.

Some examples of the most popular attractors:
- Day, date and time
- Weather
- News headlines
- Event schedules
- Webpages and intranets
- Social media feeds
- RSS feeds
- Data visualizations

Get Interactive

Today, we're used to touching screens to get the information we need. So, it makes sense to use interactive screens in your digital signage system:

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

Interactive Wayfinding and Mapping

These are self-service touchable maps that let your audience quickly orient themselves and see exactly how to get where they need to go. These can be for a single building, a 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 with landmark photos for easy reference, and a geofence virtual barrier can prompt people to download or activate the app the moment they come to your building.

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. Searchable directories, with staff and office hours, can reduce frustration and streamline the process of getting to an appointment on time.

Queuing Systems

Being stuck in a line in a government office can be a frustrating experience. But keeping people informed as to where they are in the queue and how long it's estimated to take before they can be helped goes a long way to reducing that frustration. And while they're there, you can educate and entertain them with targeted messages that will make their experience seem like time well spent.

Stay Safe

Security is on everyone's minds these days, especially at government facilities. Integrating your emergency alert system with your digital signage ensures that the people you are trying to protect can get the information they need when they need it. 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, every screen can immediately warn everyone of incoming severe weather, Amber alerts and more.
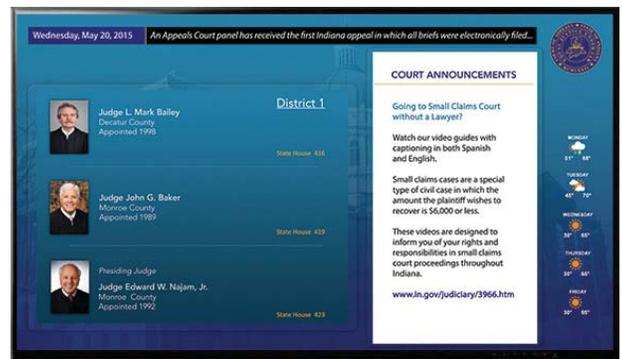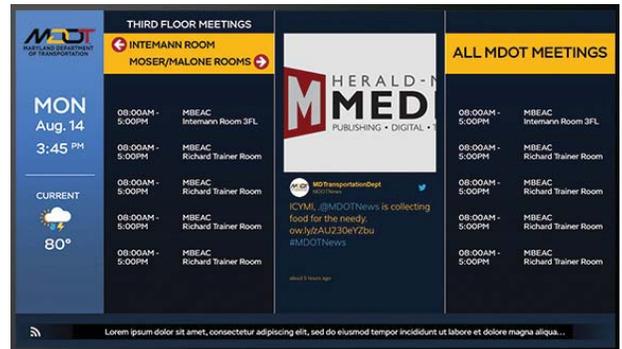
Digital signs are always placed in high visibility areas, so it makes sense to include an emergency override option when planning your digital signage system. You content management software should have this capability already included, and should allow you to trigger the alert on a single screen, or across many screens at once.

Conclusion

Screens have become ubiquitous. Nearly everyone, it seems, has at least one mobile computing device, reads their news on the internet, and participates in social media. Even the President uses Twitter, and government websites now host a huge range of information and services.

Supporting this trend with a well-planned digital signage system is an obvious next step. This transforms your physical environment into an information-rich space for both the public and your staff. Putting more information into more people's hands frees up your own resources, empowers people to participate, and engages audiences on both sides of the desk to build community.

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