Employee Facing Digital Signage for a Better Workplace
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Let's cut to the chase short and sweet. Digital signage has evolved. Period and end of sentence. It began as a means of advertising and then it took on the patina of providing a "wow factor" for the viewer and collecting impressions that could not be ignored. Yes, it is still all that but to an ever increasing extent, it has moved beyond those paradigms to so much more. Of course this begs the question of defining what "more" actually is. In this case "more" refers to more communication, more devices, more locations, more content, more calls to action, more responses, more ability to measure, more return on objectives, and finally, all of this information delivered to more targeted people who are then able to be more productive.

Too many in the digital signage industry still don't quite get it. They think in terms of hardware and software with the more knowledgeable among us thinking about content. Stripping away the obvious glitz and glamor, these are simply the tools that we use to get the job done. We need to think of problems and then solutions. A colleague of mine, Dave Haynes of 16-9 fame, speaks about asking "why" up front. He asks who, what, when, where, and how, all under the umbrella of why. I lump all of this under the concept of clearly articulating the objectives. Combing concepts, it relates to the tried and true MBA admonition that says "if you can't measure it you can't manage it". My addition is that you cannot manage that which does not have a clear set of objectives answering the questions of why.

If we look at traditional digital signage from an advertising perspective, the whys, aka objectives, are to create a call to action that results in sales, repeat business, recall, and brand equity. The scope of these efforts is tightly focused, if for no other reason than to gain ROI in a measurable and predictable way. In other words, hard dollars spent for hard dollars returned that can be counted on. If we expand our thinking to employee facing networks, the critical concept here is encompassing a different set of objectives and focus in terms of what our technological tools can do for a company.

As a communication tool, digital signage expands far beyond the self-imposed limits of an advertisement or building a brand. It can be and is a multi-informational, multi-functional approach to the communications needs of a company beyond the limits of the building, the board room or conference room, the department, or even the desktop PC. Ultimately it is all about productivity and making the most out of the time you have, where you are at, and when you need the information. We exist in collaborative environments and there is an increasing need to share and a need to know. It is a world of what is called big data and we now have the Internet of Things or IoT to deal with. What we do with all of this and how we do it, determines the success or failure in attaining our objectives.

Digital signage facilitates the dissemination of big data and small data. For the sake of meeting the objectives of employee facing networks is to recognize up front that one size does not fit all. On a recent project the objective was to address the very different needs of 17 disparate departments in a transportation environment. The needs were very different as was the content and the timeliness of the dissemination of information. In some cases, interactivity was required and in others wayfinding was in order. The devices that carried and conveyed the messages differed as well. There were smaller displays at critical locations, larger displays suspended from the ceiling for expanded viewing, and there were mobile displays and smart phone applications. The not so secret approach on this project was interviewing the individual stakeholders and creating a digit signage system that met their specific needs but was able to be maintained with company control, management, distribution, and departmental

analytics. This was "not your father's Oldsmobile" as the old ad used to say and neither is any employee facing network.

Again, for employee facing networks it all boils down to productivity for the company and quality of life for employees on the job. The easier it is to get the information an employee needs in order to do their job efficiently, the more productive they and the company overall will be. Happy employees stay with a company and their care and feeding by providing the tools to do their jobs better cannot be underestimated. With this in mind we can now move beyond the sometimes self-imposed paradigms of traditional digital signage and as a colleague says, "think outside of the rectangle".