

## A Guide to Planning, Budgeting, and Implementing Healthcare digital signage



### To know...before you buy.

As you embark on the often complicated task of deciding which digital signage system is best for your healthcare facility, you will need clearly defined objectives and a list of questions you want answered. If you are struggling in either or both of these areas, you are surely not alone. This guide will help you navigate the vast amount of information currently available on digital signage to help you better meet your communications objectives and fit within your budget.

Planning, budgeting, and implementing digital signage can seem like an overwhelming endeavor, but you don't need to go it alone. Your first requirement should be finding a vendor who is your healthcare digital signage "partner" in every sense of the word. Read on, and we'll tell you why this is a critical first step.

## Internal communications and its impact on the patient experience

Digital signage, also known as a digital-out-of-home (DOOH) system, is rapidly being interwoven into the communications fabric of hospitals and other healthcare facilities nationwide. It is an integral component of today's patient experience. Digital signage impacts patients and their families, employees, and physicians when relevant, audience-specific messaging directly connects patients to their caregivers. Such a connection affords healthcare providers the opportunity to positively impact the total patient experience by driving people to take action.

Digital signage often means different things to different people, but basically comes down to a communications platform that includes hardware, software, unique applications, content, branding, systems interfaces, etc. These components add up to one simple objective—providing messaging with the power to change behavior and save lives.

*Can a message really prevent harm or save a life? Or is this just marketing hype and wishful thinking?*

### Imagine...

There is a patient in your hospital who is at a high risk for falls and this information is documented in her Electronic Health Record. Your patient's test results are downloaded directly to her bed, which is then set in the lowest position to reduce her risk of falling. Technology is pretty amazing and helpful, but it isn't everything. Her fall risk is still there, because if she doesn't get the care and attention she needs from her caregiver, she will try to do things herself. Technology still cannot replace the interaction between patient and caregiver.

Even though your patient's bed is in the lowest setting, she still may need assistance when going to the restroom or trying to get personal items. She is less likely to act independently when she trusts staff will be routinely checking in on her. (This is why hourly rounding is so important and has been shown to improve patient safety and satisfaction.)

Fortunately, a digital signage monitor is located in the nursing unit where nurses are reminded about the 4 P's of hourly rounding. Messages are visually appealing, informative, and changed frequently. Relevant communications on the digital signage monitor reinforce the care process, and because staff is reminded of performing their rounds on time, they are able to minimize the risk that a fall will happen. Employees are also routinely recognized and their contributions acknowledged on the monitor. As a result, employees take pride in their work when they know they are valued. Effective employee communications also give your patient confidence in your staff because she knows she can depend on them to be there when she needs them.

Digital signage is more than just a monitor on the wall. The impact of visually engaging messages on education, safety, and quality as part of the total patient experience cannot be overstated. Rapidly becoming essential media, the right digital signage system has the power not just to engage, but to transform.

To impact behavior, audience engagement is essential, requiring fresh and relevant content that is sustainable over the long term. For maximum effectiveness, digital signage content should target each healthcare audience uniquely, delivering messages that make sense for individuals based on where they are waiting, working, eating, and congregating. Messages can target audiences in nursing stations, pharmacies, outpatient waiting areas, wellness centers, break rooms, cafeterias, doctor's lounges, etc. and at off-campus locations, to name a few. Content should be educational and informative, engaging, plentiful, dynamic, and current. Only when you combine these elements and present them in visually captivating displays can you ensure a successful digital signage platform.

Digital signage also has the power to elevate your brand and your level of professionalism, differentiating you from your competitors and altering the perception of the quality of care you provide. Your brand comes from the inside— from your culture, leadership, vision, progress, services, and employees. The right digital signage “partner” will understand the nuances and importance of branding in healthcare in order to provide a system that supports and integrates your brand seamlessly into your communications efforts.

“ It’s not just a failure to plan. The demise of digital signage begins with vendors who only communicate how hospitals are going to be successful and forget to communicate how this medium can fail. ”

Robert J. Loeb, CEO, Vericom

### Choosing the right digital signage partner

It is important to select a vendor who is truly your partner. A successful long-term digital signage initiative at your hospital or healthcare facility requires you have a partner who is an extension of your own business and has the same goals. Without the right partner, you can easily fail before you even get started.

During the vendor interview process, you may want to consider the following:

- A vendor is your partner if they understand your internal and external communications challenges and objectives.
- A vendor is your partner if they have extensive experience in healthcare—with client hospitals, case studies, and testimonials to support this claim—and understand your business is, first and foremost, that of patient care.
- A vendor is your partner if they can supply technology and content and have a sustainable content development model that is an integral part of their software and service.
- A vendor is your partner if they are as vested in your life-long success and commitment to growth as in their own!

Increasingly, hospitals are undertaking digital signage initiatives they cannot support and sustain. In such cases, the focus is primarily on hardware, technology, and system integration. They quickly discover that while technology is important and necessary, it cannot exist in a silo. A sustainable content platform must work in tandem with a technological platform in order for digital signage to be successful. You need a partner who knows this experientially. Your success will depend upon a partner who takes the time to understand your communications objectives, can assist with content planning and development, provides an extensive healthcare content library, works with you to educate internal stakeholders and get buy-in at all levels, helps you map out necessary internal resources and roles, and provides ongoing support, working closely with you and doing everything necessary to ensure your success.

Get the right partner. Your success depends on it.

To keep your message front and center you need to...



Find software and hardware vendors that are willing to sit down with the healthcare facility and try to comprehend its mission.

Travis Kircher, DigitalSignageToday.com 2010



### What you need to know—an overview

As you formulate your digital signage budget, you will need to look at start-up and one-time fees, as well as annual costs. One-time costs can often be financed, if desired. As you review the list below of what is included in digital signage, please note that not all vendors provide all of these services or components, and may require you to use third party sources as well.

#### Elements of a digital signage offering may include the following:

- Technical site survey (in some cases may be waived with purchase)
- High-definition monitors (one-time fee)
- Media players (one-time fee)
- Media player software (one-time purchase and/or annual fees)
- Mounting brackets, cables, and other installation hardware (one-time fees)
- Power drops, internet access, and internal wiring (typically your responsibility)
- Installation and project management (one-time fees)
- Content management software (one-time purchase and/or annual fees)

- Other hardware (is a server required to host the software?)
- Technical support and maintenance (annual fees; not all vendors include this as part of their service)
- Special design services (to incorporate your unique branding elements)
- Content creation, management, and programming (who will “own” it?)
- Special applications (what’s included?)
- Training (up front, and as new users come on board)
- Ongoing support and warranties (many companies are now charging different fees for different support levels. Note that these prices can vary extensively.)

*Each of these areas will be specifically addressed in this document.*

## **Technical Site Survey**

A vendor-partner who walks your halls with you will be able to make recommendations and assess your monitor locations first hand. Working with a company who understands healthcare and the challenges presented by the physical layouts of healthcare facilities will be to your advantage.

The technical site survey will take into account your communications objectives based on your unique audiences. Who are these audiences? Where are they waiting, congregating, working, etc? What are they are doing in the presence of each monitor? An effective survey will require assistance from marketing, IT, and facilities departments and will assess the following:

- Identification of appropriate monitor locations depending on viewing audiences
- Appropriate monitor size for each location
- Proper mounting and all other hardware required (e.g. video distribution equipment)
- Media player location
- Internal wiring, internet, and power requirements
- Target audiences, audience size, and traffic patterns at each location
- Desired content to play on the monitors (e.g. is audio required?)
- Communications goals and objectives for each audience at each location

The technical site survey gives your vendor all the information necessary to provide a detailed price quotation as well as installation, setup, and content programming recommendations. For planning purposes, figure 1-3 hours of survey time per building.

A vendor who performs this type of survey will understand and know the layout of your facility and will be able to make recommendations and guide you with any necessary changes should you decide to add new monitors or players or change the location of monitors. A vendor who visits your facility will have a more solid understanding of the facility infrastructure and also be able to offer better product support long term.

## **Price range**

A technical site survey is usually charged at an hourly rate, so plan for approximately \$150-\$175/hour plus any travel related expenses.

## **Questions to ask about the technical site survey:**

1. Do you provide a technical site survey as part of your service and is there an additional cost?
2. What does the technical site survey entail, and what will you be looking for during the survey?
3. What is your experience in surveying healthcare facilities? Do you look for elevator and surgery walls, water and oxygen lines, and other important factors that will affect the drilling of walls and installation?
4. What personnel do we need to have present during the survey (e.g. IT, facilities, marketing, HR?)
5. What is the end result of the technical site survey? (You should receive a detailed written report including all possible locations and the components needed for each location's installation. Photos of each location should be included to assist you in making final location decisions and assist with the installation process. This information will be necessary in order for your vendor to provide a detailed and accurate price quotation for your entire project.)

## **HARDWARE and SOFTWARE**

### **High-definition (HD) monitors**

Monitors display your digital signage messages. There are many decisions to make, and you will need to consider monitor type and size according to each physical location. What are the advantages/disadvantages of plasma versus LCD, 720p or 1080p? It is important to assess the viewing habits of each audience when considering location. Will the text be large enough on a 32" monitor if most people view it from 15 feet away or would a 42" monitor be more appropriate? This information can be obtained via a technical site survey by an experienced vendor, where the appropriate size monitor is determined for each location. A technical site survey will also examine your facility's existing infrastructure to determine if it is even feasible for monitors to be installed in your desired locations. If you already have monitors, this survey can help assess if they are suitable for digital signage use.

## Which monitors are the best?

Monitors are usually plasma or LCD screens. In almost all cases, you will want to purchase commercial high-definition LCD monitors.

### Here's why:

- LCD technology requires less power to run (less power consumption) and has a lifespan approximately 2 times that of plasma.
- High-definition monitors are clearer and easier to read and view. This helps to more effectively engage your audiences.
- Plasma technology may have a "burn-in" effect which can permanently disfigure the screen when static content is continuously played.
- Phosphors in plasma screens lose luminosity over time, resulting in a gradual decline of absolute image brightness.
- LCD monitors weigh less than plasma and tube monitors.
- LCD monitor prices are competitively priced.
- LCD monitors are available in larger sizes, including 65" or larger.

*Note: Be aware that continual technological advances and price decreases may soon make other technologies viable alternatives as well.*

## Commercial versus consumer models

Be sure to use ONLY commercial grade monitors. In some cases, these monitors may be comparable in price to consumer models, but they are designed for 24/7 use in digital signage applications and typically come with multi-year on-site warranties. Purchasing cheap monitors in order to save a little money up front may backfire in the long run and may also lead to increased consumer model costs for video distribution hardware.

## Speakers

Some monitor models come with pre-attached speakers while others have optional speakers. If you are considering audio for your digital signage platform, take into account the type of content being played, the location, ambient noise, and competing audio sources like overhead music, announcements, and broadcast TV. Also, consider employees who may be working in a given area. If the audio is a 20-minute loop, they will hear the same thing 24 times in an 8-hour shift.

## Price range

Price varies considerably for monitors and depends on size, brand, and resolution. As of January 2011, monitor prices can range from below \$700 for a 32" to over \$7,000 for a 65" high-definition LCD commercial grade monitor. Monitor prices typically decrease over time for a given technology.

### Questions to ask about monitors:

1. Do you use commercial or consumer models?
2. What manufacturers' brands do you use?
3. Is there a warranty included, or offered separately, and what kind is it?
4. Are speakers included or do they need to be added, if desired?
5. Will you perform monitor installation for us?

## Media players

A media player is a device that plays content (consisting of graphics, images, animations, live or recorded video, and/or text) and delivers it to one or more monitors. The number of players required is determined by the monitor locations and the type of content delivered to each monitor, as well as the vendor's technology. Different content programs will need different players.

In many cases, one media player can support multiple monitor locations if locations are physically proximal to each other and play identical content. With closed circuit television (CCTV), only one player would be required to stream identical content to all monitors in patient rooms. The actual configuration can only be determined by a technical site survey.

The technology used by some vendors requires one player per monitor. For example, some vendors provide a player that is integrated within a monitor. This type of technology typically involves increased up-front equipment costs because of the one-to-one connection. (A monitor with an integrated player will be more expensive than an equivalent off-the-shelf commercial monitor which would use a separate player and potentially share it with multiple monitors.)

## Software

Media player software may be priced separately from the player hardware. There is software that is loaded on the media player and there is content management software that controls the players. Content management software is typically either web-based (SaaS model, see box on next page) or loaded and maintained on your server. Important things to consider with software are the system requirements, who will maintain it, and how you will receive software updates. Make sure any price quotes you receive include technical support for your system.

## What you need to know

### SaaS software (“Software as a service”)

Subscription-based software where a vendor licenses an application for clients to use as a service on demand

#### Benefits:

- Remotely hosted network - no investment in servers (an otherwise expensive undertaking)
- New features updated by vendor – client does not need to do anything
- Access software from any location via a browser

## Security

Security will be foremost on the minds of your IT Network Security departments. Do you know what type of security is available?

### Questions to ask regarding software:

1. Are there varying levels of controls and security in the software?
2. How will the software and digital signage system impact our systems and network?
3. What about social sharing – is there any social hierarchy or sharing across and within the organization?  
Does the system allow for this type of sharing?

## Price range

When researching media player pricing, please make sure you know the difference between the player and the player “system.” Be sure to ask whether the player system includes the software license necessary to run the program and deliver the content to monitors. Player hardware usually ranges from \$1,200 to \$3,200 and a player “system” including licensing can raise this one-time fee. Many companies charge an annual or monthly usage or subscription fee for software that is separate from one-time hardware and software costs.

## Questions to ask about media players, systems, and software:

1. Is the price quoted just for the player hardware alone, or is it for the player system, including all software licensing and warranties? What's included in the price? What items cost extra?
2. Does the player system include access to any existing healthcare content or content library? What are the annual fees for content and what do these fees include?
3. Do you have the proper licensing to legally display all of the formats supported by your player, and all of the content in your library?
4. How many monitors can run off a single player? Are there any limitations with regard to distance between a monitor and player?
5. Does the player system deliver high-definition content? Is the content resolution in high-definition?
6. Is the player capable of playing a variety of content types, including recorded and live streaming video, graphic messages, and animations?
7. Can I upload my own content that I have created for other media? What formats are compatible?
8. Is the software web-based or does it require us to maintain it on additional equipment?
9. Can I make changes when I am not in the office?

## INSTALLATION and PROJECT MANAGEMENT

### Installation hardware

Monitor mounts secure digital signage monitors to walls, ceilings, columns, or other locations. There is a wide range in the price of mounts, as the mount size and type are dependent on the monitor size and location. In the majority of cases, it will be most "space-effective" to mount a monitor to the wall or ceiling, versus taking up valuable floor space with a freestanding digital display (i.e. some kind of cabinet). A mount for a wall can be flat or have tilt/swinging options. In certain locations, it is necessary to use a ceiling pole mount or a swing-arm mount. A technical site survey can determine mount requirements.

Please be aware of other items you may require that you will want to make sure are included in your price quotation. These items can include player mounts, monitor mounts, cables/wiring, video distribution equipment (transmitters, receivers, and splitters), and physical security locks. The distances from a monitor to the player can affect the cost of this equipment. Only a technical site survey can determine what equipment is required so you can obtain an accurate price quote.

## Price range

Depending on the monitor size and location, wall mounts alone can range from less than \$200 to \$1,000 or more. Installation equipment can cost \$400 to \$1,200, and possibly more, for each monitor. This cost should cover mounting, cabling, video distribution hardware (splitters, transmitters, and receivers) and miscellaneous hardware, such as locks. You will also typically need to provide your own Cat5 wiring/cabling, if needed.

## Questions to ask about installation hardware:

1. What other hardware is required to run this system?
2. What hardware is my facility responsible for providing (versus the vendor's responsibility?)
3. How do I determine what type of monitor mounts I need?
4. Are you able to install monitors on brick or cement walls?
5. Does the cost of installation increase if the distance between the media player and the monitor increases?

## Installation

Proper digital signage installation requires a thorough technical site survey. Only a technical site survey can accurately estimate installation time. A rough approximation would be between 2-3 hours per monitor, and 3-4 hours per player including cabling, player installation, testing, project management, and materials tracking. If there are any special requests such as putting monitors in elevators, the technical site survey will determine how much more time these special or unique installations could take, along with any special equipment requirements. If your vendor does not perform the installations, and uses a third party, you will want to find out how closely your vendor monitors their work and who you will need to go to if there are any problems. Note also that your vendor will most likely require assistance from your facility services department in surveying, planning, and performing the actual installation. Your vendor will not want to put any holes in your walls without obtaining your permission first. Typically, your facilities or IT department will be responsible for providing electrical outlets, internet access, and any required internal wiring (e.g. Cat5.)

## Price range

Plan for installation fees ranging from \$130 to \$190 per person per hour.

## Questions to ask about installation:

1. Does your company perform the installations or do you use 3rd party installers? If so, will I need to have any contact with this 3rd party or will you handle all of my questions and problems directly?

2. Will you manage the project or do I need to?
3. How much time is required of my facility services department in assisting with installations?
4. What work are we responsible for and expected to have completed before you arrive to install equipment? What directions/specifications will you provide?
5. Do your installers look for water and oxygen lines before drilling? Do they understand the uniqueness of healthcare facilities where rooms are backed up to other rooms that may have unique features like these?
6. Do your installers know about infection control and dust control standards? (Note: You should not have to teach your vendor/installers about the importance of understanding these types of healthcare compliance issues)

## Project management

Healthcare digital signage is a very large undertaking, and it is important you work with a vendor who is vested in your success and who also understands the opportunities along the way where this project can fail. The right planning, organization, and partnership between your facility and vendor will offer you the best chance of meeting and exceeding your goals. Make sure your vendor has the right service model and project management capabilities to meet your communications objectives and grow and sustain an effective digital signage platform with you over-time.

### What you need to know

#### CMS

In the digital signage world, you will see “CMS” used a lot. It refers to the “Content Management System” promoted by most vendors. Be careful to understand the difference between “software” and “system,” as a system will be more comprehensive in offering. Also, just because a vendor has a CMS does not mean they have a content library. Most vendors will be able to help with content creation for an additional fee, upon request, often through third party content providers.

## CONTENT STRATEGY and PLANNING

Before you move forward with purchasing system hardware and software, consider the content you want to play. Who is going to be viewing your content, where, and when? Who is going to create your content or where are you going to get it? Who is going to plan for and maintain the quantity, variety, quality, and integrity of all of your content for your unique audiences? Who is going to schedule your content?

Beware of vendors who quote a price for a system without including digital signage-specific content development or management costs. These vendors assume you will create, fulfill, and deliver 100% of your own content. Just having a supply of content already does not ensure it is of the quality and format needed for large high-definition, digital wide-screen viewing. Excessive use of non-HD content that has the look and feel of PowerPoint is not going to promote your brand in a positive light or communicate effectively with your audiences. Digital signage is a very visible medium and runs 24/7. If the content is not updated regularly, it will be ignored or become annoying, and you will get complaints. You want content that is visually engaging enough to attract attention and deliver the results you need. Some vendors will offer content libraries and design services, others will not.

### Pay careful attention!

1. You may have a lot of pre-existing content that does not transfer or translate well into proper viewing on large, high-definition monitors. Content designed for your website or letter-size PDF documents will most likely have too much copy and will not be appropriately sized for digital signage.
2. Videos vary in length and quality and do not always deliver messages that are appropriate to your audiences where they are waiting. Also, audio may not be desirable for many monitor locations.
3. Many PowerPoint and Word presentations contain too much text for digital signage viewing. Also, these file formats do not look good because the resolution is not high enough for these large monitors. It is best to use these types of software programs for quick communication updates, not branding efforts.
4. Be careful of vendors who say they “can do whatever you want,” or “we serve any industry.” Healthcare is complicated and unlike other industries. The ER staff and telemetry nurses could be segmented into two different content audiences, as could the patients in your imaging center and cardiac waiting room. You need a vendor with solid healthcare experience who understands that these are all unique audiences, each with their own communications challenges that need to be addressed in order for your content to have impact and make a difference.

Digital signage content needs to be planned, managed, delivered, revised, and updated routinely for multiple audiences, all with varying communications needs. It is imperative to look for a vendor who offers you content options that include:

- A relevant and expansive healthcare content library that is easy to access and includes readily available updated content and clinically accurate healthcare messages.
- Messages that enable you to add your own call-to-action tag lines and drive behavior, e.g. have customers call a certain phone number, make an appointment, sign up for a trial, or visit a website. (This is to track any ROI or ROE.)
- Custom content your vendor can create for you, assuming they have the design expertise.
- Ability for you to upload directly into your system content you create internally with your design team.

- Ability for you to quickly create messages online using a variety of custom pre-designed backgrounds that include your unique branding, available for you to use at any time.
- Ability to upload pre-recorded video and stream live video to all monitors (especially valuable in connecting and communicating with off-campus audiences.)
- Dependable supply of fresh, animated, and dynamic content to meet your needs. **The importance of unique, audience-centered content that is current, visually captivating, relevant to your audiences, and sustainable cannot be stressed enough. Digital signage is a living, breathing system that needs to be continually fed, and in healthcare that means a “healthy” dose of the right kind of health content.**
- Ability to integrate with specific existing data sources to display this information automatically on monitors.

It is also possible that you want your digital signage content to cross over into other mediums such as your closed circuit television (CCTV) system in patient rooms. This may be an important application for your internal communications, and you'll want to discuss this capability with your vendor.

### Managing multiple content channels or zones on a monitor

The decision to use more than one content viewing area (i.e. “channel” or “zone”) on a monitor is not something that should be taken lightly. It is an easy decision if the monitor is small (say 32”) because of a small or tight location. In this situation only one content channel makes sense, otherwise no one will be able to read the messages due to their small size. However, in larger, high traffic areas with larger monitors, it is very tempting to put as many channels or content areas on there as possible. Before you decide consider the following:

- Always go back to your initial communications objective or even your mission statement and look at the message you want to communicate, along with the experience you desire for your viewers that will ultimately impact their overall experience in your hospital. Bombarding people with overwhelming amounts of information is not going to relieve anxiety or even ensure your messages are received.
- Who is going to manage all these different content areas? The more areas you need to fill, the more content you need to create change and keep it fresh.
- Where do you want your viewers’ eyes to go? If you want them to absorb your main message, then you will want to minimize other distractions and other messages.

It all comes down to the experience you want your patients, employees, physicians and others to have with your hospital. There are many options to consider, and they will vary depending on where monitors are located in your hospital. If you are to be a trusted source of health information and have the ability to connect and engage audiences with what your hospital has to offer, then you will want to be careful about just supplying news and other information that is easily found elsewhere. When people are in your hospital, using your services, they are captive; this is an opportunity you do not want to miss.

## Your digital signage content should:

- Elevate the level of professionalism and branding in your facility.
- Streamline communications throughout your organization.
- Relieve patient anxiety and address FAQs with “what to expect” messages.
- Support your quality initiatives and patient safety programs. Let your audiences know where you stand on quality. Digital signage is the perfect opportunity to showcase your “transparency.”
- Encourage patients and others to use your other services and inspire employees to refer their friends and family.
- Establish your facility as a health resource, not just a place people go to when ill.
- Support physician efforts in patient education.
- Help patients and their families access care and understand processes, procedures, etc. with “what to expect” information.
- Provide patient education to help employees maintain a state of “survey readiness” for Joint Commission visits.
- Encourage referrals and event registration.
- Let people know they are important, their time is valued, and their healthcare concerns are legitimate.
- Recognize outstanding employees and introduce new physicians.

“As technologies advance, so does our perspective on content. As connectedness becomes part of our thinking, the advancement of content and engagement will excel to reach new heights of experience that lives on in the minds of the consumer longer and in more latent ways. It all begins with a display or an array of displays and is never ending with content.”

“New technology will change engagement through digital signage,”  
Keith Kelson, Digital signage today.com, April 12, 2010

## Tips for optimal content and design layouts:

- Make the most important point the most prominent – consider where you want the viewer’s eyes to go to first.
- Keep your image consistent with your brand – and the rest of the marketing in your hospital.
- Use color, contrast, and font/image size well – to catch the viewer’s attention and make your message stand out and easy to read.
- Understand how motion affects the viewer – Is your display too busy? Is there too much movement or none at all? Where is the viewer going to look first? Does the movement distract from what you are really trying to convey?
- Deliver content you want your audiences to see, feel, experience, and learn about – but don’t overdo it. Deliver your message, give your audience a chance to respond, and move on. If the point is important, make it again at another time. Reinforcement is good, redundancy is not.
- Remember to keep it simple! – It’s not always easy to do, but remember the point is not just to deliver a message, but to deliver it in such a way that the viewer understands the message and is provided with the opportunity to respond to it.

## Programming and Scheduling

We understand “programs” as they relate to television, and we know the word “playlists” as they relate to mp3 players, for example. So how do programs or playlists translate to the effectiveness of digital signage in communicating to unique audiences? This is an area you need to pay careful attention to when planning your content and in looking at the results you expect to achieve.

### What you need to know

#### Digital signage “programming”

Programming comes from the world of broadcasting, promoting an optimal arrangement of messages to be played in sequence for a particular audience.

Effective programming gives healthcare organizations an edge when it comes to influencing the behavior of their audiences by ensuring the right content is played at the right time in the right location.

Carefully crafted programs that the user can schedule to play as well as the ability to add and drop messages at any time will add up to the most effective messaging for your target audiences, delivering results by getting people to act on your messages.

Your content management software should be able to consistently deliver content to your media player system when you want and need it. This software should allow you to create playlists or programs for each monitor and allow you to:

1. Schedule your program play times.
2. Add and remove messages at your discretion.
3. Make changes to a message and then schedule the revised message for play once again.
4. Access a web-based system remotely. A locally hosted system may not allow you to update and/or utilize existing or new content from multiple locations, such as from home or while traveling. You will need to take into account the limitations of a local system.
5. Move/copy messages from one program to another.
6. Add/delete messages to/from multiple programs at the same time (easily).
7. Store unused messages in folders for later use.

## Templates

Templates help with branding different types of digital signage communications to your unique audiences. For example, a CME template that is easily recognizable to physicians on their way to get coffee in the doctor's lounge can give them the information they need in a short amount of time. And, if they see this template every month, they will come to depend on it as a valuable source of readily available information.

## File formats

Be sure to use the right file formats. Many are not optimal or even effective for large-screen high definition viewing and may even denigrate the value and appearance of your communications.

You want a system that enables you to create your own content, provides ready-made health content allowing you to target each of your healthcare audiences, and also offers a combination of the two. Some vendors can also supply completely customized content. Your digital signage vendor should be able to provide a variety of static image screens, as well as screens with movement (including video, animation, or both). Some companies also provide modules for weather and news, among other types. It is up to you to determine the value of offering this type of content and its potential impact on your audiences versus any associated additional costs.

## Price range

The cost of buying custom content varies greatly depending on quantity, quality, and vendor. A self-service content management system with graphics and technical support can be upwards of \$4,500 annually. Some vendors include a content library as a part of their annual fees, some vendors offer outside advertising agency assistance, and some offer graphics services internally. Animated content can cost at least \$2,500 to \$5,000 per animation or up to \$250/hour for creating custom content. You will need to do a side-by-side comparison to see what each vendor is offering at what price. Agencies will charge \$300 or more per static digital signage message.

## Questions to ask about content:

1. What do the content management fees include?
2. Once I create my content, what are the data storage fees?
3. Do you provide a library of ready-made healthcare content of interest to my targeted healthcare audiences?
4. What file formats will not translate well for viewing on large digital monitors? Which ones translate optimally?
5. What is the cost to have you or your third party vendor create content?

## The ad model – What you need to know if considering this for your hospital

Many are of the opinion that the ROI of ad-funded use of digital signage across all industries has been minimal, at best.

“The new mobile world makes it incumbent on the digital signage provider to deploy a visual solution that has an inherent value proposition beyond that of just delivering an advertisement.”

Steve Gurley, Ad-funded digital signage,  
Is there a future in it? June 2010

## What you need to know

### Ad-funded vs. Ad-supported

If you are considering an ad-model approach, it is important to understand the difference between ad-funded and ad-supported.

**Ad-funded** is where the digital signage system is supplied to you at little or no cost. Your vendor then sells ads on your monitor to recoup their costs. This may take place on one of the side content areas.

**Ad-supported** is where you would purchase the system from your vendor and then try to sell advertising to offset the cost of the system, or even make a profit. You would most likely approach suppliers, local businesses, and retailers on your campus to advertise in available space on your monitors.

Advertising and the digital signage medium seem to be a natural fit, so why isn't the model growing?

As smartphones develop in their ability to target individuals by location, buying habits, personal preferences, etc., marketers are projected to spend ad dollars on the "mobile experience." With this gravitation towards mobile phones, it is important that digital signage communications not focus on an ad model that will not be able to sustain itself long term. (Ad-Funded Digital Signage: Is There a Future in it? A whitepaper by Steve Gurley, June 2010.)

And, of course, in healthcare the dynamics are even more complex. HIPAA regulations, privacy, and competitor activity make the sharing of valuable internal communications even a stickier point of contention. Control over your content and how it is being delivered to your audiences should take priority. Keeping your audiences focused on your message and not anyone else's will pay off in the long run.

## TRAINING

All vendors should provide training and support in how to use their system. These costs will vary significantly depending on the type of system provided, the number of people to be trained, where the training is to be performed, etc.

## Questions to ask regarding training:

1. What type of training do you provide?
2. How long will the training take and how many people can you accommodate?
3. Where is the training performed? Do you have web-based training? Do you provide on-site, hands-on training?
4. Are there additional training fees if there are changes in personnel or new people are brought in over time who are new to the system? What are those fees?

## SERVICE and SUPPORT

What happens if something goes wrong, technically or otherwise? Does your vendor provide 24/7 support? What if your program just isn't getting the communications job done—is there someone you can call for guidance and support? What happens if you want to include another location in your signage plan and add a new monitor? Will you have one contact person who handles your account? Does your vendor know your account, or are you just another number? Undertaking a project of this nature requires technical support and assistance, 24/7 monitoring, remote service maintenance, and software updates. Some vendors offer ongoing, daily support to deal with any software issues, best practices, message ideas and implementation of campaigns, and phased expansion of your system.

Undoubtedly, you will have questions and need support as you use digital signage. Even if you are using a system where you are in control of your content and its design and distribution, you need to know your vendor understands your challenges, your objectives, and your audiences, and is there for you!

## Questions to ask regarding service and support:

1. What type of monitoring and technical support are provided? Is your support 24/7? How much does it cost?
2. What type of customer support is provided for software questions or guidance with your content and campaigns? How much does this cost?
3. What resources do you provide regarding best practices for digital signage, specifically in healthcare, to help optimize our system?

## EQUIPMENT WARRANTIES

### Warranties and service contracts

Today, there are 3-year on-site warranties for many commercial monitors, so it may not be necessary to obtain extended warranties. Please ask your vendor about the specific warranties they provide and what they cover. An extended warranty, if available, usually depends on the initial purchase price of the monitor.

### Questions to ask regarding warranties:

1. What exactly does my warranty cover?
2. How long is the warranty coverage?
3. What is the process for replacing a monitor or getting one fixed if something should go wrong?
4. Is there a warranty on the media player? What type and for how long? What is the process for repairing/replacing a player if something goes wrong?

For information about ChannelCare digital signage, exclusively for healthcare, please call Vericom at 800-800-1090 or visit us at [www.vericom.net](http://www.vericom.net).