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Four Benefits of Digital Signage in Libraries

How the technology can enhance wayfinding, promotions, education and mobile apps.

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D igital signage is becoming increasingly popular in a wide variety of venues, from stores to stadiums to restaurants. One surprising location where digital signage is gaining strong footholds is libraries. Here, signage is able to inform and educate customers while blending into the quiet environment of the library.

"Digital signage is a great technology to allow the treasures of the library to become more evident to patrons," said Richard Turner, regional sales manager for St. Paul, Minn.-based Tightrope Media Systems, a creator of digital signage systems.

Promotions

Libraries in all locations serve as community centers. Public libraries host author events and other educational content; university libraries do the same and serve as a study center for students. With the right technology, libraries are excellent venues for distributing information to a community.

If a library is having a reading by an author, the picture of the author and the book can be placed on the signage screens in high-traffic areas, such as the lobby and the

Photo: Flickr-jblyberg

If library staff members are occupied assisting other visitors, digital signage also can showcase the availability of newly returned items.

circulation desk. If a new book is in stock, the library can post an image of the book cover, a brief description of the book and tell patrons where to find it. The same is true of new movies or videos in stock. In the past, libraries would promote events through flyers on a bulletin board, but the strong, dynamic visuals of digital signage are much more eye catching.

"We've had students stop and do a double-take as they pass by (the signage) and stop and read it if it's a new message," said John Wohlers, library technology coordinator of Sugar Grove, Ill.-based Waubonsee Community College where digital signage has been used in the library since fall 2009. Wohlers also adds that students have specifically referenced seeing a book on the screens when inquiring about that book to a staff member.

New technology

The signage also can promote new technology. At Waubonsee, the library has a mobile app, a library-on-the-go where students can use their mobile phones to find out information about the library. The signage gives students a code that they enter into their phones to access the mobile library app.

"People have said to me they would not have even heard of the mobile library if not for the digital signage," Wohlers said.

Not only is the signage more eye catching for promoting books and events, it is actually less expensive and more efficient than the old method of using paper flyers. Using digital signage over paper also decreases waste.

Wayfinding

Libraries have an abundance of information available. However, the sheer size of a library, the prodigious number of books and shelves can seem very intimidating to a newcomer, who might not know where to begin. Many libraries also are facing funding issues, which means they may not have a large staff on hand to assist everyone who enters. If staff members are occupied helping other customers, digital signage also can serve as a wayfinding device, directing people to the sections and the books they're looking for.

Information

Screens can also be used to educate people about the building itself. The Kingwood Branch Library in Harris County, Texas, has one screen that shows information about upcoming events and other library information, such as operating hours and holiday closings. And another screen showcases via a PowerPoint presentation the ways in which the building is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified building.

Digital Signage Content

Digital signage can be used to display information, such as:

➢ Building history

➢ Upcoming events

➢ Operating hours

➢ Holiday closings

➢ Emergency information

The signage also can be used to broadcast emergency information. If a fire alarm goes off, it can inform people of the situation and direct them to the proper exits. If it is a university library and there is an intruder on campus and the school is going into lock down, the signage can get the message out quickly. If the school is abruptly closing due to an urgent weather event like a snowstorm or a hurricane, the signage can also inform students of that. The content management system should have the flexibility to allow the staff to interrupt normal content with emergency messages.

This functionality can be used in ways other than emergencies, too. If there is an event about to happen in the library, such as an author's reading or a class or lecture on how to use library technology, the signage can display a message alerting patrons when the event is beginning and where it is located. The signage can even be connected to a library's Google calendar, so that if an event is typed into the calendar, a reminder can pop up on the digital signage a short time before the event will take place.

About the sponsor: *Tightrope Media Systems develops Web-based digital signage and broadcast systems designed to be very easy to use while providing a high degree of functionality. The St. Paul, Minn.-based company's communications tools incorporate the latest technological capabilities along with reliability to assist organizations in a variety of fields, from education to health care to retail.*