

Three Key Considerations for Purchasing a Drive-Thru Display

Choosing the right outdoor signage can make a drive-thru display more effective, but before making a purchase, it's important to ask the right questions.

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Outdoor signage options abound for QSR operators, and the number of considerations entailed within the decision-making process can be daunting. This white paper examines three of those considerations which are especially key, and how a potential deployer might begin to evaluate choices in light of them. They are: measurable results, securing content and hardware configurations.

Measurement objectives

The imperative with measurement objectives is best viewed in terms of increasing revenue and saving costs.

Increasing revenue. Outdoor drive-thru signage can reach the customer with the right message at the right time in a clear, pleasing and even exciting manner. A hungry customer is open to, and welcomes, suggestions. With proper metrics and monitoring, measurable objectives include enhancing appetite appeal at the point of sale, promoting up-sell and enhancing the customer experience.

To measure how well messages are reaching the customer, consider how well the customer understands the available selections, which graphics (static vs. digital graphics vs. animations) result in higher sales of specific items and how nutritional information impacts both number of customers and specific item sales. Other measurements can include customer impressions of civic promotions, how well automating day-parting contributes to the bottom line, whether food and beverage promotions are effective and if so, which messages work best.

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Reducing costs. Many QSR managers view cost savings as a significant factor when making outdoor signage decisions. The costs of digital signage eventually are overcome by the reduction or elimination of expenditures for printing, shipping and labor costs associated with static signage.

Content creation and delivery

Sourcing static signage is fairly simple; because static signage has a long history of success, static QSR content specialists abound.

Sourcing digital content, however, is not nearly so simple. When a company decides digital signage better meets profit and cost-savings objectives, the company must, if they are not creating the signage themselves, find a content creation partner that understands the technology.

One example of the difference between static and digital design is that the same graphics will display differently. Colors, backgrounds, fonts, and resolutions that look perfect in print will be inadequate in digital format. The right content partner will understand the differences, including the nuances of interior vs. exterior graphic design.

Another question to ask is how the content will be delivered. If a static display is chosen, then delivery will be manual. With digital displays, content delivery will involve a number of hardware and software determinations, which also must include backup systems to combat signal delivery failures.

Once signage formats are determined, the company needs a pre-rollout plan. QSRs should conduct pilot tests, field tests, content tests for measuring effective messaging, overall assessment and adjustments, possible retestings and then the roll-outs.

Selecting the signage

Sign selection is dependent on how it can meet measurement objectives and access to suitable content. For some, a static



Outdoor drive-thru signage, like the menu board seen above, can reach the customer with the right message at the right time.



An outdoor digital menu display allowed one QSR flexibility and attracted customers.

menu board meets the objectives and delivers an easy way to get up and running without investing in digital infrastructure. Others may be ready for an all-digital system. (This need not be an either/or decision. Uni-Structures Inc., for example, a Kennesaw, Ga.-based company, offers hybrid displays that can easily be upgraded from static to digital.)

For others, digital signage better meets objectives. But evaluating digital signage displays is an expertise that few master, especially as the technology continues to evolve. An understanding of the technologies, options and minimum specifications for static boards assists evaluation.

Sizes of digital boards are deceptive; whereas one might think larger is better, that is not always the case. The optimal sizes of digital drive-thru signs are 32” and 40” for menu boards and 46” and 55” for pre-sell displays. These sizes deliver readability without causing neck strain.

The board must be able to display the entire existing menu. Landscape-to-portrait adjustment aids flexibility as does picture-in-picture. PIP also eliminates the cost of separate order confirmation boards.

Outdoor digital signs must be readable in full direct sunlight — the display needs light output of at least 2000 True NITS of brightness. Environmental considerations also come into play — variables include glare reduction, temperature controls (AC and heat) and more.

LED backlighting isn't necessarily the best for outdoor QSR digital signage. In this age when LED is all the rage, a buyer of outdoor digital menu signage may find that hot cathode fluorescent lamps (HCFL) provide a better option than LED. HCFL is more service-oriented, makes the display run better and, yielding twice the lifetime, costs less.

Then there are hidden costs to consider. Whereas each display unit may have a price tag, other costs the buyer needs to consider are shipping, installation, separate

AC and heater purchases and recurring utilities costs, and how the display will be powered. Significant, too, is maintenance. A buyer must learn the frequency, difficulty and expenses associated with maintaining the display.

Security also is important. The display must be tamper-proof, with tempered glass and theft-resistant housing. Along the lines of security, too, is ensuring that data is always backed up, that the displays are monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week and that the system can be restored quickly in the event of failure.

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Today's choices in outdoor signage are varied, and whether high tech or low, offer better solutions than ever before in history. Knowing the right questions to ask during the decision-making process ensures the best investment.

About the sponsor: *Uni-Structures Inc. is a specialty canopy and awning manufacturing company whose drive-thru offerings include a family of sunlight-readable digital menu boards. Since 1995, it has provided innovative products to quick-service restaurants to help enhance their drive-thru services. Uni-Structure's mission is to help restaurants increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the drive-thru business through the application of innovative products in around their drive-thru lanes.*