

NEC Display Solutions for Shopping Malls

In a world that's becoming increasingly fast-paced, on-demand and interconnected, going digital is a necessary transition for today's shopping malls. But it's hard to know where to begin. With so many options and so many changes in the digital marketplace, researching and deciding on the right visual display solution could cost you time and money in and of itself. Instead, you can take advantage of the knowledge and resources of NEC's retail experts, who are well equipped to tailor a display system designed specifically to meet the growing needs of shopping malls. Using this guide, you can prepare yourself with some common questions and issues to consider when starting a conversation about digital signage systems.



How does a mall benefit from a digital signage system?

Informs and interacts with your shoppers. Strategic placement in heavy traffic areas such as the food court or main entrances can help communicate with your visitors—particularly those in search of basic information such as store locations and mall services. Interactive components like touchscreen kiosks can be useful in wayfinding, while motion-activated screens can directly address passersby.

Reinforces your brand image. Digital signage can immediately refresh the mall experience with a high-tech look and feel. Trend-savvy shoppers and storeowners will respond to your mall's commitment to staying up-to-date with the latest technology. Images, logos and their accompanying color palettes are presented in optimal, true form. The color and image accuracy of professional-grade LCD screens, combined with NEC's award-winning SpectraViewII™ technology, far surpasses the varying reproduction quality of printed signage. Additionally, consumers are able to interact with your brand using a digital medium on all sensory levels, adding to the overall experience. You have the flexibility of using photo images, movie files, or even relevant news feeds. Keep your customer, informed, entertained and connected.

Generates extra revenue. Digital signage can generate more advertising revenue opportunities, from both retailers within the mall and corporate communications companies. See it as a valuable piece of real estate that can be rented out, while sacrificing less square footage.

Saves on costs. Static posters and banners are costly to replace over time, especially if you want your content to remain relevant and interesting to the customer. Going digital saves a step in the production process by going straight from the design phase to live display; no more waiting on printed materials, paying extra for expedited shipping and insurance, and then investing in manpower for installations. By playing a slideshow of JPEG files or video clips in MPEG format, you're able to use common media formats and convey as many messages as you need on one screen, rather than facing the clutter of posters and POS displays. To further help your budget, NEC offers its Total Trade™ replacement and recycling program, which updates your outdated technology equipment with the latest NEC displays. The trade includes regulatory-compliant removal of industrial waste and the paperwork process of verifying it— saving you not only unexpected costs but also time.

Deploys at your convenience. Most malls will require off-hours installation and service, which is why NEC brings you coordinated deployment services to ensure deadlines are met with minimal impact on the mall's environment—and your management staff. These services include working with union trades and coordinating installation of electrical outlets, low-voltage wiring and network infrastructure.

Helps reduce your environmental impact. Digital signage is an immediate solution to reducing your overall usage of paper, ink and plastics. NEC LCD screens are not only recyclable, but also contain less hazardous materials than other brands. In partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NEC has become very active in developing policies and guidelines to create a more environmentally conscious industry.

Reaches your network's full potential. Simply by using your mall's wireless network, you can set up and control your entire display system from a single point of access—whether it's multiple screens on one level, or screens across many shopping centers. Program when your displays turn on and off according to mall hours. The system is also equipped with self-monitoring software to prevent black screens, checking for those in need of maintenance and automatically sending an e-mail to the support team.

Initial concerns when considering a digital signage system:

This will be too expensive. Financing options are available with attractive pricing, terms and delivery options. You could also consider entering an NEC-sponsored pilot program that tests how a potential system would work in a few key locations before being rolled out across all malls. In a pilot program, NEC may absorb part or all of the initial hardware, software and installation costs for the pilot location(s). Once the system has proven itself, NEC can help roll out the digital signage solution for the rest of your mall locations.

This will be too difficult. While a learning curve is expected, in-person and online tutorials are available to prepare your staff for the transition. Web logins make it easy for you to make changes from any location, while service support is available 24/7. NEC can bring coordinated deployment services to ensure deadlines are met, and if possible, with minimum impact on the mall environment. Your project management team will be able to move the effort forward from start to finish with periodic updates and installation status reports. NEC also serves as your liaison among union trades to coordinate the installation of electrical outlets, low voltage wiring and network infrastructure. Very minimal workload is asked of the management staff.

I know real estate and sales, but I don't know advertising.

Managing and creating content for your digital display system would be ideally handled by a dedicated staff. However, NEC can help create digital marketing messaging for your mall at a monthly fee. Templates can be created to custom-fit your branding guidelines and provide you with an even easier way to update information. It's important to realize that content can make or break your digital signage system, so a dedication to content renewal needs to be established early on.

Am I taking advantage of my digital system? Initially, some may think that a digital screen is just another version of a poster, and therefore only used to display static content. With new dynamic technology, it's necessary to adjust this way of thinking by really exploring the versatility and possibilities of a digital system. Digital media can be live, interactive, branded, and can maximize budgets as well as marketing strategies.

What are some general digital display solutions for malls?

Though some visual display companies may try to convince you otherwise, there is no single “out of the box” solution. Every mall has its own unique set of challenges and business goals, and there are multiple ways of achieving each one, simple or complex.

If you’re looking for a cost-efficient way to improve wayfinding for customers, try a custom-built enclosure with a digital map of the mall, illustrating exactly where stores are located while advertising for them, as well. We can utilize your existing wireless network or a cell phone system to minimize cabling and associated labor costs. NEC can also design a network of digital advertising panels in custom enclosures for both your outdoor and indoor space. If you’re working with a minimal budget, try networked Flash-based systems that can display “infotainment”—a combination of advertising and TV entertainment. Solutions can vary in complexity according to the size of your mall, budget and IT comfort level. That’s why it helps to have a custom-built system that meets your basic needs today, but prepares you for tomorrow’s growth.

Beyond your hardware components, you’ll also be deciding on a network solution to support your displays:

A SaaS/ASP Network Software-as-a-service (SaaS) model is one of the fastest growing segments of digital signage. It can provide a cost-effective alternative to internally managed networks. While you can own the hardware if you desire, you need only subscribe to the software. Access is done through a browser-based user interface. SaaS/ASP is preferred when you have a tight timeline (one-day turnaround), a smaller budget, or have limited bandwidth and IT staff to handle day-to-day maintenance. It’s not recommended when you’re dealing with large-scale security issues or require more sophisticated consumer data retrieval (such as using interactive kiosks).

A LAN/WAN Network is an internal server that resides within your mall’s network and firewall. You own both the hardware and the software, allowing for complete customization (such as designing interactive kiosk data retrieval). Access is done through a browser-based user interface. LAN/WAN is preferred when your existing mall network requires firewall protection, or when your displays demand more sophisticated software writing. It’s not recommended for quick turnaround or those with limited resources.

What are some challenges NEC might face with malls?

Working through the advertising companies.

Many malls (particularly the larger entities) hand off signage responsibilities to large ad agencies, whether it be print or digital. These agencies, in turn, pay the malls a portion of the ad revenue. NEC first has to work with these agencies in order to sell any large digital signage systems to their mall client. Smaller malls are typically more inclined to develop digital systems without needing a “push” from an agency.

Who are the key decision makers?

Management, marketing and IT departments. Most dealerships are franchised with minimal input from the manufacturer. Some franchises own multiple dealerships and operate individually. In dealing with more kiosk-type solutions that involve data retrieval, most of the time the manufacturer’s corporate marketing department acts as the point of contact.

Who are the key decision makers?

Owners, management, IT and marketing departments

What are some qualifying questions to ask?

Current Equipment/Platform

What kind of signage do you currently use?

Do you know what digital signage is?

What kind of content do you intend to play on your screens?

How big a part does digital signage play in your marketing plan?

Are you currently working with a digital signage provider?

Budget

How much money do you spend per year on your marketing (static signs, ads)?

Has a budget been set aside for digital signage?

How many systems would you need per mall location?

Are you interested in a leasing option?

Usage

What are your intended goals with a digital signage system?

How will you use the technology? (Promote sales or build your brand?)

Will you need to retrieve data and feedback from your patrons?

How often will you need to change content?

Does content need to adapt to slow and peak hours?

Integration

How quickly do you need to deploy?

Would you prefer start-to-finish project management or working with your own vendors?

What screen sizes did you have in mind?

Do you prefer wall- or ceiling-mounted screens?

Would you like to see some custom enclosure examples we've done?

Are you a union or non-union shop?

What are the hours of operation? When can we come in to install?

Operation

Who will be managing the system's day-to-day operation?

Who is responsible for content?

Image Quality

Would you like high definition-quality playback?

Do you have high-quality videos and photos?

Are you interested in RSS news feeds that crawl across screen?

Do you need to show regular TV programming?

Network Requirements

What kind of IT infrastructure do you currently have?

Do you currently have an IT department?

Would your IT department be included in infrastructure and security conversations?

Do you use a WAN/LAN?

Do you currently have a wireless network?

Do you have any bandwidth restrictions?

Does your server need to reside inside your firewall?

Do you have an electric and/or network connection at your location or nearby?

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Project Kickoff

1. Project kickoff. Your NEC representative will meet with key decision makers to assess several factors—timeline, ROI model, budget, and generally, what your needs and expectations are for your digital signage system. In collaboration with manufacturing partners, NEC develops a tailored, end-to-end solution, which is reviewed and approved among all involved parties.

2. Project deployment. NEC acts as a general contractor in placing orders with vendors, scheduling installations, securing insurance and finalizing any application/content requirements. A site survey is performed to determine the best placements for your digital signage—how traffic flows, key decision points, proper infrastructure, electrical issues—and the first set of systems are shipped to your location. After testing and equipment inspection, your staff is trained and tutorials are created as needed.

Project Deployment

Pilot Assessment

3. Pilot assessment. If you've chosen to go through with a pilot program, this is when you start receiving feedback from customers, employees and advertisers. An ROI analysis is performed, and a timeline is created for additional deployments, as well as any enhancements to the current system. The effectiveness of the project is continually monitored, and when results are hitting targets, your remaining sites take the full move into deployment stage.

4. Ongoing evaluation. A maintenance plan is built to fit your particular needs and budget. Your NEC representative is continually in contact with you to provide any support or help with troubleshooting the system. With NEC, you're equipped with a total solutions package—from diagnostics and implementation to follow-up service and support. Through one point of contact, you have access to the highest quality technology, superior vendors, and an unrivaled industry-specific service team. No one is more committed to your needs, and no one else offers full complimentary consultations.

Ongoing Evaluation

Why choose NEC?

With NEC, you're equipped with a total solutions package—from diagnostics and implementation to follow-up service and support. Through one point of contact, you have access to the highest quality technology, superior vendors, and an unrivaled industry-specific service team. No one is more committed to your needs, and no one else offers full complimentary consultations.

Unlike competitors, NEC doesn't just offer one solution that's either too big or too small for your current environment. Instead, NEC cost-effectively maximizes the system you start with, equipping it with network capabilities that are ready to grow when you are. Evaluating your unique situation is a hugely important part of the NEC solution process, and can make the most of your investment.

Most importantly, NEC is an industry leader with a longstanding commitment to quality service, product and expertise. There is unparalleled value in working with a global household name, since you can trust that you will be taken care of throughout the lifetime of your digital signage system—and possibly beyond, as the relationship evolves at the rate of technological innovation.