NEC Display Solutions for the Small-to-Medium Business

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

NEC

How does an SMB benefit from a digital signage system?

Saves on costs. Printed materials like static posters and banners are costly to replace over time, especially if you want your content to remain relevant and interesting to your audience. 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 and paying extra for expedited shipping and insurance. By playing a slideshow of JPEG files or playing 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. To further help your budget, NEC offers its Total Trade™ replacement and recycling program, which updates your outdated technology equipment with the latest NEC displays.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.

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

Adopts to your business environment. With every digital signage system comes a detailed site survey to evaluate the unique needs of your particular business environment. To maximize effectiveness, displays are placed according to traffic flow and capitalize on areas containing captive audiences such as waiting rooms. For screens in non-traditional placements, NEC is able to custom-build enclosures to match and blend into your existing environment. When necessary, protective polycarbonate or glass-based covers are incorporated to protect LCD monitors susceptible to harsh contaminants or outdoor elements.

Enhances your existing infrastructure. A new digital signage system can be smoothly integrated into your current inventory and POS system, with user-friendly templates to help efficiently create fresh content. Marketing and IT departments are able to collaborate easily through its all-in-one software, while also encouraging other departments such as sales and operations to participate and provide promotional ideas or in-house needs. Standardizing your overall signage system—in terms of system design, deployment, service and content design—lowers pricing and costs, therefore passing much-needed savings on to other areas of your budget.

Reaches your network's full potential. Minimize the labor and wiring costs usually associated with network deployment by using your office's wireless network. NEC designs a system specific to your working network, ensuring that minimal traffic is used to prevent any IT slowdowns. Many businesses choose to go with a cellular network, avoiding the wireless congestion in crowded environments and cable restrictions in rental spaces. With a networked digital system, you can set up and control your entire display system from a single point of access — whether it's multiple screens in one office or screens across multiple offices and locations. Program when your displays turn on and off according to business hours. The system is also equipped with self-monitoring software that prevents black screens by running regular checks for maintenance issues and automatically sending an e-mail to the support team in the event of a problem.

Offers peace of mind. An NEC digital display system takes care of itself, lifting the burden from your IT staff and maintenance crew. Professional technicians and engineers across the country are partnered with NEC to service digital display customers with 24-7 availability. Additionally, every NEC large-format display comes a three-year standard warranty, while most third-party products used in an NEC system also carry a three-year warranty.

Reinforces your brand image. Digital signage can power your brand with a consistent message, whether it's the voice of a single business or multiple brands of the same parent company. Logos and their accompanying color palettes are presented in optimal, true form; the color and image accuracy of commercial-grade LCD screens, combined with NEC's award-winning SpectraView II™ technology, far surpasses the varying reproduction quality of printed signage. Additionally, your audience is 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.

Relieves the transitional burden off a small staff.
A digital signage system is designed with the user in mind, built to be as easily manageable as possible. Throughout the digital signage process, NEC assists in interviewing all potential system operators and works with them to ensure their comfort with the system. Training and information sessions are available to employees, whether by personal instructor or by web tutorial. Prior to full deployment, you're able to test the software's effect within your existing network so that problems are addressed without full-scale implications.

Initial concerns when considering a digital signage system:

This will be too expensive. In comparison to competitors, NEC has a lower total cost of ownership; lower failure rates in the system equate to lower costs in maintenance and operations. Financing options are also available with attractive pricing, terms and delivery options. Consider entering an NEC-sponsored pilot program that tests how a potential system would work in a few of your key locations. In a pilot program, NEC absorbs part or all of the initial hardware, software and installation costs for the pilot location or locations. Once the system has proved itself, NEC can help roll out the digital signage solution to the rest of the company's locations.

This will be too difficult. While a learning curve is expected, in-person and online tutorials are available to prepare staff for the transition. Web logins make it easy 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 dealership work environment. The project management team will be able to move the effort forward from start to finish with periodic updates and installation status reports. For added convenience, off-hours installation and service can easily be scheduled to avoid compromising business hours. Also, NEC can serve as liaison among union trades to coordinate the installation of electrical outlets, low-voltage wiring and network infrastructure. Very minimal workload is asked of the staff.

How do I keep content fresh? Your marketing department is currently using the same content creation tools as those used to "feed" the digital signage network. With digital signs, you can dynamically change the content, increasing the ROI on the same content. For smaller businesses without access to content assets, NEC can help create digital marketing messaging 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.

What are some general digital display solutions for SMBs?

Though some visual display companies may try to convince you otherwise, there is no single "out of the box" solution. Each SMB may have 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 simple way to translate traditional signage into a digital medium, consider a basic Flash memory-based media player (like an industrial DVD player). If you're intending to gain feedback and data from your customer, consider a networked kiosk. If you just want to create a "wow-factor" among clients and customers, consider a video wall to show off your branded products and services in action. Solutions can vary in complexity according to the size of your business, 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 is an external server that resides outside of your company's network. While you own the hardware, you only have to subscribe to the software. No maintenance is required on your part. 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 company'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 company network requires firewall protection, or when your displays demand more sophisticated software writing. It's not recommended for quick turnaround or for those with limited resources.

What are some challenges NEC might face with SMBs?

Departments are segregated. Conversations with all stakeholders will need to be established early on, as there generally isn't one key decision maker. However, once all departments are involved, you're able to lessen the burden of training and decision making upon one in particular. For example, the marketing department should be involved in the digital solution to ease IT handoff, while also helping to find multiple solutions and needs across the board—especially in managing content creation.

Current IT infrastructure is limited. IT departments usually balk at the burden of a new digital signage system using their network, particularly content that uses streaming HD video. NEC can design a system based on wireless or even cellular network technology, creating an even smoother, more easily manageable solution. With a small business' limited IT staff, NEC offers help with 24/7 service, in-system maintenance checks, and user-friendly tutorials within the software. In one-on-one meetings with IT and marketing groups, PowerPoint™ presentations are used to illustrate software capabilities and answer any questions.

Upfront costs are too high. For smaller businesses, software comes before screens. NEC can offer the most basic "sneakerware" systems, usually built around a simple Flash-based media player (such as an industrial DVD player). NEC provides the business with easy-to-use content management software. More sophisticated components can be added later on when the business is ready.

"TV and PowerPoint are good enough" attitude. This do-it-yourself approach actually adds more burden to the staff, more costs in installment and fails to meet the full potential of dynamic digital technology. There are so many ways to go wrong when transitioning into a digital signage system. Instead, learn from NEC's mistakes; NEC knows what you don't know.

Who are the key decision makers?
Marketing, IT, business owner, sales, and operations/facilities.

What are some qualifying questions to ask?

Current Equipment/Platform

What kind of signage do you currently use?

What kind of content is playing on your screens?

Do you know what digital signage is?

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 office/location?

Usage

What are your intended goals with a digital signage system?

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

Who is your audience?

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

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?

Are you a union or non-union shop?

Operation

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

Who is responsible for content?

If the main office is sponsoring a system, will your branches have input?

Image Quality

Would you like high definition-quality playback?

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

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

Do you use a WAN/LAN?

Do you currently have a wireless network?

Do you have any bandwidth restrictions?

What network security protocol is required?

What are the steps in creating a digital display solution?

| Project Kickoff | Project Deployment | Pilot Assessment | Ongoing Evaluation |

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, such as your marketing and IT staff.

2. Project deployment. NEC acts as a general contractor in placing orders with vendors, scheduling installations, securing insurance and finalizing any application/content requirements among your IT and marketing departments. 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.

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.

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.

NEC Display Solutions
866–NEC–MORE

500 Park Boulevard, Suite 1100
Itasca, Illinois 60143

NEC