

Hancock County Public Library

Technology Vendor Project: Digital Signage

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Brief Overview of Hancock County Public Library

History

Hancock County Public Library is a medium-sized suburban library located in Hancock County, Indiana, just east of the central capital of Indianapolis. The library has served its community for over 100 years. In that time, technological advances have been on the forefront of the library's goals in providing the best service for the patrons and more recently in remaining relevant in an ever-changing digital age.

Program attendance, as well as overall door count have been on the uphill climb in recent years at the library, including nearly 400,000 people physically walking into the library in 2015 alone (Hancock County Public Library, 2016(a)). That number is an impressive number of patrons to be reached through effective and attractive digital signage.

Technology Need

Each year for the past four years consecutively, HCPL has surpassed one million check-outs. This is largely in part from the effectiveness of the digital signage that is strategically placed throughout the library. In the lobby, as well as the audio-visual/lounge area, are large mounted televisions displaying current promotions, frequently asked questions, local community news, and the weather on a side panel. Unfortunately, the current software is no longer supported from the parent company, Prysm, and the library is currently seeking out a digital signage software provider that has more options, and better caters to libraries. Currently it is unknown how long the server will remain active, so timeliness is of the essence.

In speaking with the Web Manager who is primarily spearheading the operation, he says staying local would be preferred for convenience and keeping business close, however if the opportunity arises that a better option is available from out of state, it is possible that the option will be further explored.

Why Digital Signage?

Digital signage promotes more attention-grabbing and creative opportunities than traditional poster or standee signs. With digital signage, animation, rotating photo collages, interactive exhibits, and other key information articles such as



Digital Signage display in lobby by book return

news tickers or weather reports are able to be utilized to amplify the effectiveness of the signage.

Many people don't consider digital signage more than a simple slide presentation or a picture slideshow. In reality, the software behind digital signage can do much more. As Barclay explains: "Content can take the form of still images, animation, Web pages, or video. Digital signage may incorporate sound, screen crawls, or picture-in-a-picture technology as well as such interactive features as touch-screen functionality, two-way voice-and-video communication, and cellphone interaction." (Barclay, 2010). Digital signage can be as interactive as the programmer for the signage wishes it to be or depend on the limitations or opportunities of the software program being used.



Additional digital signage display located near public sitting and teen area. These displays, one off photo on the right side, will be relocated soon within the library.

Digital Signage Vendors

Four Vendors

The four digital signage vendors that will be analyzed are the following:

- Visix
- DigitalSignage.com
- Scala
- Bright Sign

These four vendors provide a variety of digital signage personalization and packages including live web streaming of videos and live-time weather updates. Prices for the software also vary greatly, as well as the need for equipment.



Criteria for Vendors

While the library is not a large space and will not be requiring multiple stackable screens with the highest resolution, flexibility and user-friendliness of the software is preferred. Cloud-service projection of the digital signage would be ideal, however if necessary the library does have cables running throughout the library to the screens that will be presenting the signage.

Eligible software would ideally allow the library to schedule for certain presentations to run on certain days and/or times, which may not always be a repeated event. Preferably, live streaming capabilities for web programs or videos, and personalization features including news tickers, weather forecasts, social media feeds, and so on, would distinguish one software server from another. Technical support as well as reputation is held in high regard, for instance if a company has a high rate of representation in libraries. Length of time representing the digital signage market will also be in consideration for the longevity of the company.

The library will not be in the market for purchasing a television or projection equipment, but instead will require a software that can display on the presently owned television displays. At present there are three displays at the main branch in Greenfield, and one at the Sugar Creek branch in New Palestine. It should be noted that expansion of the digital signage with ease would be ideal because the construction of the new Sugar Creek branch should be completed in the next year or two, and with a larger space more digital signage may be possible. In addition,

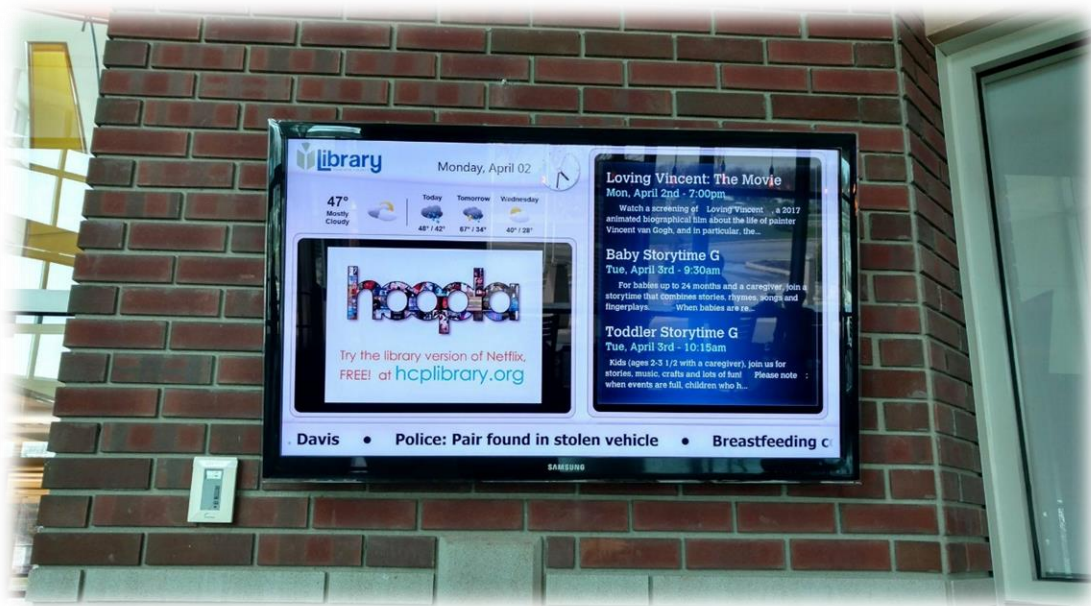
although the library is not in the market for an interactive signage at the present time, expansion and improvements to the library's user experience is also a decision-making influence.

These criteria will be evaluated across the four vendors in a chart, as seen in the following pages, and further explained in the paragraphs to follow.

In short, the criteria for the new digital signage software is as follows in no particular order:

- Potential for expansion of digital signage with ease
- Schedule for content
- Live stream capabilities for web or television broadcasts
- Personalization of "widgets" for weather, time, events, local news, social media feeds, etc.
- Ability to work without purchasing projection equipment a plus
- Ease of use and accessibility of technical support

Below is an example of the current digital signage utilized by the library. The library's logo, date, time, weather, news ticker, events highlights, and a featured rotating image are showcased in the center of the screen. Displays like this one are in other areas of the library, and one main display at the Sugar Creek branch. Eligible digital signage would ideally include many of the same features.



Comparison of Vendors

For this comparison, the packages that would most benefit the library were showcased. In some instances these packages were the cheapest, some more costly. More will be expounded on in the following paragraphs.



Cable/Equipment Required	X	X	X	X
Schedule Content	X	X	X	X
Live Streaming	X	X	X	X
Personalization (weather, news, events, social media, etc.)	X	X	X	X
Experience in Libraries/Bookstores	X		X	
Multiple Packages of Various Software	X	X	X	X
Notable Partners	Multiple Universities, Libraries, Airports, Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Police Departments, Churches	Dunkin Donuts, Procter and Gamble, AAMCO Transmissions, Goodwill, Multiple Universities, The Weather Channel, ReMax Realty Group	Multiple Airlines, Shell Gasoline, Wendy's Restaurant, Abu Dhabi World Trade Center, Burger King, Multiple Universities, including Indiana University	Louvre Museum, 9/11 Memorial Museum, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Shell Gasoline, Starbucks, CNBC, Circus Circus Hotel Las Vegas
Year Founded	1980	2006	1987	2002
Headquarters	Georgia, USA	California, USA	Pennsylvania, USA	California, USA

Company Overviews: Visix



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800-572-4935
info@visix.com

Social Media:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/VisixInc>

<https://www.facebook.com/visixinc>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/visixinc/>

https://twitter.com/visix_inc

<https://plus.google.com/116068651468011998977>

What is Visix?

Visix is a digital signage company based out of Georgia that specializes in corporate, education, healthcare, and government facilities with over 3,000 digital signage solutions and over 1,000 on college and university campuses (Visix, 2018).

Software and Hardware

It appears that there are two different digital signage software programs that Visix provides: AxisTV Signage Suite and AxisTV Enterprise Software. For the library's use and purposes of the digital signage, the former, Signature Suite, would be better suited for the needs. This program package includes the widgets for weather, RSS (social media) feeds, and event calendars. There is also the possibility for YouTube streaming as well as text blocks, date and time, and schedules. The results depicted in the images on the webpage are attractive to the eyes and would satisfy the library's need for the digital signage.

Unfortunately, pricing for this information must be obtained through a regional sales manager. The notion of purchasing a perpetual license or purchasing a subscription base format leads to indicate that in the long run this could be a costly company.

Pros and Cons

Overall the company is impressive. With international business and a strong presence in government, universities, and libraries, the signage has the specs that the library is looking for. Another benefit is the fact that this company has been in business the longest out of the four showcased. However, without a clear pricing directive without the contact of a regional sales person this resource would likely fall behind in the comparisons.

DigitalSignage.com



Contact:

31368 Via Colinas, Unit 108
Westlake Village, CA 91362

1-877-344-7446

Social Media:

<https://twitter.com/mediasignage>

<https://plus.google.com/115111400772461446638/posts/>

<http://blog.digitalsignage.com/>

What is DigitalSignage.com?

Who doesn't love free? DigitalSignage.com is one of the newer options for digital signage. The website is an open-source model. This means that the consumer, unless wishing to own their own server or upgrade to a higher class digital signage package, only has to purchase the media player, download the free software, open an account, and begin streaming their digital signage.

Software and Hardware

As stated above, the only hardware that needs to be purchased is the media player for projection of the digital signage to the designated screens. There are four different versions of the media player ranging in price from \$165 to \$695 (DigitalSignage, 2018). The differences amongst these players are primarily in the options that come with each player. The library would be best suited for the lower-priced Windows player at \$595. While this does sound like a lot of money, the player has the specs that the library is looking for in terms of streaming content, even boasting the ability to stream different content on two different screens.

Pros and Cons

The price of the media player is worth the zero-dollar cost associated with the software, cloud storage, and server use that is required of the site. The impressive list of current customers utilizing the free software is also something to take into account of, given that many are nationwide, big-name brands. Another impressive benefit of the free open source service is that with the mediaCLOUD software (free edition) the user can utilize as many screens as they need. Granted, the purchase of more media players may be required if the number of screens overrules the number the player is capable of handling, however again this is a small price to pay at the point of expansion, for an otherwise completely free service that meets the criteria that the library is seeking out. The one con that is somewhat confusing is the usefulness of the upgraded services. So much is offered in the free service, it would require much further research and possible contact with a sales representative in order to truly weigh the differences. However, at this time the free service, mediaCLOUD, would satisfy the library's needs.

Scala



Contact:

7 Great Valley Parkway
Suite 300 Malvern, PA 19355

1-888-722-5296

Social Media:

<https://twitter.com/scalainc>

<https://www.facebook.com/scala>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/scala/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/scala>

<https://plus.google.com/+Scalainc>

What is Scala?

Scala is a large digital signage company with over 500,000 digital signage screens worldwide in over 100 countries (Scala, 2018). The company is also the second oldest, being in business for just over 30 years.

Software and Hardware

Scala has two different types of media players, and the library would be best suited for the Scala Media Player-L. as for the software, Scala allows for personalization of software and content management systems, so the library can put together a package of what they would need. Like Visix, Scala unfortunately does not provide the prices for the hardware and software necessary for the digital signage to work. The regional sales representative, as suggested in an instant messaging chat, would be able to describe the pricing variations, system requirements, and the best option for the library.

Pros and Cons

Scala is a large industry with decades of experience and a worldwide customer pool. In addition to these facts, several local businesses and colleges utilize Scala, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art and Indiana University. This makes contacting the customers and receiving an honest review much simpler than a company with no local other customers. In addition, Scala is one of the only two vendors that has experience in a library or bookstore setting, which shows that the company understands the type of signage that the library prefers. Unfortunately, this company requires much more research and contact, as the information that the library is seeking is not readily available on the website.

BrightSign

BrightSign®

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1-408-852-9263
sales@brightsign.biz

Social Media:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/brightsign/>
<https://www.facebook.com/BrightSignLLC>
<https://twitter.com/brightsign>
<https://www.youtube.com/user/BrightSignLLC>
<https://vimeo.com/brightsign/videos>
<https://www.instagram.com/brightsign/>

What is BrightSign?

BrightSign LLC is a privately-owned company in California that is roughly 16 years old. Founded by the inventor of digital video recorders, better known now as DVRs, the company has promise for the creativity and longevity of the products that it produces (BrightSign, 2018). With a wide range of hardware and software options, as a design component that the library would benefit from having, free of charge, BrightSign has a lot to offer.

Software and Hardware

BrightSign offers a free software download for designing the digital signage called BrightAuthor. The software is completely free and contains all the criteria the library is looking for in a digital signage software capability. In the realm of media players, BrightSign again has the most options out of the four vendors. There are two low cost and effective players, the LS423 from \$250 and the HO523 from \$400. The differences are the LS is a very basic model player, and it would be up to the discretion of the IT department what the best course of action would be, bearing in mind the potential for more signage in the future in which case the HO would be best, though for what the library needs now and the price, the LS is also a valid choice.

Pros and Cons

BrightSign is a well-rounded company with a variety of options in all price ranges with the specs that the library is looking for in digital signage, as well as the potential for growth and advancement with more in-depth signage options. The multitude of not only media player but also of software options allows for the library to narrow down the information and their criteria to find a package that works best for what is required of it.

Recommended Vendor

All four vendors offer an array of benefits. From the longest in business, the most customers, the cost of equipment, and ease of understanding the services provided, each company excels in a different field.

In the following table the four vendors are ranked on the longevity of the company, the number of software options, and the number of hardware options amongst all four competitors.

Rankings go from 4 being the best score, the best of the four competitors, to 1 being the lowest score, the company having the poorest number in the category.

	Visix	DigitalSignage.com	Scala	BrightSign
<i>Longevity</i>	4	1	3	2
<i>Software Options</i>	2	3	1	4
<i>Hardware Options</i>	4	2	1	3
<i>Total</i>	10	6	5	9

Based on these results, Visix and BrightSign satisfy the criteria best. However, further research should be completed by the expert in the field of digital signage and the needs of the library, likely the Web Manager or IT Manager. While this list does rank the vendors across the multitudes of the options they supply, it does not take into account the costliness, advanced options, or ease of use compared across the companies.

Given the data that is supplied to us at this point and time, it is my belief that BrightSign LLC would be the ideal candidate for the library to reach out to and potentially do future digital signage business alongside. I have come to this conclusion with the aid of the featured charts, and also the flexibility and experience of the company. As of right now, what the library is wanting to display on the digital signage is a step above a glorified Power Point slideshow. The option for streaming and eye-grabbing widgets such as an RSS feed, weather, time, etc. are on the priority wish list, but looking to the future for expansion to possibly hands-on interactive signage, the ability for expansion of the content to multiple screens, and the options included in that, are also important to the decision-making process.

As with all influences in the decisions that the library makes, cost is an important factor. Though DigitalSignage.com offers free software, their media players are significantly more expensive than BrightSign, which also has a free software option. At the present time, the costs associated with Visix and Scala remain unknown until a sales representative is able to be reached. Bearing this influence in mind, recall that in all BrightSign offered the quality of software and hardware options, as well as the criteria for the signage itself at a reasonable rate.

In addition to the question of pricing for Visix and Scala, more in-depth questions pertaining to the maintenance and upkeep of the software, hardware, and any implications that would have on the use of the digital signage would also need to be addressed. As Vaughn also suggests, asking for statistics of users who have committed to the product, technical support and troubleshooting options for customers, and any other hidden fees that may be associated with the given product (Vaughan, 2011).

Technology and Ethics

Though not frequently garnered in the same context, when it comes to the library and technology, ethics holds a great influence in the decision-making process. The library as to consider not only what is best suited for the entity itself, but also what would best serve and suit the community it serves. For example, it may be tempting to look into multi-display, wall-engulfing digital signage, but at the end of the day is that really what the community needs, or would the money and time be better served elsewhere?

In addition to the best equipment for both the library itself as well as patron interaction, the library must consider the best use of the taxpayer money. Investing in a new digital signage vendor should be worth the time, money, and benefit the library greater than the previous vendor. It is important to provide a service that is clear, easy to understand, and conveys the message or messages the library wants to share with its patrons.

While it may just as easy for a patron to say the expense is not necessary, as displays with print media can also easily be done, the digital signage should offer enough that if given the opportunity the patron would have made the same decision to acquire the signage to enhance the library and better communicate with the patrons.

Conclusion

In closing, the digital signage vendors, Visix, DigitalSignage.com, Scala, and BrightSign all have a variety of opportunities, all the while satisfying the library's criteria for what they are seeking the digital signage for. Influences such as price, expansion, and design all have significant impact on the final decision by the Web or IT Managers. At present, my suggestion would be BrightSign for its free software and cost-effective media player hardware. More research would need conducted into the realms of sales representatives and full item price and specs, though that will be completed by personnel better versed in the unexpected complexities of the various components of digital signage.

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