

Food Service Game-Changers Top 6 Digital Signage Solutions

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This white paper examines the key communication touch points within a variety of food service environments and how digital menu boards, digital signage, and interactive touch screens are changing the consumer's experience, while improving revenue, environmental awareness and menu item decision making.



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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	03
Identifying the Points of Communication	03
Food Service Game Changers: Top 6 Digital Signage Solutions .	05
Key Digital Signage Features and Benefits	06
What NOT To Do.....	06
Food Service Platform.....	08
Wireless Ronin Technologies	09

QSR GAME-CHANGERS: TOP SIX DIGITAL SIGNAGE SOLUTIONS

Driving Revenue, Increasing Awareness, and Influence Decision Making

by Linda Hofflander

Technology is transforming consumer engagement with restaurants and impacting menu item purchasing decisions. Competing technologies, changing legislation, and customer demand are converging and creating a very challenging environment. Staying abreast of how consumers anticipate or desire to interact with your organization may determine either the success or failure of your organization moving forward.

Consumer-facing technologies such as smart phone applications (apps), online ordering software, digital and interactive signage, and a variety of other integration tools are being introduced to consumers and restaurateurs at a mind-boggling rate. Weave in the new nutritional labeling law, its compliance implications and other legal issues facing the industry and the associated demands on time, money, and resources is undoubtedly something that corporate, franchisees, owners, and managers need to quickly and effectively understand and control.

This paper will assist you in:

- Identifying the communication points of your customer,
- Understanding the top six communication zones that influence the decision making of consumers (and staff) within the food service environment, and
- Avoiding the common mistakes made by organizations.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

The recent Healthcare Reform Act signed into law by President Obama on March 23, 2010, and the impending regulations for nutritional posting requirements for restaurant menus, menu boards, and drive-thrus for companies with over 20 locations has many restaurateurs seeking digital menu board solutions.

The goal isn't to implement technology for the sake of having this one challenge resolved, but to leverage its immediacy of messaging control to deliver and extract relevant information and data that will **create a unique customer experience that delivers on the promise of your brand.**

IDENTIFYING THE POINTS OF COMMUNICATION

As you look to implement digital technologies in your environment, you must begin by identifying the numerous points of communication that exists with the customer. Past experience tells us that size, focus, strategy and budget will vary significantly across food service concepts.

However, the one place guaranteed to be viewed by all customers approaching the ordering counter (quick serve or fast casual location) is the menu board. Learning how to capitalize on this communication real-estate is one of the most effective ways in which to manage decision-making regarding the food items being served.

Along with menu boards, there are numerous other touch points within the environment that can also influence purchase choices, inform the consumer, and enhance the customer experience. Each of these touch points must be evaluated to create a digital technology map that will work for your unique experience.

Selecting a partner that understands these complexities and is skilled at creating a digital model that will ultimately scale along with your overall business plan is paramount. As you seek an experienced digital signage group or consultancy to work with, have them identify their process for capturing relevant information and explain how they map next steps, including a growth plan. This type of strategic consulting is a fundamental ingredient for a successful network rollout and is easily provided by experienced organizations.



OPPORTUNITY CHECKLIST:

Not all opportunity lists will be the same. Spend a minute and build your own snapshot list.

- Menu Boards**
- Promotional Boards:** Ceiling Hung or Wall Mounted Signage
- Self-serve ordering kiosks/line-busters**
- Eatery Signage:** Infotainment/Entertainment possibly a TV or Digital Media
- Drive-Thru**
 - Dead Zone Signage
 - Promotional Board or pre-order Menu Board
 - Menu Board
- Back of House:** Employee Training and Awareness
- Marquee or Street Signage
- Building Signage
- Promotional Window Signage
- POS Toppers
- Restroom Signage
- Floor Decals
- Tray Liners
- Exit “thank you” signage
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Many if not all of the above opportunities can be supported by digital media communications vs. decals, however, for the purpose of this paper we’ve identified the TOP Six digital signage opportunities (highlighted in bold) based on the implementation experiences of Wireless Ronin Technologies, a premier provider of digital signage and interactive touch screen technology.

FOOD SERVICE GAME CHANGERS: TOP SIX DIGITAL SIGNAGE SOLUTIONS

- 1) Digital Menu Boards
- 2) Promotional Boards
- 3) Self Order Kiosks/Interactive Kiosk
- 4) Eatery Infotainment/Entertainment Promo Boards
- 5) Drive-thru Menu Boards and Promo Boards
- 6) Back of House: Employee Training and Awareness

Digital Menu Boards

Menu boards have the highest impact for interaction of your products with the customer and provide a unique opportunity to visually communicate with your customer. Effective menu boards are no longer static boards merely displaying descriptors and pricing, but rather a dynamic visual sales tool that should be used to engage, entice, influence, and up-sell your customers. Digital technology allows you to incorporate photos with animation, show videos or commercials that align with national campaigns, day part your messages and menu items based on availability, promote community activities, and handle multi-lingual requirements.

Promotional Boards

Promotions can be displayed within the menu board itself, on stand-alone self-order kiosks, on dedicated promotional signage, within the eatery, or out on the drive-thru. The flexibility and control of digital signage allows marketing to decrease time-to-market with new messaging via 100% store compliance with just a click of a button. Accurate and timely installation and removal of promotional material is an ongoing challenge for most restaurants. With digital media activation featuring limited time offers, special pricing, new menu items and even third party advertising, information is instantly available for online viewing. The content displayed can be managed by a variety of administrators including the location's owner, the creative agency, site managers, digital signage network providers, network operations center (NOC) technicians, or whomever you deem appropriate – you assign the viewing and contribute rights.

Self-Order Kiosks/Interactive Kiosks

There continues to be a significant increase of activity in self-order kiosks, also known as line busters, in higher education institutions and in regional areas with high tourism traffic. The systems are being used in multiple ways including providing the ability to quickly and autonomously order meal items via a touch-screen which in turn can send an order ticket directly to the facility's kitchen. This new self-order model is changing the way order processing is managed. For example, in the event a location cannot manage the volume generated from both self-ordering and counter-ordering due to kitchen capacity constraints, the individual location can dynamically determine the kiosk's availability for customer use. Management can also use capacity management and system overriding to determine kitchen staffing during peak times. There is little doubt that food service environments will continue to expand the use of interactive kiosks, leveraging the opportunities they provide to support on-demand nutritional information requirements and/or promote loyalty program sign ups through their consumer friendly touch screen displays.

Eatery Infotainment/Entertainment/Promo Boards

With more and more ordering done through the drive-thru operations, digital media is leveraged to create an inviting dine-in environment featuring entertainment or infotainment programming. Digital signage permits zoning a portion of the screen for promotions of items such as a particular limited-time dessert or recommended food items for their next visit. For example, during lunch hours, one can promote breakfast items for customers to consider sampling during their next morning commute. Consider, eatery signage doesn't need to just facilitate the ordering process, but also provides an opportunity to inform, educate, engage, and convert diners into loyal, repeat customers.

Drive-thru Menu Boards and Promo Boards

The use of digital technology solutions has greatly increased with industry reports showing that drive-thru service can account for almost 70% of a location business in some instances¹.

New hardware solutions now allow one to take advantage of digital signage technology outdoors with digital menu boards, promotion boards, and even POS screens at the payment window.

TOUCH YOUR CUSTOMER

Communication touch points vary by concept. Start with digital menu boards.

Outdoor solutions have historically been price restrictive. Having to address weather conditions, sunlight, and readability required digital solutions to be encapsulated and contain their own heating and cooling systems, driving the overall cost to a prohibitive level. However, a number of more cost-attractive hardware solutions, each with their own targeted markets and applications, are now available to meet the growing demand for drive-thru menu boards. Mixing and matching hardware solutions for a wide-area rollout is now a viable option - putting one solution in one part of the country and another solution in another part of the country based on each area's specific climate-related concerns. Taking such an approach will allow your rollout to provide a more cost-effective solution while addressing varying environmental needs.

Back of House: Employee Training and Awareness

A strong company culture creates a workforce that is engaged. Employees who feel they are respected and involved continually outperform those employees without a similar connection, and creating this connection means ensuring a high level of two-way communication. Taking advantage of the back of house training and motivational techniques that digital signage provides, allows you to fully engage your employees, adding significantly to the benefits definition in your overall ROI modeling analyses. Touch-screen digital signage can also confirm employee training records through password identification, and allow for the viewing of on-demand company messages and training videos. Data provided through the touch screen can be driven by a variety of means, including your company itself, a third party database, or by tapping into an RSS feed promoting local activities and events or weather.

KEY DIGITAL SIGNAGE FEATURES AND BENEFITS

Digital menu and promotional messaging assist not only in satisfying the new governmental labeling requirements, but may lift sales as well. Digital signage also provides features and benefits that enhance the in-store experience and the environment, including:

Automated Content Control Data integration allows the system to automatically update calorie, serving size and other nutritional information on your menu board content by linking into an information database.

Consistency Manage thousands of locations with digital signage software from one central location. Keep nutritional information and corporate branding accurate with 100-percent compliance in all locations.

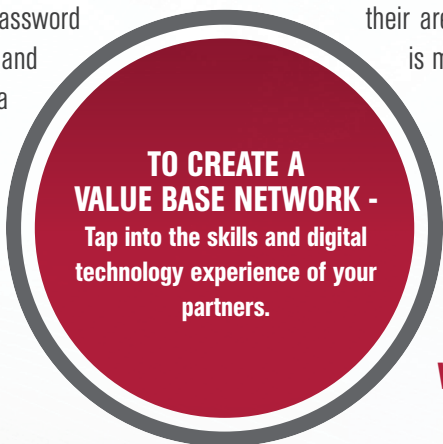
Space Management Leverage the dynamic nature of digital signage to provide more engaging graphics and information through your menu boards. Animating menu item transitions and item rotations helps you communicate more information.

Day-Parting Schedule your menu between breakfast, lunch, dinner and late night with menu boards specifically geared to change on your timeline.

Versatility Implement touch screen order menu boards that allow customers freedom to order on their own. Even display messages in various languages to effectively tailor communication to each location's demographic trends.

Flexible Control Provide various levels of content control access all the way down to store level, yet retain corporate oversight. Allow location managers to select daily specials, or customize their menus for their area while verifying nutritional information provided is maintained.

Menu Nutritional Labeling Nutritional regulations are quickly going to change menu board design. The dynamic nature of digital signage will allow restaurant operators to make the most of their menu boards' message space.



WHAT NOT TO DO

Analysis Paralysis
Fear of network management and poor decision-making causes some groups to get locked into analysis paralysis. Web-based solutions frequently offer customizable portals, a slew of dashboard management tools, and easy to use GUI navigation and control settings, allowing key information to be made readily available to those assigned to manage your network. If you're not seeing this with the partner you've selected you may not be aligning yourself with the right partner. Network

management and message management through digital signage technology allows immediate viewing, delivery and site control of menu items, nutritional data and promotions down to the store level. This level of control simplifies compliance, taking only seconds to click a button versus the weeks historically required to adjust traditional print solutions throughout a restaurant's network of stores.

Copycat Network Design

As you begin to build a network it is important that your company's culture, style, technique, menu items, promotions, voice, brand, and how you communicate with your customer is taken into consideration. These elements impact the design of your network and should not be overlooked. For example, if your company culture has been one that is typically slow to adopt new technology then it may serve your organization well to create a less aggressive roll-out plan that is heavy on education and adoption at the beginning. Alternatively, if your organization is typically viewed as a technology leader then ensuring your people are provided with the most leading-edge solutions will be imperative in order to ensure you maintain your competitive advantage. The fundamentals to differentiate are there for you to exploit -- build your own masterpiece that meets the needs of your customer and your business.

Cut Costs in the Wrong Places

One of the biggest mistakes I've seen made in network deployment is made by end-users who chose to manage their own rollout by procuring consumer grade screens at the local big box electronic stores in an attempt to save a few dollars.

Consumer grade screens and commercial grade screens are built differently for very different uses, and screen selection should be based on a specific application's usage and operating environment. For example: The food service industry typically uses their screens for long duty cycles, in an environment with grease, steam and smoke in the air, to display visuals of their food item offerings. For such an application you will want to select a high resolution, encapsulated/sealed display designed to run for long periods of time. You may save a little money up front selecting a consumer-oriented screen, but most likely you'll be replacing your hardware sooner rather than later. Additionally, in most if not all cases the use of a consumer-grade screen in a commercial capacity will void the warranty on the system.

The second most common error is buying a boxed enterprise software solution thinking it will easily grow along with your business. This issue is more complex than screen selection due to the number of factors involved in the decision-making process including: company size (e.g. number of locations), corporate and store goals, and institutional objectives. Having a business partner that can walk you through the many nuances and provide you a variety of scenarios based on experience will be critical to your success.

Make Assumptions about Technology

Technology (hardware, software, and services), partners, financing, data integration, and overall solution options have quickly evolved over the past several years. If it has been some time since you have looked at digital signage or touch screens, it is time to revisit. The software as a service (SaaS) model has taken off, and integration (inbound and outbound data) is on everyone's to-do list. What you once knew about the industry has probably changed or become irrelevant. The top digital screen media companies have built out their alliances and partners to address virtually every scenario that provides a complete solution regardless of your location around the world.

Don't Launch a Pilot Without a Purpose

Before deciding to pilot a digital signage network it is important to understand the corporate goals and objectives that wish to be accomplished. Many organizations have launched digital signage networks before they have definitely determined their key performance indicators and how they plan to effectively measure the ROI. As an emerging technology, some group decided to implement digital signage purely on the belief that going digital IS the way of the future and that rollout of a digital network is an unavoidable cost of doing business in today's information driven economy. While this is true, failure to place measureable numbers against a pilot will mean a stall in your long-term program. Taking the time in advance to understand the corporate drivers and then measuring against those items will ensure your pilot becomes a successful program.

FOOD SERVICE PLATFORM

RoninCast® is a comprehensive digital signage solution which addresses the mission critical needs of the food service industry. Wireless Ronin's software product features and valuable services include:

RoninCast® Digital Signage Software:

Centralized Control - manage content and review the status of the media players and network locations at any time.

Network Grouping - set up digital signage network groups and subgroups for specific content distribution.

Scheduling - create and change schedules so that content will play automatically on the time line you specify.

Database Integration - retrieve database information to automatically update messages, information and content.

Data Mining - support your marketing and communication efforts with user data collected from users touch screen interactions.

Content Zoning - divide your displays into separate zones to play various content types which can be updated independently.

Wireless Ronin Services:

Consulting - share goals and map program models during our discovery phases to determine your network structure.

Creative - work with our design team to produce messages that are both influential and memorable with brand consistency.

Project Management - our team will oversee the implementation of your network to keep you on budget and on time.

Training - take advantage of our training service to bring your team together and learn RoninCast® software functionality.

Hosting - our Network Operations Center (NOC) is available 24/7/365 for customers needing round the clock network monitoring.

Support - take advantage of software upgrades and hardware maintenance with a service package designed to meet your needs.

CONCLUSION

For restaurant industry members in need of effective solutions to drive revenue and influence behavior or are affected by nutritional labeling legislation, Wireless Ronin's RoninCast® for Food Service provides a solution. By efficiently integrating data from third party databases with digital displays that can be multiple-purposed throughout the environment, restaurants can reduce costs, improve messaging compliance, speed data transmission and facilitate the consumer in the decision-making processes.

FOOTNOTES:

1 <http://www.tacobell.com/company/newsreleasearticle/drive-thru-diet-survey>

ABOUT WIRELESS RONIN

Wireless Ronin is a digital media leader in the fast casual and QSR industries with RoninCast® dynamic digital signage and its creative and technical support services. RoninCast® digital menu boards allow:

- Never-before seen flexibility in product advertising, menu day-parting and decreased time-to-market with new products and promotions.
- Maintain corporate brand identity while allowing unique market segments the ability to customize to their specific location's needs.
- Extend that experience into additional areas for improved dining experiences with entertainment programming.
- Take it into the back room for employee training.
- Create an engaging drive-thru with dynamic digital menu boards for full audience reach.

Wireless Ronin has the services and support structure to assist you where needed through each and every step of the process. Through our NOC located in Minneapolis, MN, we can monitor the health of your network, schedule content, verify updates, and service your needs 7/24/365.

RoninCast® digital signage software is an award-winning technology that has generated numerous awards for clients in the area of interactive innovation, environmental design, hospitality, top merchandising, and absolute excellence in electronic media.

In December 2008, Wireless Ronin's digital menu board application for Kentucky Fried Chicken was named one of the Best New Products of 2008 by Visual Merchandising and Store Design (VMSD) magazine.

In February 2010, Wireless Ronin received an Apex Award at the Digital Signage Expo & Interactive Technology Expo for innovative excellence in Hospitality - ARAMARK Corporation, and a Digital Signage Content Award - ARAMARK Corporation for Burger Studio.

Wireless Ronin has extensive experience in serving up technology needs in the form of menu boards, promotional and eatery signage, POS toppers and drive-thru communications.

The organization has a reputation for drilling down on key business unit drivers to deliver mission critical solutions, software, and services.

To find out how Wireless Ronin can help streamline your labeling compliance and enhance your in-store communications contact Bob Baerg at bbaerg@wirelessronin.com or visit www.wirelessronin.com.

About The Author:



Linda Hofflander is a Strategic Partner of Minneapolis-based Wireless Ronin Technologies. www.wirelessronin.com She sits on the Digital Signage Association Advisory Board and is a member of the Digital Signage Speakers Bureau. This sister white paper "Food Service Game Changers: Top 6 Digital Signage Solutions" is based on, "Menu Labeling Mandated in Health Care Reform Act," and is available as a free download at www.wirelessronin.com. To contact Linda Hofflander, email: lhofflander@thehandagroup.com.