

CHAIN STORE AGE®

THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR RETAIL EXECUTIVES

MARKETING

DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Borders Goes Digital

Networked digital signage delivers targeted content at point of purchase

By Marianne Wilson

Signage has taken on an added dimension at Borders Books & Music. The chain is testing digital signage in 12 locations, with the content displayed on 42-in. plasma screens that are located throughout each store.

“We expect to incorporate the signage in 15 additional locations this year,” says Emily Swan, spokesperson, Borders Group, Ann Arbor, Mich., which operates approximately 450 Borders stores throughout the United States.

Borders’ first digital-signage installation took place in September 2003, in Louisville, Ky.

“It was part of a larger effort to make our stores more customer-centric,” says Manish Vyas, manager, retail convergence services, Borders Books & Music. “We decided to do some visionary things in terms of store design, and incorporating digital signage was one of them.”

The chain is still getting its arms around the new technology. But it likes what it sees so far.

“We’re excited about it,” Swan says. “It has helped us aesthetically—it looks very cool—and it has allowed us to minimize some signage at the information desk. It has also helped brand us in a very dynamic way.”

Borders’ digital-signage network is managed and maintained by Convergent Media Systems. The company offers total support, from design of creative content to installation, operation and maintenance.

“We wanted a turnkey solution, which is why we went with a partner that helps manage the deployment of the content and also provides ongoing maintenance and support,” Vyas explains. “One of our objectives was to make the system as seamless as possible for our store staff. We want them to be focused on the customers.”

Convergent remotely manages Borders’ digital network, connecting the in-store screens to its network in a complete loop. Everything is done via remote control. There is virtually no on-site intervention by Borders’ employees.



Borders’ digital-signage network is managed off-site, with virtually no intervention by store associates.

Borders develops its programming content in-house. In so doing, the chain leverages its existing promotional and marketing content as much as possible.

"We want it [the digital-signage programming] to look and feel like Borders," Swan says.

The retailer provides Convergent with its digital assets or images. The supplier takes the images and turns them into digital-signage programming. Industry experts describe the process as "repackaging" or "repurposing" of existing assets.

"Chains spend significant amounts of money on branding and advertising campaigns," explains Rick Hutcheson, VP of marketing, Convergent Media Systems, Alpharetta, Ga. "Digital signage gives retailers the opportunity to repackage the content from those campaigns and use it to connect with customers in the store. It provides an important consistency across the board."

For example, the signage at the information desk might promote the chain's assorted customer services, such as special ordering. New music and DVD releases, on the other hand, are more likely to be the subject of the digital installation in the multimedia area. Three synchronized screens hang next to each other behind the cashwrap. The content can span all three at once.

"Because customers at the cashwrap have already decided on their purchase, we use the signage here to get them back to the store for a return visit," Swan says. "So the signage talks about upcoming in-store events and new releases."

In the "newsstand" area, the chain runs actual news feeds.

"It helps create a certain atmosphere," Vyas explains.

Although Borders is enthusiastic about the new signage technology, it is proceeding cautiously.

going down this road. Digital signage gives you the ability to react and message to what is going on in a manner that is a lot quicker than the traditional method."

The real-time capabilities of digital signage are enhanced by its ease of use.

"It's easier to upload a multimedia file and serve it up to the stores than it is to send traditional signage," Vyas says.

To date, reaction on the digital signage has been positive.

"Based on anecdotal evidence from folks out in the field, the digital signs are real attention-getters," Vyas says. "We're getting good feedback from our staff and customers."

Borders says that digital signage offers cost-savings possibilities. One likely area involves shipping costs.

"With digital signage, you're not shipping as much on a monthly basis," Swan says.

While some advocates envision the day when digital signage will replace static signage, Borders' Vyas and Swan are not among them.

"It will be a balance," Vyas says. "Some of the existing signage is there for a good reason: It works. We see digital signage as complementing traditional signage and removing some of its inefficiencies."

To those retailers who might be considering digital signage or are about to roll it out, Vyas offers this advice: "Start slow. Examine your current work flow and current processes and adapt them to the new technology."

Vyas says it's important to involve representatives from construction, information technology and marketing in the implementation of digital signage.

"This technology changes the workflow for all three constituencies," he adds.

—mwilson@chainstoreage.com

“Digital signage gives you the ability to react and message to what is going on a lot quicker than the traditional method.”

Manish Vyas, Manager,
Retail Convergence Services, Borders Books & Music

Convergent distributes the content to the Borders stores.

"After the content is in our servers, we create program schedules of when the assets are to be displayed," Hutcheson explains, "and we send out the images to the Borders stores for playback as a fixed-programming wheel."

Borders has installed the digital signs throughout the store, with the exact configuration depending on the location. The retailer is using the technology to enhance image, build customer loyalty and drive traffic.

"We use the signage in different ways in different parts of the store," Swan adds.

"This is a fairly new initiative for us," Vyas says. "What you see today in the store might not be what you see tomorrow. We are still tweaking it to see how best we can serve our customers with signage and language. As we get more experience with this type of technology, we should be able to do different things in terms of content."

The content at Borders is updated regularly, typically on a monthly basis (information relating to new releases is updated more frequently). That may change in the future.

"Our capabilities and intent are to get as close to real time as we can," Vyas says. "That's one of the reasons we are

CONVERGENT®

CONVERGENT MEDIA SYSTEMS

One Convergent Center • 190 Bluegrass Valley Parkway • Alpharetta, GA 30005
Tel. 1-800-877-7804 • email: convergent@convergent.com • www.convergent.com