

Digital Signage in Healthcare

Along with serving as an educational tool, digital signage networks can help medical offices generate an additional revenue stream.

By Richard Slawsky
Contributing editor,
DigitalSignageToday.com

Sponsored by:

NEC

When Mario Almonte visited an orthodontist earlier this year, he found something different in the waiting room.

Rather than a stack of months-old magazines, a pile of brochures or a flickering TV in the corner, Almonte's orthodontist had outfitted his waiting room with a digital signage network. Displayed on the network was a series of videos related to dentistry.

"He had videos showing the different types of dental diseases and how they are treated, and tips on proper brushing techniques," said Almonte, managing partner with New York-based Herman & Almonte Public Relations. "They were on a loop that seemed to cycle every 10 minutes or so."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are at least 1.5 million doctor's offices in the United States. Add to that the number of dental clinics, chiropractor's offices, hospital waiting rooms and other medical facilities around the country, and that number could easily approach 5 million or more.

And each one of those locations is a potential site for a digital signage network.

"Digital signage is considered one of the most effective communications tools due to the dynamic nature of the screen content changing from image to image or pure video, versus the use of static signage," said Mike Zmuda, director of business development for Itasca, Ill.-based NEC Display Solutions, a provider of digital signage. "Simply put, good digital signage



Digital signage in a medical facility can effectively communicate with patients and their loved ones.

content is relevant for the audience and the environment and offers context based on what is relevant at that particular time, in that particular healthcare facility.”

Adding up the benefits

Anyone who has ever sat in a doctor’s office lobby or hospital emergency room knows that time slows down when one is waiting for an appointment or an update on a loved one.

Instead of having patients sit in waiting rooms and look at old magazines, medical practitioners seem to be recognizing the benefits of outfitting their waiting rooms with digital signage.

“The market is growing tremendously,” said David Levin, president of Denver-based digital signage provider Four Winds Interactive. “Healthcare providers are all competing for patients. Placing digital signage in waiting rooms gives providers the ability to reinforce their brand, educate patient’s key service offerings and provide overall enhancement to the patient’s experience.”

Although it may be easy to mount a screen in a waiting room and tune it to CNN, doing so can be a waste of a tremendous opportunity. There are numerous studies that demonstrate that people are extremely receptive to custom content that they can’t get elsewhere.

But beyond helping waiting patients pass the time, what are the benefits of outfitting a waiting room with digital signage? After all, chances are those patients will wait anyway, whether or not they are being entertained by a digital signage network.

Digital signage benefits

Digital signage in a waiting room can:

- Reinforce the provider’s brand
- Educate patients about additional services
- Decrease perceived wait times
- Offer targeted advertising opportunities

“If you think about it, those screens afford each individual doctor the ability to showcase their skills and offer additional healthcare opportunities to patients,” said Rob Gorrie, founder and president of New York-based Adcentricity, a digital out-of-home provider. “That can generate additional revenue opportunities.”

Harry Cagnetto, delivery director with Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based technology provider Technisource Deployment Services, saw that concept in action at a chiropractor’s office.

“His digital signage was for general information as well as advertising to let patients know what additional services he provides and what technology he utilizes to set himself apart from other chiropractors,” Cagnetto said. “In between that information were inspirational segments about past clients.”

Beyond serving to entertain waiting patients and inform them of additional services, digital signage networks can generate additional revenue for medical offices in a number of ways. One is by

partnering with pharmaceutical companies and providers of healthcare products to display advertising.

And a newer concept is to offer screen space to providers of products and services that aren't related to healthcare, based on the demographics of those likely to be sitting in a doctor's waiting room. A pediatrician's waiting room is likely to be filled with mothers who might be in the market for a minivan, while a cardiologist's waiting room is likely to be filled with senior citizens who might be considering a cruise for their next vacation.

But widespread use of digital signage in waiting rooms for third-party advertising may still be a long way off, some experts say.

"Healthcare providers in general want tight control over the content being broadcast to their audience," Levin said. "Most healthcare providers we work with keep 100 percent of the programming dedicated to their own messaging. Those providers who are open to outside advertising content generally require the content be directly related to health- and wellness-related products and services."

Deploying a network

Once a deployer has decided upon the type of content he will be running, he can delve into the various hardware and software options available. Here are a few tips on things to consider when deploying a digital signage network.

Screen types. Plasma screens and LCDs handle the effects of static content differently. One of the perceived weaknesses of plasma screens is that they are subject to an effect known as "burn-

Experts advise against buying cheap consumer-grade displays just to save on cost.

in." It usually occurs on displays that continuously run static content, such as logos, banners, crawling text and similar graphics that remain on the screen for long periods of time. They also are much heavier than LCD displays.

Reliability. Healthcare providers must be concerned with more than just image retention and video quality. When it comes to choosing the right hardware, there are other factors to consider, including environmental factors. Can the displays survive a rugged healthcare environment where the screens may be cleaned with disinfectant on a regular basis?

Most experts advise against buying cheap consumer-grade displays just to save on cost. There is, however, a danger in being the first one to deploy a brand-new technology. In many cases, it's advantageous to go with the tried and true.

Content management software (CMS). The CMS is the next critical component of a digital signage system. Think of it as the mind behind the system. It holds the message content. It tells the display what to show on the screen and when to show it.

Although CMS options were once very expensive, in recent years the price of a CMS has fallen dramatically. NEC Display Solutions recently began offering its VUKUNET CMS at no cost to the network.

The VUKUNET CMS is an SaaS solution that is fully hosted, managed and supported by NEC. VUKUNET also

includes a universal ad-serving solution with modules that enable network operators to make money through advertising, with no sales effort and minimal technical effort.

The CMS solution is part of a suite of software products that comprise the VUKUNET platform, and creates an advertising marketplace that bridges ad buyers with networks. The system also largely automates the ad scheduling, playback and report process across hundreds or thousands of screens and networks.

“We strongly believe VUKUNET helps networks and the industry as a whole to succeed by offering a reliable, free solution

that lets networks put their operating expenses instead into critical areas like content development,” said Pierre Richer, president and chief operating officer of NEC Display Solutions. “And then we offer a very simple way to generate new ad revenues, with NEC doing all the selling, execution and admin work for them.”

About the sponsor: NEC Display Solutions innovates, produces and delivers display products and complete digital signage solutions for a wide range of vertical businesses, specialists and lifestyle applications. The company is wholly owned by NEC Corporation, one of the world's leading providers of Internet, broadband-network and enterprise business solutions, employing more than 150,000 people.