

Size Matters In Digital Signage

TUNING SCREENS TO MOMENTS

The size of the screens matters in the retail shopper journeys. Here's what screens are doing by general size, from large to tablet.

LARGE



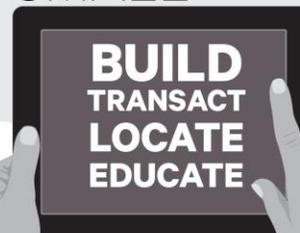
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To get the most out digital signage in retail settings, keep two key words in mind: Size Matters.

That doesn't mean bigger is better. What matters is using screen sizes that suit the setting, dynamics and purpose.

The display side of the digital signage business understandably focuses on screens that seem to just keep getting bigger. They're amazing, and very powerful marketing tools for certain jobs. But there are times when diminutive 10-inch or 22-inch LCD displays are better, more logical and effective options than those much larger screens.

In this [ComQi](#) white paper, we'll walk you through how smart merchandisers, marketers and retail designers are supplementing the Wow Factor and branding power of huge screens and video walls in stores, and using a variety of smaller screen sizes and types to optimize communications with consumers.

We'll also explore how, when and where touchscreen displays work best, and the importance of using commercial-grade software and displays for business and public environments.

Why Put Screens In Retail?

Walk into most retail environments and you will see digital displays somewhere in the store, installed for a variety of purposes.

Retailers are using screens to drive communications with shoppers – anything from what’s on sale and what’s new on shelves and racks, to more tactical work like helping direct foot traffic and managing line-ups at check-out.

Just like print material, displays create awareness and can have a direct correlation to sales performance. The difference with digital is agility – print takes days and weeks to execute. Prices and promotions using digital signs take a few keystrokes, and more sophisticated systems can largely automate what shoppers see, location by location. Done right, a SKU that sells out then automatically disappears off digital display promotions.

Large screens and clusters of displays made into video walls are used by many retailers as the signature design features in stores. Those high-impact displays are in place to reinforce the brand and make statements that ideally connect emotionally with shoppers.

Smaller displays – all the way down to tablet-sized screens – are there to make the shopper journey faster, easier and most importantly, better.

Starting With Objectives

Every screen plugged in and powered up in a retail environment should have a clear purpose and objectives. Putting screens in stores is not, in itself, an objective. That’s just a tactic.

“I can understand how some retailers have been disappointed by the signage projects they’ve had put in, when the displays were just positioned where there was room. You’re trying to establish what those consumers are attempting to do, and then respond to that with relevant messaging at relevant moments,” says Stuart Armstrong, Group President of [ComQi](#), which markets a digital signage content management platform used by many leading retailers

“In-store digital messaging really starts to work,” adds Armstrong, “when what’s done reflects a lot of solid thinking in the planning stages of these projects.”

Journalists use a basic set of questions – the Five Ws - to guide every story they research and produce: Who? What? When? Where? And Why?

That same approach applies to retail planning.

Why belongs at the head of the question list – because that “W” question does the job of framing up the core objectives.

- Why are we talking about putting screens in our stores?
- Why isn’t what we do now working?

- Why will technology make it better?
- Why would we do it now?
- Why at that location?

The other “W” questions follow:

- What will the screens be used for?
- What are shoppers attempting to do?
- When are those moments in the shopper journey when screens would help, direct or even connect?
- Where would we place screens?
- Why would people look at them?
- Who are those people? Loyal customers? Newcomers?

There’s also the H question – How? How will success – reaching objectives – be tracked, measured and assessed?

A team with a clear set of objectives can sort out a solution that’s primed and calibrated for success.

The plan should have a clear sense of:

- Objectives and performance measures;
- Optimal screen positions around the store;
- Most suitable screen types and sizes;
- Type, tone, variety and timing of content;
- Static versus interactive content zones;
- Basic understanding of budget and required resources.

Retailers use screens for a wide variety of reasons. “They want to be able to move the needle on specific business objectives,” says Armstrong. “Are those screens driving traffic into the store? Are they driving conversion rates? Are they driving loyalty? Are they trying to reduce perceived wait times? Are they trying to connect shoppers with the store’s social media channels?”

Whatever the reason, the key thing is to “have” a reason. Screens with no plan are just screens.

Putting Objectives To Work

Here’s how savvy marketers and merchandisers have got well-beyond hanging a big screen on a wall or pole, and are using displays of all sizes in their retail environments to drive specific objectives:

Endless Aisle: A shift by some retailers to smaller footprint stores means not all the product SKUs may be on shelves. Touchscreen product selector stations at shelves or logical waypoints in stores allow shoppers to look up the full variety of what’s available, from different sizes and colors to other, similar options, or accessories. Mapped to store systems, shoppers can use a touchscreen to order next-day store pickup or home delivery.

Assisted Selling: Associates for retailers with steadily-changing SKUs – such as electronics – are challenged to maintain high levels of product knowledge. Screens used as assisted selling tools enable associates to tap into features, specifications and detailed pricing, on demand.

Self-guided Shopping: During busy periods in stores, sales associates and manager are using touchscreens to balance multiple customers – getting shoppers started on product research and selection, using the screens, while the associates finish with other customers. These tools can speed transactions and prevent walk-outs by keeping shoppers engaged.

Configurators: Maybe you've tried different colors and options when you've started your car shopping research online, using configurator tools. Those kinds of visually-rich, intuitive tools transport nicely to in-store screens. Across the retail landscape, small to medium sized screens are being used for everything from building custom shoes and teddy bears, to living room furnishings. Some gesture-based tools are even allowing shoppers to virtually try on clothing, using screens and augmented reality software.

Interactive Communications: Retailers as varied in their offers as smartphones, cosmetics and spirits are all using trigger-based digital displays to connect with and educate customers. When a shopper lifts up a product, content on a screen immediately behind or above that product switches to product information and calls to action. A variety of triggers are used – anything from switches on security tethers to RFID tags on the base of boxes, bottles or jars.

Reinvented Experiences: We've all picked out clothing, gone to a dressing room, and discovered items didn't fit. So we dress again. Tie our shoes up again. And head back to the sales floor to find a different size. But digital signs – everything from wall-mounted displays to digital mirrors with embedded LCDs – can be used to contact sales associates to bring different sizes right to your dressing room. Tied to store systems, these screens are also being used to show other color options, put together full outfits, suggest accessories, and even accelerate the checkout process.

Contextual Messaging & Smart Displays: The so-called Internet of Things means the management systems at the store and for the business, and many of the devices that are part of retailing, will be connected and intertwined. That will enable smarter messaging and tailored messaging and experiences. Displays tied to point of sale and inventory systems can already have content "rules" in place that interrogate those systems and show content based on what the data reports. That means out of stock items drop out of promotional rotations, and underperforming items get more frequent presence on screens. It also means content on screens can be tied to things like smart lighting systems in stores, changing hues based on programming.

Tuning To Shopper Dynamics

Ask and answer this: What are shoppers thinking about and doing at various points in a store, and how might screens help?

Think of your retail space in terms of zones and emotions. Are there decision points? Confusion points? Waiting points? What shoppers are thinking about, and how they're moving, is very different at the store entry than it is deeper inside.

With each zone, would screens help make a decision? Would they ease confusion - directing people or answering those questions that tend to come up? Would a screen or screens speed things in a waiting area, provide options, or just make the line seem to move a little faster - using engaging content, relevant to that moment and place?

Here's a common mistake: putting screens where they fit. A spare wall. A support column. A stand by the entry.

Sometimes, where screens will fit is where they'll also work. But often, screens go unnoticed because they're asking people to stop in an area – like an entrance – where people don't, and won't, stop. Maybe they're positioned above the natural line of sight – safe from being bumped, but effectively out of consumers' view.

If the screens are interactive, are they located at the place and moment in stores would have questions. Or are they off to the side, because that's where power was available.

Is the touchscreen experience in some way personal and private? Does the position and size suit privacy, or put the user on a stage? If the screens ask people to input personal information, they want smaller screens with limited viewing angles, for privacy. They don't want a large screen anyone can also see.

"We find smaller screens – 10-inch, 15-inch and 22-inch – are very popular in retail settings because they're so good for personal information and personal shopping, says Luke Wilwerding, director of interactive retail solutions for the commercial display company [Elo](#). "They're doing something they don't want to share with a broader audience."

All Screens Are Not Created Equal

That amazing TV you have at home, or saw at your local big box store, would seemingly look just as amazing in a retail environment, right?

Sleek, visually dense little iPads would look great on store counters, right?

Well, yes, but mostly no.

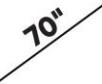
The display business has at least two distinct tracks – consumer and commercial. Consumer products are designed for relatively light use in homes and out with their owners. Commercial products are designed for 16/7 or 24/7 use, and are tuned to the needs of IT, audio visual and systems integration professionals who crave and need durability, reliability and predictability.

The consumer flat screen at that local big box is designed for perhaps 8-10 hours of use daily, if that. It is engineered to sit on a stand or hang on a wall. It is not engineered to be run 16 hours a day, or constantly, and it's not ventilated to be turned on its side and used in portrait mode.

When screens are taxed and break down, there are costs in repair and replacement, labor and shipping, and in lost opportunity. If those screens were put in with objectives, downtime means those objectives are being missed.

Amazing tablets like the iPad look great, but they're designed for the loving touch of their owners – not the endless pounding of endlessly different consumers.

COMMERCIAL TOUCHSCREENS VS CONSUMER TABLETS | ComQi

USAGE	 designed for 16/7 or 24/7 use	 designed for 4-5 hours of use daily
DURABILITY	 ruggedized design	 NOT designed for bumps, scrapes, power spikes etc.
LIFE CYCLE	 long product life cycle and standard specs	 short product life cycle, unpredictable specs
BUTTONS	 NO external buttons	 external buttons (accidental turn off or volume adjust)
CONNECTORS	 specialized connectors (LAN jacks, USB etc.)	 NO important connectors
SOFTWARE	 open access to software interfaces and controls	 Software and OS update challenges
REMOTE MANAGEMENT	 solid content management system (ComQi etc.), remote management	 Limited or NO remote monitoring and management
SCREEN SIZE	 available from 10" - 70" and larger	 rarely over 10"-11"

Here's what's important to remember about consumer-grade tablets:

- They're not ruggedized, meaning they're not designed for the bumps, scrapes, power spikes and general abuse that just happens – like it or not – when made available for public use;
- Product life cycles and specs – particularly outside of Apple – can be short and unpredictable. If you plan to phase in tablets over several months or years, each shipment may be a little different in terms of dimensions, connectors, controls and the operating software. Any changes mean costs and complications;
- There are external buttons curious fingers turn off, or adjust, like volume;
- Important connectors – like network LAN jacks – aren't there;
- Updating software and managing operating systems is a big challenge with consumer displays like iPads. Software developers have far deeper, better access to commercial tablet operating systems because the vendors offer proper, published programming interfaces and controls;
- And perhaps the biggest one – where consumer tablets aren't designed to be remotely monitored and managed – individually and certain not in large groups – commercial tablets paired with a solid

content management system like [ComQI](#) can do that. Device management – the ability to monitor screens in the field and remotely manage and fix them – is critical.

So What Size Matters?

Start with this: Is your messaging meant as one screen to many, or one screen to one person?

One to many requires larger screens that will do the work of attracting, directing and provoking people to actions, like buying or connecting to social or loyalty programs.

One to one is all about information and efficiency – making the shopper journey better, building customer loyalty and affinity, and making those users want to return to the store in person and online.

It's possible to overpower a venue with too much digital, and more and bigger are not necessarily going to deliver better results than a series of smaller screens strategically positioned around the retail environment.

But small can also go wrong. Some retailers have found putting tablets on counters and on pedestal floor mounts has had little impact. They're too small.

"What we have found," says [Elo's](#) Wilwerding, "is those medium-sized screens, like 22-inches and 32-inches, really draw people in more effectively than tablet-sized screens. The message is visually louder in the videos that run to attract users, and the interaction on a larger screen is more comfortable."

Tablets, he says, are designed to be used in close proximity to our faces and eyes. Fixed on counters and mounts, often three feet away from eyes, the user experience quickly grows hard to see and navigate. Larger screens, at eye level, don't have those issues.

Interactive Needs Interaction

Arguably the best touchscreen stations ever invented are those kiosks that enable airline travelers to check-in for flights and get boarding passes without standing in a long line. But at many airports, more than a decade after these simple kiosk applications were debuted, you'll still often see airline staff showing people how to use them.

Kiosks and other interactive screens on walls may seem intuitive and obvious, but even long-running check-in kiosks need ambassadors who help show the way and build adoption.

Many retailers have introduced touchscreen stations of varying shapes and purposes in stores, and watched, disappointed, as the expensive investments went largely unused. It's not even to put in screens that boldly say: "Touch Here To Begin!"

Begin what? Why?

"The digital journey is not about throwing screens into stores and watching them do the work," says Wilwerding. "You have to show people how to use them, and ensure they understand what value using them brings to shoppers."

Touchscreen displays work best in stores, he says, when store associates recognize these screens are powerful information and selling tools for their work. If a touch-screen makes it easier to find, explain and sell things, they'll be strong advocates and bring their customers to the screens when it makes sense.

Touch Matters, Too

Just as all screens are not created equal, the same applies with the touch technologies that work with displays.

With billions of smartphones now in consumer hands around the world, shoppers are conditioned to using touchscreens in certain ways. We all pinch and zoom and flick and swipe to navigate content.

That's enable by certain types of touch technology, and not all touch overlays support those gestures. Some are designed to deliver the much more simple behavior of bank teller machines and ticket kiosks.

In some cases, that less expensive, highly intuitive technology does the necessary job. But in environments like retail, where shoppers are expecting to navigate content as they do on their phones and laptops, solutions that deliver less will be abandoned, and the innovation credibility of the retailer questioned.

The touch technology used on most smartphones and tablets is called project capacitive, or p-cap, for short.

Start With The Challenge, Not The Tech

Digital signage has steadily shown its value in retail settings when it is properly planned and executed.

The mistakes can happen early when the mission becomes about putting screens – large or small – in stores, and worrying about the purpose and content later.

A giant 4K screen right inside the entry will look amazing when it goes in, but most people will breeze on past it, not even noticing. In the same way, a row of tablets can line a merchandise counter but largely go unused, because it's not clear to shoppers why they'd want to use them.

"When we sit with retailers, we really try to dig into what their needs are and how their stores work," says Armstrong. "A lot of retail strategists talk about the consumer journey, and the best digital signage projects are really tuned into that journey – making an impression or offering services that make things faster, easier and generally better – at just the right moments."

Figure out the challenge. Tune the messages to the shopper moments. And fit the screens to the purpose. Because the size of screens does indeed matter.
