

REVOLUTIONARY signage

Signage can take numerous forms in today's shopping centre. Claire Elliott takes a look

While wayfinding signs are probably the most familiar forms of signage in shopping centres, the industry seems to be evolving towards digital technology and other media. Indeed while wayfinding is, and always will be, vital to shoppers, communicating the right messages to the consumer, such as promoting in-store offers or upcoming events, is also becoming increasingly important.

Gary Marshall, managing director at Tonik, believes there is a solution that could combine the benefits of digital screens with wayfinding signage, thus ridding centres of static signs.

He says: "If shopping centres are rebranding, they spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on static signage. A few are introducing plasma screens but there's still a certain amount of basic signage which can be useful and can help with wayfinding, but so much more can be done."

Marshall believes digital signage could combine directional information with interactive content, such as directing customers to in-store promotions as they enter a scheme, or generating income by selling space to brands sold within the centre. He says that shopping centres can tap into their Tuesday morning or Saturday afternoon shopper directly and the retailers can realise their full potential.

He suggests a number of options. "Ultimately there needs to be some level of wayfinding, but you could have a split screen with basic traditional stuff above, and below stuff that's moving and interactive. A rolling programme could allow wayfinding information to appear every 20 seconds."

The industry is continually evolving. Titan Outdoor has partnered with Esprit Digital to install the world's first double-sided digital poster at Hammerson's Brent Cross shopping centre. The large-format HD LCD screens, which will be rolled out to other shopping centre sites across the UK, are the creation of Esprit Digital,

the company behind CBS Outdoor's digital escalator panels and Clear Channel's recent digital bus shelters. It is the first time that a 65" panel has been installed back-to-back in a single housing.

Both sides of the display can show synchronised content and it's even possible to run two 'channels' at the same time, meaning that one side can become a store directory and information point, while the other can show advertising. The display can handle any type of content from JPEG through to full-screen flash and hi-definition video, and can be instantly updated via Esprit's ImageFlow remote content delivery package.

James Brenner, director of Esprit Digital, says: "The panel, in its single-sided application, has already been successfully installed at Victoria Station and the launch of the double-sided unit at Brent Cross marks the beginning of a series of similar installations."

Brian Boakes, director of strategy at EnQii, says that in order to maximise the value of digital media in a transient environment, the customer journey and overall experience must be carefully thought through.

"Technology can be extremely effective but only where customers are receptive to messaging and the content is relevant to their frame of mind," he says. "The first consideration is location. Digital screens need to be placed in the line of sight. One well-placed screen can be as effective as five that are located in less than advantageous positions."

"Shopping centres can create new branding to suit digital delivery. Logos can be animated, and accompanied by sound to create a welcoming and relaxing shopping environment." **SC**



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