

# CONTENT IS KING IN NARROWCASTING



**BY PETER T. VRETTAS, EDR MEDIA**

Ten years ago, using media at retail generally meant watching a product demonstration on a small video monitor — and that was considered revolutionary! Today, that revolution has advanced with exponential speed. It has been powered by advances in both hardware and software. But the real revolution is not in the technology itself — it's in the content potential. Retailers now have the ability to customize and target messages to specific audiences. Instead of broadcasting via television and print,

today's intelligent digital technologies allow them to break through that clutter and *narrowcast* their promotions where, when, and to whom they will be most effective. The task is rewarding, but also complex. *That's why digital content providers — in partnership with hardware integrators — play a pivotal role in a system's success.*

The concept of narrowcasting digital messages into a commercial environment is a powerful breakthrough, creating an entirely new media category.

Narrowcasting is loosely defined as the distribution, display, and management of informational, and promotional content in public spaces over a high-speed network. It's broad enough to include in-store TV, digital signage, interactive POP, and in-store advertising systems. And its display devices can range from a simple monitor, to a flat-panel screen, to a kiosk, to a media wall.

A retailer that is considering a digital messaging system shouldn't let the tail wag the dog. Forget about the new

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RETAIL NARROWCASTING APPLICATIONS REQUIRE NOT JUST APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY, SUCH AS THESE NEC PLASMA DISPLAYS, BUT AN EFFECTIVE, TARGETED MESSAGING STRATEGY.



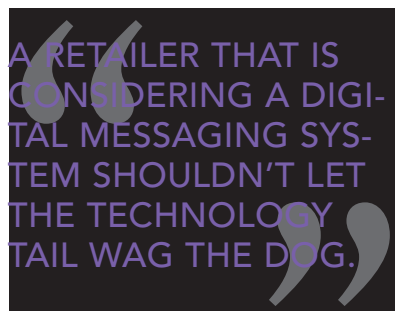
hardware device you saw at the tradeshow. Don't focus on the WAN or satellite system in place. *A digital messaging system will only be successful if it responds to the needs of your customers.* If you can communicate a relevant message, you're more likely to capture their interest and gain their loyalty. There is practically no limit to the variety of messages you can display — from brand image spots, to product information, to promotions, to community information, to entertaining trivia, to live news feeds. In addition to all this, there's also an intriguing bonus — the ability to display vendor advertising and generate revenue.

The content issues go deeper yet. *Digital messages are now customizable by location and by time — and this capability raises new and interesting questions for retailers.* What existing content can you use that's not time-dependent? What specific messages do you need to create for different stores and times of day? How old does your content look to your customers after a week or two? Answering these questions means that a retailer will have to think strategically in ways they may never have done before.

Since content is the driving force behind a messaging system, a content provider should be the driving force behind implementing the system itself. *A content provider can objectively recommend the solution that best gets the message across — efficiently and cost-effectively.* That provider might be an advertising agency, a marketing firm, or a media development company. They should understand the retailer's business, communication goals, and budget. And their challenge is to match a retailer's messaging needs with the best technological solution — in terms of content, delivery, and display.

For example, if a retailer wants to run a video-based program that doesn't need a lot of content refreshment, then a DVD player with "sneaker-net"

updates might work just fine. If customer demographics demand highly customized messaging, a more complex delivery solution needs to be found. If a retailer wants high impact, the display device might be a media wall or plasma screen. If the goal is to let customers sample a product, there are point-of-purchase displays with that singular purpose. If dispensing detailed product information is key, an interactive device can be the right solution. Meeting each of these criteria involves different content, update schedules, bandwidth requirements,



and operational platforms. *There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution.*

On a creative level, a digital messaging system allows retailers to think about the store in an exhilarating new light — not a passive area where transactions occur, but a proactive communications environment that helps make the sale. *When implemented correctly, a digital messaging system can transform the entire retail space — making it more relevant every step of the way.* Here's just one scenario:

As a customer walks in, she receives a warm video greeting that highlights up-to-the-minute promotions, including inventory sell-offs and switches to local weather — all displayed on a sleek plasma screen. While waiting to make a return, she watches overhead monitors showing local community outreach programs the store participates in, along with entertaining trivia segments. When the next customer service number is called, it's running as a "crawl" on the overhead monitors. Afterwards, this same customer moves on to the digital camera department. There, an in-shelf monitor displays a camcorder demo — co-sponsored by a

specific vendor — that demystifies the product. Finally, as she waits in line to purchase her items, she views another display that reminds her to grab those extra batteries next to the checkout counter.

Working behind the scenes to make sure this all happens, minute by minute, is — once again — the content provider. Because once the messaging system is in place, it must be fed with constantly refreshed content that is determined by the retailer. *The content provider facilitates this by offering comprehensive content creation and management services — preferably on a 24/7 basis to respond to last-minute changes.* These services include asset gathering from both in-house and outside sources; art direction to establish a look and feel consistent with a retailer's brand image; graphics and video production; programming to operate the narrowcast platform on a designated delivery system; content scheduling; and playlist monitoring to verify advertising inserts.

After experimenting over the years with everything from music to elaborate sound and light displays, more and more retailers are now reaching out to the power of customized digital media content to increase customer loyalty. Their key partners are the content providers who can objectively assess a retailer's messaging needs and provide content creation and management over the long term. Retailers who use industry knowledge, creativity, reliability, accuracy, and technical expertise as the criteria for selecting a content provider will help ensure their messaging system's long-term success.

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