

Duff on Hospitality Law

Digital Signage: What You Need to Know

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Digital Signage Part 1: What is a Digital Sign?

According to the humorist Robert Benchley “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don’t.” Borrowing from Mr. Benchley, there are two kinds of people in the world – those who know about digital signage and those who don’t. Today, the latter is probably the larger group, but the former is a fast growing group. Because digital signs have already started to impact every organization and location where people gather, there is good reason to join the group of those who know about digital signage.

What comes to mind in response to the word “sign”? Something along the side of a road that conveys meaningful information? Something you look for along that road when you are low on gas? Something to let you know that you have arrived at your destination without running out of gas? The word “open” in glowing neon light at that destination?

Many signs have remained unchanged for decades. However, because of a variety of technological advances, such as digital signal transmission, high-speed high-volume broadband, flat-screen displays, QR codes and near field communications (transmitting information wirelessly over very short distances such as by touching smartphones) the concept of a sign has changed dramatically over the past decade. What once was static can now be dynamic and can take many very different forms.

A common term for modern signs is “digital sign” or “digital signage.” There is no single recognized definition of this term right now. However, a digital sign is something you know when you see it because it is different from what you are used to seeing. The Digital Place-based Advertising Association has adopted the following definition: “a display device that has the ability to display dynamic advertising and replaced static billboards and posters.” Note the use of the term “display device” to suggest some piece of hardware. Note the use of the term “dynamic” contrasted with “static”. Given the highly specialized mission of this particular association, note also the reference to advertising; however, there is no reason why a digital sign cannot convey non-advertising messages as well.

Some in advertising and marketing fields suggest it is more helpful to think of modern signs as a “screen,” and more specifically as the “fifth screen.” The first four screens are the motion picture screen, the television screen, the computer screen and the screen on a mobile hand-

held device. The fifth screen is any screen in a public area.

Digital signs involve one or more monitors or video displays in any given location. Software makes them operate. There is something going on visually – there is movement. Signs can be connected by some wired or wireless network, so that the information can be changed or updated frequently. Digital signs are experiential and increasingly interactive for the people watching the signs. Perhaps troubling to some, the signs are watching the people and collecting information about them at the same time.

For simplicity but also to recognize the vast potential of digital signage, the author thinks of a digital sign as an iPad on a wall.

In our next installment, we will talk about some specific examples of digital signs in the hospitality and travel industries.

In the meantime, if you have questions concerning digital signs or other telecommunication issues, please let [Greg Duff](#) know.

Tags: digital signage, FCC, Wi-Fi technology