



Mary Meeker, founder,
Mary Meeker Design, Inc.

Digital Signage: Inside Advice From A Retail/AV Veteran

Mary Meeker, founder of Mary Meeker Design Inc., sheds light on opportunities and strategies for retail digital signage.

by Matt Pillar

Some pretty impressive, high profile retail brands have called on Mary Meeker to design, configure, and implement digital displays in their stores. Well before the industry called it digital signage, she was using the term retail entertainment. With a long career in retail store design as the backdrop to her growing audio/visual tech integration business, she's uniquely suited to help retailers navigate the murky waters of digital signage strategy and deployment. I recently spent some time with her, talking about the opportunities digital displays present retailers.

Why are retailers adopting digital signage?

Meeker: The motivation is different from one retailer to the next, and this is why content strategy should always be the starting point for any retail digital signage deployment. There are retailers that are leveraging digital signage networks as a source of income by selling in-store advertising on them. Some retailers have at least partially funded their digital signage deployments this way.

Then, of course, there are retailers who implement digital signage for their own design and advertising purposes. These retailers wouldn't think about advertising other brands on their networks. Take a retailer with several brands; it will often only allow advertising on a specific brand in a specific store, shunning the notion of cross-branding even within entities of its own parent corporation.

Why is retail a key vertical market for MMDI?

Meeker: I worked in the retail industry for thirty years, in big-box environments, both in stores and within their construction divisions. Understanding the language and parameters for design elements with regards to retailers is very different than it is in most verticals. I think that background in retail helps us understand not just what retailers want and need from a design perspective, but how to get it done without interruption from an operational perspective.

This space is also strategic because there's a lot of evolution around interaction and mobility happening right now.

We're increasingly engaged in projects that bridge the gaps between stores, websites, social media, and mobile initiatives. Retailers are empowering consumers to use their phones at the shelves and displays to scan items and develop wish lists or access custom promotions, rewards programs, and individualized content. They understand that they can leverage this to get customers into the stores, especially as online and mobile shopping continues to grow.

What advice do you give those considering a digital signage project?

Meeker: First, each digital display solution has to serve its own purpose. There's no success in hanging displays without a reason, a plan, and the content to back it up. In terms of the advertising model, there are many considerations and few guidelines or established standards. If you plan on attempting to sell airtime on your digital display network, be prepared to provide proof of playback with your reports. Your advertisers will want assurance that your hardware is operational and that their content is displaying as contracted. Technology breaks. The Internet goes down. And displays hang idly everywhere. You must have a plan in place to both ensure the content plays as contracted and prove that to your advertisers.

Generally, we try to steer retailers away from the "hang and bang" mentality — putting an LCD up somewhere in the store without enough consideration of strategy, content, and aesthetics. You want your displays and the content they play to belong, to complement your store sets and your brand, and to have a strategic impact.

Regarding the strategy, we like to discuss those we've talked about here — internal advertising and the ad revenue model — but we also advise retailers on more complex deployments, like how to deliver day-parted, specific information to specific shoppers at specific times of the retail day. We help retailers determine how to reach working professionals with relevant messaging when they're shopping, stay-at-home moms with relevant content when they're in the stores, and so on. ■