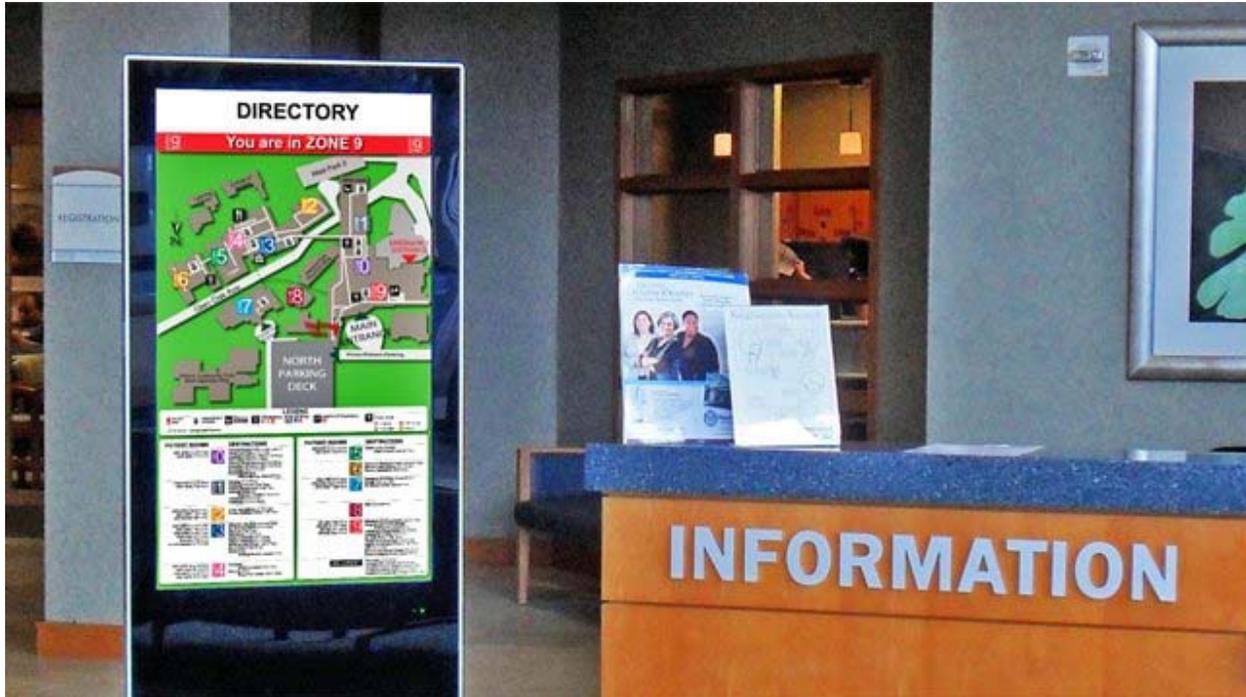


In hospitals and digital signage, the media matters



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Far-flung campuses stretching over a couple of city blocks. Multiple entrances and parking lots competing for a driver's attention. Add to the mix an already stressed patient, physically weak from a health challenge. And they aren't even yet inside the building, where they face more directional challenges.

These trials are a formula for short tempers, patient complaints and wasted resources. Hospital staff must often step out of their primary role and act as traffic cops to help disoriented, and often irritated, patrons find their destination.

Such can be the state of affairs at today's health care facilities — unless they tackle the challenge to improve the customer experience and get everyone where they need to be, when they need to be there, with as little fuss as possible. The fix: a wayfinding program based on methods perfected by modern business and utilizing a mix of both static and electronic solutions.

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If a medical institution today doesn't have at least a basic electronic messaging system, patients may question the facility's technical ability in other areas as well. Hospitals and clinics are embracing digital signage to not only

improve on-premise navigation, but also to provide targeted information and positive community news.

Automated signage fosters the ability to:

- Originate and manage messaging locally or remotely.
- Target information for each waiting area, varied by department specialty, for example.
- Disseminate multiple messages simultaneously, unlike standard fixed systems.

Digital signage professionals know the medical field provides one of the most exciting avenues for growing profits over the next few years, and digital wayfinding appears to be an easy way to increase sales to a hospital. But they should also be aware that wayfinding is more than installing signs with directional information; it is its own field with its own set of experts. Bringing digital signage into the wayfinding mix the right way involves weaving electronic messaging into a comprehensive directional plan, which will allow AV and digital signage professionals make the most of this important market.

Let's look at several ways these important disciplines intersect. We'll begin with an overview of the unique challenges faced by medical facilities daily, the battle to get their customer in, out, on time and satisfied.

Wayfinding ROI: Understand its foundation

Medical facility managers have a unique challenge. Steer visitors to the right location and, while they're on their way, help them navigate a labyrinthine maze of similar appearing corridors with doors labeled with unfamiliar medical terms. Many administrators are turning to digital signage to enhance the customer experience.

Wayfinding in the medical arena is complex. Each health care institution has its own "personality" and can be quite different from other types of organizations.

Advances in digital sign technology are bringing the component costs down for implementation, and appear to be part of the future for health care signage. It can be tempting for hospital executives to just throw in a few digital signs alongside existing static signage, but true success comes from incorporating the latest technology into a broad-based wayfinding program.



Informational kiosks provide guidance 24/7/365 -Despite best attempts to keep personnel at information desks, there are times when a kiosk can step in and assist patients/visitors.

A wayfinding needs assessment can run the gamut from informal discussions in the hallway to engaging a professional research firm to conduct surveys, identifying problem areas

through tracking customer complaints, logging "asking for directions" encounters and performing stakeholder satisfaction surveys. Focus groups of recent patients and visitors, and exit point sampling stations are other valuable tools.



Point-of-wait displays have evolved - Health care facilities are starting to recognize the potential of the digital displays in their public waiting/gathering areas as wayfinding and educational tools.

A focused health care wayfinding program is an investment, and facility leaders need to evaluate the proposed improvements, both static and digital, in terms of ROI. A successful wayfinding program can help to greatly reduce employee and equipment downtime from patient tardiness or missed appointments, and reduce time invested by staff having to step out of their normal role to give directions.

Leadership makes the difference

As with any vital initiative, having a champion to lead implementation can be the difference

between success and stagnation. The project needs both a committee chair and a project manager, usually two different people. The chair should either be in the C-suite, or have direct access to it, to deal effectively with internal politics, set direction and identify funding sources. The project manager can then step forward and play the role of program champion among the various stakeholders.

With a process in place, such a tri-partite arrangement — the digital signage implementation firm, the hospital's internal champion and the wayfinding consultant — can combine forces to achieve what would be difficult in a go-it-alone fashion.

Keeping the patient in view

With proper implementation, dedicated electronic displays, touchscreen kiosks and handheld apps will improve the patient's experience. This means keeping the patient in view — and getting them to their destination at the right time. Too much information, or not enough, before they even arrive on site will compound an already stressful situation.

Effective wayfinding must incorporate "progressive disclosure," best described as a comprehensive program that gives the patient only what they need to know at any given decision point.

In keeping with the philosophy of a whole-body approach to wayfinding, though, print materials are still important. Collateral printed materials can communicate much information at a reasonable cost — for example, specific parking

areas, designated doors and specific desks at which to register. Combine them with handheld directional apps to ease the patient's journey even more.

Implement with a plan

Adding several touchscreen directories around a medical campus, without a comprehensive plan, is expensive. An electronic approach alone provides little return on investment. The need for frequent equipment updates may yield a useful life only half that of static systems, but some costs may be offset by the efficiency of electronically updating display information.

Scope creep can also lead to loading up on all possible electronic features to the point where you strain the budget. Both ends of the spectrum — buying an electronic sign or two to upgrade the hospital's image, or going for all the bells and whistles — can lead to wasted resources.

Digital displays have great potential as one part of a well-designed master plan that includes consistent terminology, enterprise-wide employee training and static signage all working in unison. It's important to keep the big-picture mission in mind and avoid the pitfalls of too little or too much in digital implementation.

Digital equals success

Wayfinding, enhanced with the latest digital technology, yields a measurable, positive return on investment. Initial stakeholder surveys produce data for a baseline status, and follow up surveys can document the program's boost to the bottom line. One health care facility had a 59-percent improvement in its wayfinding after the successful implementation of comprehensive wayfinding system that included three touchscreen digital kiosks, new static signage and collateral materials. The key to its success was due to the fact that the client was willing to embrace and implement the progressive disclosure concept.

Looking ahead

Wayfinding is much more than putting up a few extra static or electronic signs. It is a process that includes people, resources and knowledge from across the organization. Hospitals that integrate electronic with traditional signage in a well-executed program will see improved patient throughput.

Digital solutions offer an intriguing array of enhancements to the patient experience. With today's technology, they should be part of the bedrock of the medical wayfinding experience. And the future is looking more exciting as haptic devices now in development will allow users to feel textures on touchscreen devices and even in mid-air. Both features facilitate easily updatable, ADA-compatible directional signage.



Dynamic donor walls make an impact - By adding digital signage components, a health care facility can convert an old "brass plaque" donor recognition wall into an impactful presentation that will increase awareness and donations.

Combine electronic signage with a plan for progressive engagement — giving the user the information they need, when they need it — and health care facilities will see a positive return on investment that reinforces the decision to implement a master wayfinding plan.



Digital signage impacts patient safety - By incorporating a small, password-protected touchscreen tablet into a regular static sign at the patient room door, hospital staff will be able to better communicate vital patient information (restrictions, precautions, etc.) with other staff members and visitors.

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