

## Simplifying Digital Signage Content Management

A templated format allows users to easily input and post dynamic information.

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tightrope media systems

It's not just newcomers who can find the complexities of the digital signage industry intimidating; so do some experienced users.

Instead of spending time and resources on navigating a highly technical process, many businesses and organizations incorporating digital technology into their operations contract the responsibility for managing content to another company. But as the industry continues to evolve, so too does the ease with which signage users can control content, from start to finish.

A number of digital signage firms have developed software packages that put the power of content control in the hands of even the most basic of computer users. The technology is helping companies save time and money.

### How it works

Content, in many regards, is the foundation of digital signage. To hear industry experts tell it, large displays and flashy graphics are no replacement for meaningful messaging that ultimately generates a call to action. In information signage systems, getting laypeople to



A template, such as the one used in the Port Authority bus terminal, offers an easy way to update the content of digital signage, keeping the message relevant.

generate that content, especially when a variety of other communications options are available, is the challenge.

As more businesses and organizations venture into the digital signage field, they want the ability to post what they want, when they want and how they want. But often, they lack the know-how. Also, organizations may have strict branding guidelines that must be followed. Users must become familiar with digital signage and have the ability to create content that looks good and supports the company image.

Premade, professionally designed digital signage channels with content templates allow anyone to create a compelling message. Such programs ensure the software is more help than hindrance and that the signage is actually used.

The foundation of the easy-to-use technology is a Web browser interface, which allows users to key-in information and upload images with a few clicks of a mouse.

The format developed and being implemented by digital signage companies like Tightrope Media Systems, for example, is the incarnation of a system first used more than a decade ago in public school districts, which were the very first users of what is known today as digital signage.

Before the advent of digital signage, communication with students was complex and inefficient. Tightrope created a browser-based system, Carousel, that used simple templates as a starting point for users. Because designers developed the message elements and formatting, school employees felt much more empowered using the system, even when they had no training.

The latest versions of Carousel are a modern extension of the original vision, which is a signage system that makes untrained users look like designers and encourages them to use the system over traditional alternatives.

### Advantages

When it comes to content development and management, industry experts agree most end users can't do it. They either lack the time or the knowledge — or both. Template-based solutions raise the level of involvement for many, ironically creating

the opposite challenge that most systems face: too much content.

To better manage the increased amount of demand for screen real estate, software should separate signage screens into any desired number of segments, or zones, and work in a variety of resolutions, such as 16:9, 9:16 and 4:3. A variety of different templates should be available, so users can simply click on the area where they want to add content. Within minutes, images and graphics can be uploaded and

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text can be keyed in.

Templates shouldn't feel constraining, however. If a deployer wishes, the templates should be able to be modified so that an organization's logo and branding elements easily can be added. Alternatively, some providers, such as Tightrope, have designers available to help a company custom brand its digital signage.

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The technology should be powerful enough to host and run several types of media at once, from streaming video to dynamic graphics and RSS feeds that crawl across the screen. Some programs, like Tightrope's, support a robust set of interactive capabilities, which can be used in college campuses and airports for wayfinding.

Software should include the ability to regulate access for different users, allowing them to act as the editor for some information zones and a contributor to others.

“It’s important to have many people contribute because it keeps everything fresh,” said Andrew Starks, co-founder and chief marketing officer for Tighrope. “If one person has responsibility for all of the bulletins, and has other pressing responsibilities, the task of updating the signage competes with their real job. If many people are given just the right roles, that person is promoted from artist to art critic.”

### Users

Template-based software is used by educational institutions, municipalities, hospitals and corporations — anywhere that has a busy staff that needs to communicate to people in a public space.

The technology has found a niche in other fields, too.

One hotel uses the software to promote upcoming events. A restaurant uses it to display the menu, particularly as a viewing option for diners in the lobby waiting for a seat. The New York and New Jersey Port Authority uses Tighrope’s Carousel to manage the flow of travelers by integrating it into the computer system that controls their train.

“With information signage, the people that use it don’t really have a stake in the success of the system,” said Starks. “If it’s fun to use and makes them look creative and smart, they’ll continue to come back to it, which makes the stake holders look smart for choosing template-based

software like Carousel.”

***About the sponsor:** Tighrope Media Systems develops Web-based digital signage and broadcast systems designed to be very easy to use while providing a high degree of functionality. The Minnesota-based company’s communications tools incorporate the latest technological capabilities with reliability to assist organizations in a variety of fields, from education to healthcare to retail.*