Design Tips for Digital Signage

With ScreenScape's built-in Media editor, creating effective digital signage content has never been easier. But what does effective digital signage content look like? It's beautiful, it's simple, it has a clear and precise message, and often it's dynamic and tailored for the local audience. Read on for some tips for creating effective digital signage content.

Example of Catch, Inform, Action messaging for digital signage

#1 Keep it Short

The 3-step Catch, Inform, Action (CIA) message works best in most digital signage environments. The CIA approach to messaging entails the following steps[1]:
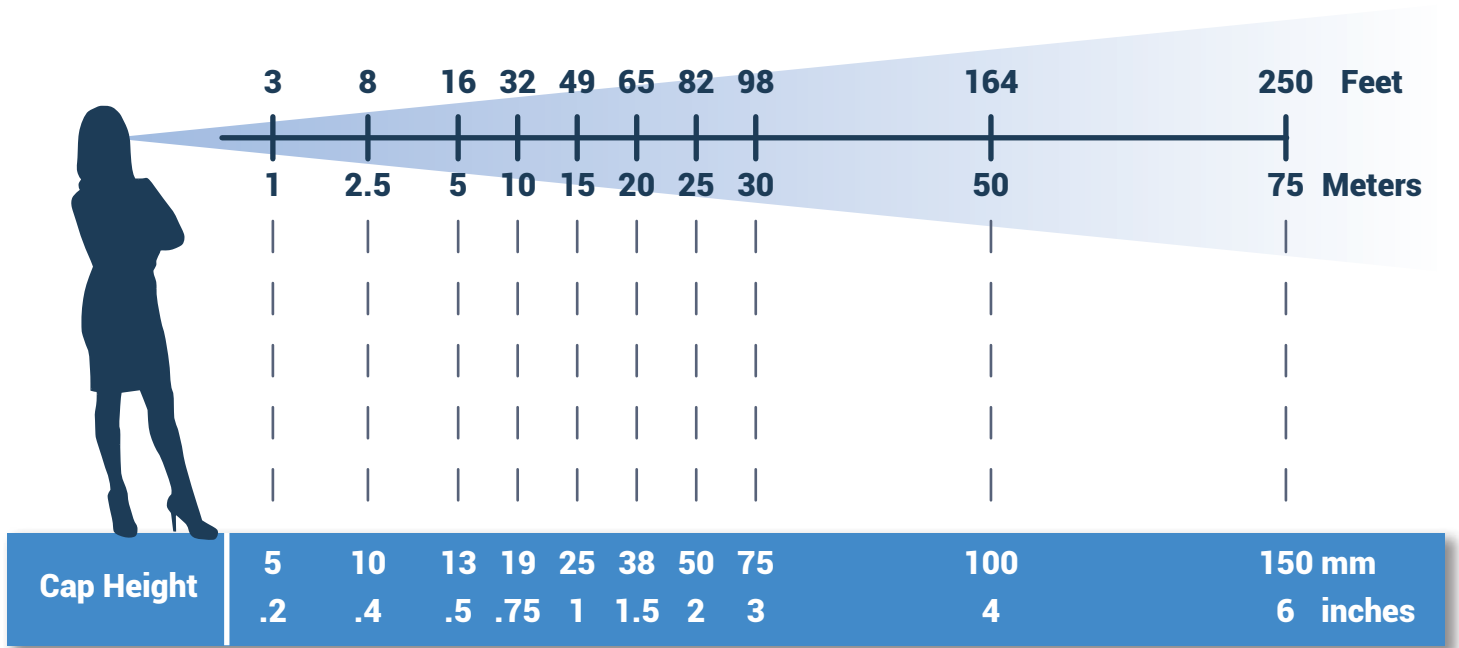
- Catch the viewer's attention
- Briefly inform them
- Call them to Action (CTA)

To increase the effectiveness of your messaging, follow these five copy recommendations[2] whenever possible:

- Don't use a lot of words to convey your message.
- Be declarative.
- Be grammatically complete.
- Be otherwise standard.
- Contain alliteration, metaphor or rhyme.

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[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] Padmore, Nick. "Greatest Copy Shot Ever Written". *A List Apart*. Publication Date: November 7, 2007. Accessed October 28, 2019. https://alistapart.com/article/greatestcopyshot/

Feet	3	8	16	32	49	65	82	98	164	250
Meters	1	2.5	5	10	15	20	25	30	50	75
Cap Height (mm)	5	10	13	19	25	38	50	75	100	150
inches	.2	.4	.5	.75	1	1.5	2	3	4	6

#2 Choose the Right Font & Font Size

Legibility matters. The bigger the room and the greater the distance between the screen and its audience, the bigger your digital signage message font size should be. Also, time is money: the longer it takes viewers to make sense of your message, the less chance they'll read and understand the whole thing[1].

- Utilize the brand's font guidelines.
- Vary the usage of font weights and sizes.
- Make your text big enough (if in doubt, bigger is better).
- Only use all caps to emphasize individual words.

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines.* Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] Stewart, David. "Recommended Letter Sizes and Viewing Distances for Signage". *RedBlu Graphics & Displays.* Publication Date: June 18, 2014. Accessed October 28, 2019. https://redblugraphics.co.uk/recommended-letter-sizes-and-viewing-distances-signage

Always use a call to action in your messaging

#3 Use a Strong, Constant Call-to-Action

A retail advertisement or commercial without a call-to-action (CTA) is considered incomplete or ineffective. The same is true for digital signage[1].

- Start the call-to-action with a verb.
- Keep the verb and the subject close together: For example, "Ask a salesperson for details" or "Book your appointment today".
- Ask the viewer to do some task that he or she can complete immediately or in the near future.
- Use size, color, and surrounding negative space to draw attention to your call-to-action.
- If your CTA cannot be on screen the whole time, show it several times per spot[2].

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] McCaffrey, Billy. "Hook, Line, and Sinker: 7 Tips for a Killer Call-to-Action". *Wordstream*. Publication Date: November 30, 2018. Accessed October 28, 2019. https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2014/10/09/call-to-action

When in doubt, try converting your design to grayscale to test your color contrasts. In the above images, the yellow text has better contrast than the red.

#4 Consider Contrast Before Color

Contrast, not color, is far more important when it comes to getting your content noticed, watched and remembered. It's all too easy to include graphical elements that draw the viewer's attention away from the critical part of your content: the message itself[1].

Additionally, there are more than 300 million people globally who suffer from some degree of color blindness[2]. For accessbility purposes, ensuring strong contrast for your text will enable this segment of your viewing audience to be able to read your message.

Bonus Tip
If you are in doubt as to whether your image and text combinations provide enough contrast, test it by applying a grayscale filter to your design.

Color contrast chart showing the best contrasting color combinations for digital signage

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] "What is Colour Blindness". *Colour Blind Awareness*. Accessed October 29, 2019. http://www.colourblindawareness.org/colour-blindness/

Menus are a great example of information chunking. Food items are split into groups like "Appetizers", "Entrees", and "Drinks" or, as in this case, "Size", "Sauce", "Crust", and "Toppings".

#5 Chunk Your Information to Improve Recall

Chunking is a term referring to the process of taking individual pieces of information (chunks) and grouping them into larger units. By grouping each piece into a large whole, you an improve the amount of information you can remember[1].

- Order your information into groups or key phrases and set them into distinct areas of the screen.
- Use the Rule of Three to build sentences or phrases as a progression of three clauses.
- Use alliteration, rhyme and meter to make your information easier to remember[2].

[1] Cherry, Kendra. "How Chunking Pieces of Information Can Improve Memory". *Very Well Mind*. Published Date: October 21, 2019. Accessed October 30, 2019. https://www.verywellmind.com/chunking-how-can-this-technique-improve-your-memory-2794969
[2] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
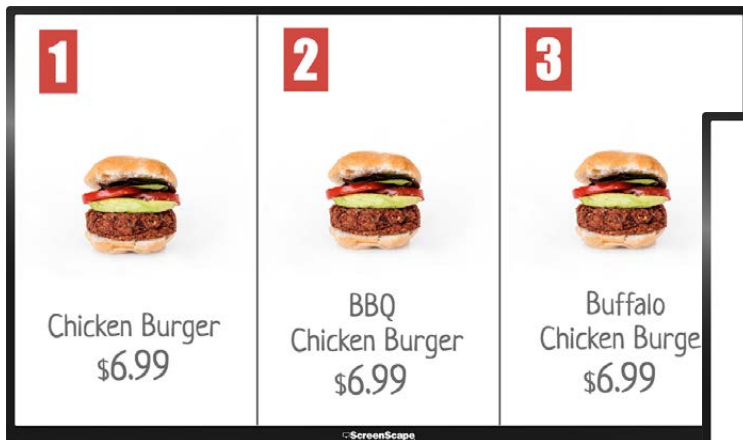
Be aware of the Serial Position Effect when presenting visitors with a list of any kind (a set of links, products, features, etc.). The viewer will more easily remember the first and last items in a list.

#6 Take Advantage of the Serial Position Effect

The serial position effect notes how an element's position in a list affects the number of readers who are able to recall it later. Experiments have shown that when presented with a list of words, study participants tended to remember the first few words (primary effect) and the last few words (recency effect) in a list and are more likely to forget those in the middle of the list[2].

- Present the first few items on your list at a slower speed to enhance the primary effect.
- If you have a call-to-action at the end of your content, keep it short and simple, so it won't compete with your core message.
- When in doubt, choose your two best messages and leave it at that. Sometimes less is more. If there's one message that's more important than the rest, keep it on the screen for as long as possible.

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] McLeod, Saul. "Serial Position Effect". *Simply Psychology*. Published Date: 2008. Accessed October 29, 2019. https://www.simplypsychology.org/primacy-recency.html

#7 Gather ALL Available Creative Assets

Most digital signage will be deployed as an additive component to existing marketing and advertising campaigns. All the raw assets (graphics, animations, video, sounds, etc.) available should be pooled, inspected and analyzed, then reused or re-purposed for digital signage. You can find these assets in a variety of places[1].

ScreenScape's Content Management System allows you to import your creative assets from wherever they reside—Facebook, Instagram, Google Drive, DropBox and One Drive.

Bonus Tip
Improve clarity, scalability, maintenance and collaboration by employing an organization-wide file naming convention[2].

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[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines*. Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
[2] Palkó, Botond. "Good Design Practices: Naming Conventions". *UX Planet*. Published Date: January 2019. Accessed October 29, 2019. https://uxplanet.org/good-design-practices-tips-file-naming-conventions-af32eba681f2

The image to the left features a busy background which makes the text harder to read and can distract the viewer from the message. The minimalist design to the right puts more emphasis on the product and makes the text more legible.

#8 Choose Your Imagery Carefully

Although a picture is worth a thousand words, it's all too easy to include graphical elements that draw viewer attention away from the critical part of your content—***the message itself***. Eye candy that may make a design visually pleasing can also dull down your brand or message even to the point where viewers cannot recall it later[1].

- Identify the core messages.
- Think of a single image or visual element to go along with each of these core ideas.
- Take each message-visual combination and do a poster mockup.
- Elements that have a strong and easily identifiable silhouette will take fewer cognitive resources to identify.
- Consider the environment in which the spots will run; different images can have entirely different meanings in different contexts.

Remember
When it comes to design, LESS IS MORE.

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines.* Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.

In the image to the left, rather than animating the text, this screen features an animated border. The movement is enough to catch the viewer's eye without sacrificing the readability of the message. The image on the right uses one of ScreenScape's panelled Playlist layouts containing revolving news headlines and weather forecasts to catch the viewer's attention.

## #9 Consider the Medium as Print with Motion

While you may think that having an object move on screen would make it more eye-catching and more memorable, the opposite can also be true. In fact, poorly planned motion can decrease visibility and readability, making your content less effective.[1]

Test It!
If you can read your message through three times while it's on screen, you're safe!

- Just because you can make it move doesn't mean that you should.
- Don't let motion interfere with readability or comprehension.
- Any period when important text or other critical message components are off the screen is potentially a missed opportunity to connect.
- The most important features of your spot should be static (unanimated).
- Motion on the periphery is more subtle than animations in the middle of the field of view.

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines.* Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.
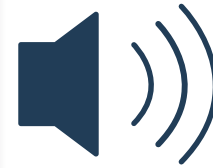
Keep your screen's environment in mind. Don't allow your screen's sound to compete with other music or essential conversations in its location. Use sound sparingly to create impact.

#10 Effective Sound Usage (if available)

The vast majority of digital signage networks do not use sound. Sounds can be part of digital signage content, and where it is appropriate, it can enhance the viewer's experience. When designing content, ask if it requires sound. Remember, in digital signage *sound is always used to support the visuals.*[1]

- Point of Sale networks could have sound, but that depends largely on the location of the screen.
- The most likely candidates for sound usage are Point of Wait networks.
- Sound should not necessarily be used in every message in a playlist. Use it sparingly to create impact.

[1] Johnson, G. *Digital Signage: Effective Creative Content Development Guidelines.* Sault Ste. Marie: Ontario Lottery & Gaming Corporation, 2010.

When in doubt, keep it simple!

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