



## **Enhancing the Impact Of Menu Boards**

by

Michael L. Kasavana, Ph.D., CHTP, CFTP  
MSU/NAMA Professor, Emeritus  
IFBTA Education

and

Amy Fanale  
Sr. Product Manager  
Panasonic North America

### **Executive Summary**

There is a significant shift in restaurant technology that can engage customers in a way that enhances service, reduces wait times, and increases sales. Digital signage is the technology that powers dynamic menu boards and enables cost-effective influential decision making at preliminary and point of purchase touchpoints. It has the ability to empower restaurants with digital menu boards, queue management techniques, streaming entertainment, and impactful marketing campaigns to increase sales. This is why 74% of QSRs ranked digital menu boards as a top priority.

Post pandemic changes in restaurant design, are creating challenges in customer communications in the absence of face-to-face interaction. According to a recent survey conducted by Panasonic, 100% of foodservice operators found that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified a sense of urgency to adopt transformational technology. As the foodservice industry experiences challenges with labor and an increase in customer preferences for touchless options, adopting digital technology appears to be even more important. In addition, the evolution of the drive-thru has also underscored the importance of digital signage and customer engagement.

Restaurant operators are seeking way to elevate revenues and further enhance the customer experience with digital signage.

### **The Menu Board**

Menu boards have existed for more than forty-five years. The menu boards were initially very simple with copy listing the menu items and their prices printed on a sheet of paper or plastic installed in a lightbox. Some boards were illuminated but no product photography was included. Since restaurants in the 1970s did not offer as many menu items as currently featured, boards were generally smaller in design. When the need to change items or prices arose, the item insert was removed and replaced with a new strip. Similarly, price chips were updated. Since a menu item was printed on a strip of plastic that slid into tracks, and price chips snapped into place, changes required some

dexterity but not altering the entire panel. Static menu boards for drive-thru's also were invented and installed in the 1970s.

The introduction of drive-thru service brought about the addition of outside menu boards and an accompanying communication system. During the next decade operators learned that photography of menu items increased sales. This led to a space challenge as eateries increased the number of items on the menu and needed room for photos. These increases in food offerings and photos rendered the board space as insufficient. In the 1990s, the introduction of dayparts led to the need for a way to change the content completely to shift from breakfast to lunch to dinner menus. To accommodate daypart changes, meal panels would either be slid over one another at various times of the day or turned around, both manual processes and had to take place regardless of the weather conditions. By the early 2000s menu boards advanced to digital and allowed for video and commercial promotions to emanate from the board without having to go outside. The digitization of menu boards has expanded capabilities while positively impacting revenues, at a cost-effective rate.

## Digital Signage

According to Digital Signage Today, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many QSR operators' approaches to restaurant design, including outdoor signage. This aspect is likely to be a major part of a post-pandemic, renewed approach. A restaurant menu board should do more than simply list menu items. It should offer a clear way for customers to engage with the brand and, most importantly, become loyal customers. Traditionally, there are three reasons menu boards are important: appeal, inform, and engage.

- **Appeal** -- A restaurant menu board should be part of the architectural design process of the business. Board placement and technical components should be considered along with the ambiance of the guest touchpoints.
- **Inform** -- With a defined marketing and branding strategy, a menu board can support efforts to create an integrated customer experience. A menu board that is appealing and informative both educates and excites customers to become more loyal to the brand.
- **Engage** -- A quality menu board can serve as the basis for value and engagement supporting the overall customer experience and promoting menu items.

All of these factors contribute to creating a unique customer experience, leading to increased customer loyalty, average check, and business.

## Digital Menu Boards

Customers want to see crisp, clear graphics that enhance their experience and restaurants want that experience to be one that makes them returning customers. With the ability to serve up specialized menus with offerings in real time, customers will enjoy a more personalized experience. In the past few years, digital menus have become more popular in restaurants given their ease of use and dynamic capabilities. Digital signage is the most effective option for restaurant operators to create digital menus that

provide flexibility and efficiencies. A menu board provides a large-scale, contactless way of sharing information, both text and graphics, with customers. According to the FDA's menu labeling requirements, restaurants that are part of a chain with twenty or more locations must disclose the number of calories for menu items on a menu board. However, as menu items are consistently changing, especially when food supplies have become somewhat inconsistent, operators can rely on technology to enable rapid changes in displayed content to customers.

The capabilities of digital signage are quite extensive. For restaurants to provide a personalized experience for customers, operators are incorporating interactive, visually immersive signage. Customers can view menu offerings, including price, promotions, ingredients, and nutritional data with clear visuals. For example, restaurants have the ability to easily customize digital menu boards in real-time to enable cross- and up-selling, promotion of specials based on time of day, day of the week, celebrations, and holidays. The objective being that an enhanced customer experience will lead to greater customer loyalty that translates into increased average check and repeat visits.



Source: Panasonic

## **Indoor and Outdoor Digital Signage**

As we've seen over the past few years, digital menu boards have become more popular in restaurants and other businesses for their ease of use and dynamic nature. As these signs become more widely used, you may be wondering if digital menus are right for your business. Weighing the benefits against the costs this is viewed as an investment as the benefits gained are experienced by both the restaurant and customers.

Indoor digital menu boards are great for businesses whether you have an open layout or limited floor space as menu boards can be installed above counter or on the side of the counter to best accommodate your operation. This allows for easy viewing of the menu from multiple locations in your store. Placing the menu in a location that is easy to read prior to the payment counter allows customers plenty of time to view the menu in advance without feeling rushed. Typically, this is seen in quick-service restaurants with the display on the wall behind the cashiers, a couple feet above eye level, or on a wall or stand prior to the counter. This placement can help answer questions about the menu sooner and minimize any lengthy discussions that will hold up the line. Choose a spot that's convenient for you and has the most direct visibility for your customers.

Drive-thru service windows enabled QSRs to serve customers in a relatively contact-free manner during the height of the pandemic and continue to do so. Operators remain focused on these operations, while incorporating third-party delivery, and closely monitoring local on-premise dining regulations in order to de-emphasize it or not. Also, digital signage is used to direct customers to the proper drive-thru lane. Having indoor and outdoor digital signage gives restaurants the advantage to be quick to adjust to the business climate and provide their customers with an up-to-date menu.

## **A Better Menu**



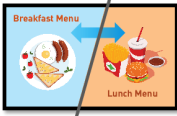

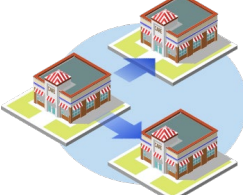

Restaurants that have frequent menu changes are great for digital menus as it is easier to update your digital menu boards on the fly than print new menus. Additionally, if you have products or menu items that frequently sell out, this is a great way to stay on top of editing your menu availability or indicating that something is sold out as soon as it happens. This means the menu is always the most up-to-date version and staff don't need to worry about communicating menu changes to customers. This helps mitigate any frustration a customer might have after already spending time deciding on what they'd like to order. This also means there is a savings on no longer incur expenses on reprinting menus due to changes, regardless of how frequent. Additionally, restaurant staff no longer needs to change menus or go outside in unpleasant weather conditions to turn around static drive-thru menus.

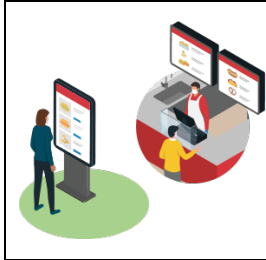
Using a digital board instantly upgrades your establishment by giving it a more modern look. Digital menus tend to draw the eye and give your business a sleek aesthetic. And with a more dynamic menu than what paper menus can provide, your customers are more likely to spend time viewing what you offer and seeing more of the menu they might not otherwise have noticed. They make menu items more noticeable with the use of bright or rotating imagery. This is also a great way to highlight new products, the daily lunch or dinner specials, as well as products that customers may not

be aware of. Since digital menus tend to be more engaging than traditional print products, customers are more apt to notice these updates or specialty products, making it easier to upsell and increase sales overall.

### Must Have Features

Digital menu boards technologies consisting of hardware, software, and supportive services can help increase operational efficiencies, reduce production wait times, enhance customer engagement, and improve revenue. While characteristics of digital menu boards tend to vary, common traits include:

	<p><b>Enterprise Software</b> A common software platform ensures every display in a restaurant is automatically updated and in synchronization with one another. It should allow for self-management at the enterprise or regional level and is connected with your point-of-sale (POS) system to make price and menu changes accomplished remotely.</p>
	<p><b>Weather Resistant</b> The weather should not be a concern with outdoor digital signage as some can withstand the harshest of environments, from -31°F to 140°F.</p>
	<p><b>Automatic Dayparting</b> Display should provide a more customized experience and help manage assets and eliminate waste. Boards can be programmed to automatically change day part without staff interaction.</p>
	<p><b>Changeable Content</b> As menu items are consistently changing given inconsistencies in food supplies, restaurant managers need technology to enable a swift change in the information (ingredients, preparation, and calories) displayed to its customers. Out-of-stock items can be quickly removed, or replaced, without impacting menu appearance.</p>
	<p><b>Uniformity at Multiple Locations</b> With a digital menu board network, menus can easily be updated and content can be uniform and consistent across all locations and units.</p>
	<p><b>All Day Every Day</b> Support services keep systems operable and current with minimal maintenance and/or external support services</p>



### **Customer experience**

Ensure digital signage are easy to read regardless of indoor and outdoor lighting in order to provide a visually engaging customer experience. Additionally, set triggers to offer certain item menus based on the current situation, for example, display iced tea images when outdoor temperature is 80° F or seasonal items for a specified period of time.

### **Summary**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital signage technology upgrades at drive-thrus were questionable for casual and quick-service restaurants. Utilizing the latest technologies, foodservice operators can improve customer confidence, enabling them to take full advantage of strong pent-up demand for the dining experience. By implementing solutions such as kiosks, smart food lockers and digital signage, restaurant owners are offering customers more control of their experience, helping them choose the path that best matches their comfort level, while contributing to a happy and satisfied customer. While it may cost more upfront and take time to implement in the restaurant, a digital menu board may be the solution that makes the most sense in the long term. Once set up, a digital menu is easy to maintain and can increase sales for ongoing success.

# 7 Tips to Develop Awesome Digital Signage

by

Rich Archer

Digital Lead, Omnivex

Digital Signage Today (2021)

**The medium changes, art remains** -- The digital age has brought an untold number of new opportunities to artists. In the 1600s an artist might sculpt clay or paint on large canvas. Today, some of the best artists are creating digital animations or designing apps. Digital signage is one of those evolving mediums. It is an interesting mix of the traditional and the new age. While the concept of a sign is as old as civilization itself, a linked digital communications platform is something entirely new. Which means that if you're reading this, you are working in somewhat uncharted territory.

**Never fear** -- The right designs are as aesthetically oriented as they are utilitarian. This necessity for form and function means that experienced professionals rely on a tightly knit group of core concepts to create masterpieces that pass internal review and look amazing in the field. Wait, what if you aren't a digital design expert but have a network of digital signs you are tasked with creating content for — where do you start?

**Do your research** -- The first facet of creating the perfect digital communication design is research! Start with a brand style guide and required content. Most organizations have brand guidelines and these are important for gaining insight into the colors and visual style considered acceptable by your company. If a brand guide is unavailable, it's a good idea to create one. Use the guide to define color schemes, fonts, and rules around logo usage for your digital signage. Next, think about what you are trying to communicate and consider how that information is currently shared. Who is the audience? What are the important messages and content? What systems/feeds will the data and information on the digital signs come from?

**Create a realistic outline** -- Outline exactly what kind of content is going to be included in the digital content solution. This provides insight into the scope of the project and how the material will be seen. One approach is to use a content matrix that you fill out with a comprehensive list of the different type of content each screen will display. This is important for designing the layouts for different screen sizes.

**Sketch it out** -- Now comes the fun part! Start brainstorming potential ideas and putting pen to paper. It is a good idea to come up with several alternative designs and get input early in the process. Once the general details are mapped out it is important to set a timeline to keep the project on track. Think about Lorem Ipsum, I mean fonts. Once you have agreed on the deliverables and rough outlines, start to research fonts. It is common to use San Serif fonts for headings and pair them with Serif fonts for body copy. Also, be sure to consider casing. When our eyes see all upper-case letters, it can

be harder for them to make out the shape of the word because the texts become all blocks.

**Put yourself in the observer's shoes** -- Keep viewing distance in mind when creating your final design. A one-inch high font size is visible from around 20-25 feet. Think about where your audience will be standing and how they will be interacting with the message. Pixel density and monitor size also play crucial roles in the final visibility of the design. Use simple color contrasts and avoid overwhelming your audience. There is a fine line between a design that "pops" and one that is an eyesore.

**Put it all together** -- Gather all of your mockups get feedback. Ask yourself: Have I explored ideas fully? Have I given every idea I had a chance? Get some feedback. What do people like? What do people not like. Don't take the feedback personal. Think of it as all objective. Afterwards, finalize the mockups for every single screen size. I do these in Photoshop at 72 dpi, 1920-by-1080p aspect ratio. Then it is time to start building. Think about how much of this you can do in your digital signage software, and how it can make this task easier

Now you should be ready to publish some killer designs!