

## Three Strategies to Make Digital Menu Boards Stand Out in a Crowd

Maximizing an investment in a digital menu board means more than simply displaying prices.

By Richard Slawsky  
Contributing editor,  
FastCasual.com

Sponsored by:



Digital menu boards are becoming an integral part of restaurants today, and for good reason.

According to industry experts, the deployment of digital menu boards can lead to overall sales uplifts of as much as 5 percent or more. In addition, spotlighting a promotional item on a digital menu board can boost the sales of that item by as much as 60 percent.

But as more operators embrace digital menu boards, standing out among the crowd is becoming an ever-increasing challenge. There are steps an operator can take, however, to ensure that his restaurant's digital menu board system does the job it was designed to do.

### Placing the screens

One of the simplest steps operators can take to make their menu boards stand out is to ensure proper screen placement. If a customer can't see the screen, the menu board won't be effective.

While that seems obvious, there is more to visibility than making sure customers have an unobstructed view of the screen.

“There might be window glare or light glare or glare from other units, and all of those things need to be countered,” said Mike Litteral, who works in the technical department of Oakland, Calif.-based Lucasey Manufacturing Corp., a provider of mounting solutions for digital signage.



A digital menu board must be unobstructed, easy to see and not suffer from glare of any kind.

In addition to mounting screens behind the counter, restaurant operators might consider placing screens in other areas of the restaurant. For example, a digital preview board can influence customers' orders, introduce a new product, upsell or influence a purchase on a return trip. It's also a good place to introduce discounts or coupons.

After the customer has placed her order, a separate board can influence perceived wait time. In addition to a news crawl or ads about neighborhood events, screens can offer information about a restaurant's frequent diner program, new menu items or upcoming promotions.

### Maximizing content effectiveness

Prior to digital menu boards, many operators in the QSR and fast casual arena relied on backlit boards to display menu items and prices. But simply taking the content from a plastic backlit board and placing it on a digital menu board is likely to leave a deployer disappointed.

"Effective digital signage should stop you in your tracks and make you take notice," said Kelley Max, director of business and creative development with Burbank, Calif.-based media company New Wave Entertainment. "This can be achieved with simple, powerful messaging, unexpected animation and dramatic visuals that creatively fill the space."

Clint Eatherton, owner of 7th Heaven Eatery in Phoenix, first installed a digital menu board system in his restaurant in November 2006. The system consists of four 46-inch monitors displaying more than 60 menu items.

*"Effective digital signage should stop you in your tracks and make you take notice. This can be achieved with simple, powerful messaging, unexpected animation and dramatic visuals that creatively fill the space."*

— Kelley Max, director of business and creative development, New Wave Entertainment.

Those items are displayed atop menu moving scenery that changes depending on the time of day.

"We are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner," Eatherton said. "At breakfast time, the board displays a nice, bright sunrise with hang gliders and hot air balloons moving in behind the text."

During lunch, the board changes to reflect a midday look, and in the evening, the board displays an orange dusk scene. After dark, the screens show twinkling stars with flying saucers and other moving objects.

Because the template for Eatherton's menu board is Web-based, he can make changes to 7th Heaven's menu items from anywhere in the world.

"If we've had an item on the menu for four weeks and we've only sold 10, we would probably want to get rid of it," Eatherton said. "If you had the standard graphics board, which could cost \$1,800 to have printed, you have to figure in that cost each time you change the menu. With the digital boards, you change it today and it doesn't cost you a penny."

### Effective dayparting

When fast casual restaurants first entered the market, they offered limited menus catering to one broad daypart. As the industry grew and became more competitive, the number of dayparts expanded.

“Operators started serving breakfast, so they went to two dayparts, and then three,” said Scott Sharon, president of the Naples, Fla.-based Vertigo Group, a digital menu board provider. “They wanted to do more, but there wasn’t room on the old menu board.”

With the introduction of such marketing concepts as Taco Bell’s “Fourthmeal” and a growing trend toward 24-hour operation, operators are looking at four or more dayparts.

“With a digital menu board, you have the opportunity to cater your messaging to your demographics,” said Tim Tang, marketing director with Germantown, Md.-based Hughes Network Systems, a provider of broadband satellite networks, services and products.

“I know stay-at-home moms are going to come in midday and they are going to be more health conscious, so I should be targeting them with salads and healthy food messages,” he said. “I know high school kids are going to be coming in after school hours, so I can promote quick snacks and high-energy foods.”

### Advantages of digital signage and merchandising:

- Increase sales of promotional items by 10 to 60 percent
- Update custom verbiage in real time
- Schedule specific messages at specific times to maximize impact
- Entertain and wow customers with custom animation
- Easily modify content to reflect real-time stock and alleviate issues related to out-of-stock, seasonal or closeout merchandise
- Decrease customers’ perceived wait time
- Move lines faster in ordering scenarios because customers view the menu more quickly
- Improve customer impressions of friendliness and service

Source: Visual Impressions

*About the sponsor: Visual Impressions specializes in the design, manufacturing, fabrication and installation of print and digital signage merchandising solutions. Since 1994, the company has offered personal customer service and innovative strategies to its clients, utilizing the most current and advanced technology. Its objective is to exceed customers’ expectations and produce visually stunning and functional creations that illuminate clients’ brands, messages and logos.*