Integrators Stage Early to Avoid Installation Headaches in the Field

Staging and testing digital signage projects prior to deployment is an important yet often overlooked element of a successful digital signage installation. Our support staff regularly receive support calls from installers having interoperability problems with systems that weren't tested prior to installation. They call us when they're on-site, un-boxing things and trying to make them work. It can be a very stressful situation for everyone involved.

It's not uncommon for individual components to be tested prior to installation. And while this is a good first step, it overlooks the reality that thorough testing requires full staging to see how the entire system (software, media player, screens, mounting hardware and the network configuration) behaves in unison. This highlights the importance of *system integration* to truly understand and perfect interoperability of individual components working in harmony.

It is often the case that a system integrator specifies all the required equipment for a given project and then turns it over to an installation team for the final stage of delivery to a customer. In this case, the best practice is for the integration team to carefully stage the equipment before the actual installation. Take all of the equipment, set it up, test the content and networking to make sure it's working perfectly. Then box it up with explicit instructions for the installation team. It should all be checked, labeled and kitted. All the installers should have to do is connect it together. They're good at installation, and it should be exactly that. The installation should be geared around the labor side of things and have nothing to do with the operation of the system itself. If the pre-installation staging is done properly, the only thing the installer will have to worry about is possible shipping damage.

Staging is especially crucial for content that relies on data-driven information. For example, if the player connects to a database of pricing information for a digital menu board, the integrator needs to make sure the connections to the pricing database are being made. Staging is also a crucial process for any kind of video wall. Staging the screen configuration, checking the player synchronization and bezel compensation settings – all of these elements contribute to a smooth and successful final installation.

One final consideration for the integrator to ensure a simple and successful deployment is to specify reliable purpose-built hardware designed specifically for the job at hand. Solid-state media players designed for the 24x7 operating environment of digital signage offer greater reliability, flexibility and performance for as little as $250. Think of the long haul and start with the products that will perform flawlessly for years to come. PCs, with the need for periodic updates, can really hamper an installation.

Installers don't want to be in the position of dealing with malfunctioning PCs or other equipment in the field. And they certainly don't want to complete an installation, with only blank screens to show for all their hard work. Installers understandably don't want to be in the position of having to call out an engineer to fix the problem.

There exists a symbiotic relationship between integrators and installers, each with an important role to play in their shared success. Working in tandem, they can build and maintain very strong customer relationships that benefit all involved.