The Future of Signage According to Display Expert, Dave Haynes

Dave Haynes is the editor of [Sixteen:Nine](), one of—if not the—best blogs out there on the digital signage industry. With over 15 years' experience, Haynes is an expert in the arena.

Since he works in the industry as a consultant alongside the blog, we wanted to hear his opinion about the current state of the industry and where he sees it heading.

In your [recent interview at NEC ISE 2017](), you spoke about the increasing number of digital signage software companies popping up all over. What are the positive and negative effects of this growth on the industry?

I was floored to hear from one company that tracks the competitive software landscape, who said it has a database of 3,200 content management software companies. That's insane. What amazes me is that there are still more companies coming into the business. I know, because I get the emails and phone calls asking and hoping for attention on my blog, and looking for advice.

The marketplace can perhaps support 32 companies, and definitely not 3,200. So there will be a lot of roadkill, and we're already seeing companies quietly making it known they're amenable to acquisition. The positive side to this, I suppose, is hyper-competition breeds innovation.

While a lot of the newcomers really aren't doing anything that hasn't already been done, there are cases where I have seen companies really push the possibilities and think differently about the approach to digital signage and visual communications.

> A growing industry like digital signage always creates new companies, but many will not survive the competition.

You also spoke about the end user's want for the 'latest and the greatest.' Do you think this will be dampened as they try to marry up the costs with the returns?

I think buyers are, generally, getting smarter—particularly those that are not new to this technology and are maybe refreshing an existing network with new hardware and software.

However, there are still many, many buyers enchanted by the latest types of displays and the latest related technologies. When I consult, I always reinforce with clients that their projects can't be about 'the stuff' because it really is just stuff. What matters is what's on that screen and how it solves problems or makes some effort better.

If the content is compelling and relevant, they'll look—no matter the display layer. If the content is dull or off-message, super-teeny displays are not going to make the difference.

> Content is king and needs to be contextual and crisp to grab attention.

Read our case studies to see what works.

In terms of ever-advancing technology, just how important is it to a successful campaign?

The advancing technology that really matters is the boring stuff—the software and hardware tools that are absolutely minimizing downtimes. We've all seen very expensive video wall installations with a dead screen right in the middle of it, or Windows update messages popping up over marketing videos.

The other boring things that will have a massive impact are systems that organize, present and make readily available useful data, as well as connected sensors and other devices that will help directly influence and trigger what content should play where and when, in real time.

> For commercial signage displays, the quality of the product is still the most important factor.

What are your predictions for the industry over the coming years?

Much of the backlit and framed poster inventory in developed countries will transition from analog to digital. PCs as digital signage players will be used only for video walls and specialty jobs, and the rest of the business will be with 'smart' displays or separate, special-purpose playout boxes.

A big brand's agency doesn't want to manage most of the endpoint screens—like phones, tablets and desktops with one platform—and then have to use a different one for signage applications. So the 3,200 will become 32, maybe, and there will be 3 or 4 major CMS (Content Management System) software companies that have the industrial-grade software and a suite of supporting services to do this.

The local hair salon will use some simple, probably free or dirt-cheap system for their one screen, just as they use some free or dirt-cheap set-up to support their website. There's a good chance it will be the same software.

> Digital signage is poised to expand rapidly, especially in DOOH. Digital signage management will transform from PCs to smart, intuitive special-purpose boxes.

Check out the latest outdoor signage products.

This interview has been edited.

We want to thank Dave for taking the time to answer our questions, and for his incredible work at Sixteen:Nine. If you'd like to hear more from Sixteen:Nine, follow them on Twitter here.