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Digital Signage: A New Tool in Your Arsenal of Knowledge

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Digital Signage

A new tool in your arsenal of knowledge

By Deborah Schander

"MY ARSENAL OF KNOWLEDGE INCLUDES ROCKET LAUNCHERS, TRACKING DEVICES, ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FIELD GENERATORS, FREEZE RAYS, AND THE USUAL ASSORTMENT OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONRY YOU'D EXPECT IN YOUR TYPICAL LIBRARY."

Thus proclaims Rex Libris, the eponymous star of James Turner's comic book series about a man who once worked at the Library of Alexandria and who now uses any means necessary to collect late books and fight ignorance. As Rex has discovered, modern librarianship often requires us to embrace technologies and resources that do not automatically scream "library service!" So while freeze rays may not, sadly, be standard issue for law librarians, we still have the opportunity to assemble our own arsenals of knowledge. In the case of library marketing, we already have print newsletters, web pages, and word of mouth as proven methods of promotion. With the space-saving advent of flat screens, we now also have the opportunity to broadcast announcements to students who simply walk through the door. Digital signage creates a new opportunity to reach your library patrons.

Using TVs and computer monitors to inform building visitors is not a new concept. Law schools have been using them for years to tell students about on-campus interviews, class cancellations, and more. Thanks to screens that don't require an excessive amount of space and even open source software, libraries can now do the same.

Choosing Your Location

A digital display can be an invaluable marketing tool for any library, but where do you start? Your first concern will probably be where to put it. Placement is actually a fairly easy question to address. Perhaps you have a public computing area or a good space near the circulation desk. The exact location will depend on your library's layout, but the important thing is that the display be placed in a heavily trafficked area where your visitors can see the screen without a lot of effort. If possible, it is also best to place the screen at eye level, five or six feet above the ground. This way, the display is in

your patrons' direct line of sight as they walk by. Although you can mount the screen higher on the wall, you may find that people don't notice it as readily or don't want to crane their necks to see your announcements.

Setting Up Your System

Closely related to the question of where to mount your screen is how to display items. You have two basic options here. The first option is to use a flat screen computer monitor and run your announcements as a PowerPoint presentation or screensaver. The advantage of this option is that it will not require any new software. You may even be able to use some existing hardware. On the other hand, you'll also need to have the CPU nearby. This may require a locked cabinet or similar piece of furniture to protect the tower.

Your second option is to purchase a flat screen TV, receiver, and software specifically designed for digital signage. Some of the advantages of going this route include the option for a much larger screen and the ability to run your software from a remote location rather than a connected CPU. However, this software can be expensive and comes

with a learning curve. You may also decide to purchase only one license, and updates would need to be done from one specific computer on which the software is installed. There are a number of companies that offer digital signage software, including Scala (scala.com), Symon (www.symon.com), and the free, open source option Concerto (www.concerto-signage.org).

Designing Your Signage

Although your slides can be as plain or as fancy as you'd like, you will find that having some knowledge of design principles and software will be incredibly helpful. And while some digital signage software allows you to create your slides within the program itself, it can often be easier to do so in another program and just upload a final product for display. Microsoft products such as PowerPoint and Publisher tend to be readily available on office computers and are a good place for the casual designer to start. You can then save your design in various formats such as JPGs, PPTs, or whichever format your digital signage software prefers. You can also use more high-powered programs such as InDesign, Photoshop, or The Gimp for advanced editing options.

It can never hurt to remind patrons of some of your basic services, such as offering guidance on their research assignments.

**Legal Bib
got you stumped?**

**Ask at the
Reference Desk!**





Digital signage can be used for advertising library events or offerings, such as Law Library Week or free coffee during finals.

The internet provides a wealth of free tools to enhance your designs. For attractive new fonts, try [dafont.com](http://www.dafont.com) (www.dafont.com) or Font Squirrel (www.fontsquirrel.com), which boast a wide variety of options. If you'd like some help with color selection,



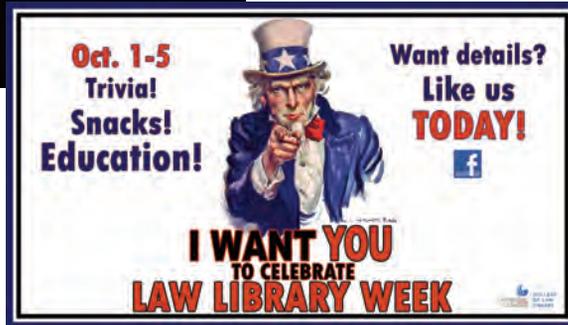
Some of your slides may stay up on an ongoing basis. For example, this slide alerts patrons to a quiet area of the library.

COLOURlovers (www.colourlovers.com/palettes) has a fun and inspiring selection of user-created palettes. For eye-catching art, run a search on Flickr (www.flickr.com) for Creative Commons-licensed images; from straightforward to wacky, these Flickr images are often available for use with just an artist attribution.

Content Ideas

Choosing your display system and design software are probably one-time decisions, but you are also going to face the ongoing decisions of what to display on your digital signage. Some of this content will be self-evident: upcoming library events, reference desk hours, and that handy "quiet zone" sign. Other signage may be tied to a particular time of year, such as orientation or exams. Your digital signage can also feature

other slides: new databases, free coffee days, or highlights from your special collections. Digital signage can even be a creative way to lighten the mood of the library. For



example, at Georgia State University, our students requested the increasingly popular stress animals during exams; when we determined that our library didn't have an adequate place to house the animals, students requested pictures of them on the digital signage instead. Throughout exams, we'd see students walking by, grinning because a puppy had come up on the screen. Some would even camp out in front of the screen for a few minutes as the display cycled through lambs, cats, and even a tiger.

Scheduling

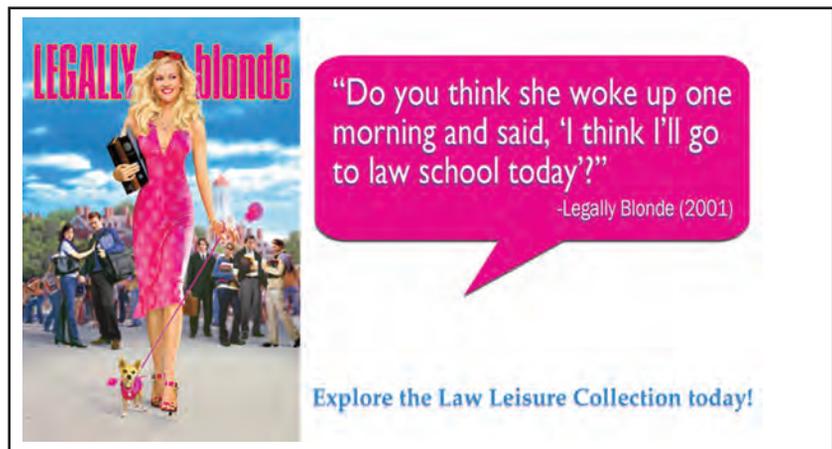
One final factor to consider with your digital signage is the schedule and variety of content. There will probably be some slides you choose to display throughout

the semester, ongoing pieces of information that are useful for one-time visitors and that serve as reminders for your frequent users. But you will also find that your patrons start to ignore the signage if content gets too stale. To prevent this, plan to change out the majority of your content every week or two; any longer, and people tend to ignore it. With a good mix of changing informational screens, lighthearted content such as movie or book quotes (also often popular with visitors), event announcements, and your ongoing slides, your digital signage will remain fresh and informative for your patrons.

Seeing the Results

Adding digital signage to your library can require an investment of both money and time, but you can also expect your patrons to become more informed about upcoming library events, services, and the collection. Whether it's a student confiding that they didn't feel comfortable asking a class-related question until they saw a sign urging them to do so or a public patron taking note of your holiday hours, you will see a change in how your patrons start to get their library news. Although a digital sign cannot (and should not) replace other traditional forms of library marketing, it can still enhance your outreach efforts in a noticeable way. ■

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Quotes from books and movies are often popular slides (not to mention easy to create for filler content).