



Matching The Right Mix

Just what is the right mix for digital screen networks? *John Taylor* talked to Mood Media to get its ideas on getting it right

New as our industry is there certainly has been no shortage of controversy over the many conflicting approaches and opinions on digital media over the past few years. But it's undeniable that we are still talking about it, says Mood Media's Marketing Manager Vanessa Warren, with more running trials or integrating digital media in its varying forms to the communications mix.

The solutions are legion. Some just use video content for entertainment, others use visual content to promote and increase sales. More use moving imagery to educate or even reduce waiting times. The facts are that digital media really can be present in countless forms and is a

wonder tool that can help fulfil many objectives.

It can be argued, says Vanessa Warren, that the benefits are often dubious: often suppliers make promises that cannot be kept. But the trick to digital media is not to over complicate things. "Think of it as another element to the communications mix," she says. "It will not satisfy every objective on its own but when used creatively and in conjunction with the right audio visual mix, it becomes an effective cog in the world of communication."

"For leading operators to stay at the top of their game, it is vital to stay ahead of the competition by keeping consumers engaged, interested and spending money," she continues.

"Creating the right environment is an integral part of this process and this is where digital media can help. Above all, digital media, however simple or complex, the solution helps create the impression of a modern, forward thinking business, and these are essential requirements for engaging today's consumer."

Mood Media Group, new to the UK but well known throughout Europe, currently supports over 6000 commercial sites with visual solutions. It specialises in digital media and is the result of a merger last year with DMX Music. Together, under the Mood Media banner, says Vanessa Warren "the new organisation boasts a complete in-site marketing service, covering

music and retail radio as well as digital visual technologies to scent marketing solutions”.

Notably, with DMX already providing audio solutions to over 20,000 sites in the UK, the new group reckons it can help any business to differentiate itself from its competitors. Focussing on the digital media, Mood Media is able to provide a range of visual solutions including customised TV programmes, interactive kiosks and video jukebox services, to companies who need to communicate the right message to the right audience, in the right format and at the right time.

“Visual content struggled initially to take off in the UK,” states Jean-Marie Noizet, Group CEO, “because of ineffective business models, whereas in continental Europe, we helped establish visuals as a key element of enhancing the customer experience.”

So that beggars the question: why did UK businesses not embrace digital media in the same way as their European counterparts? Is it because there was a greater emphasis on UK digital networks to generate revenue as opposed to providing a new platform to promote in-store? This certainly appeared to be the case for the larger multiple chains, says Vanessa Warren. However, recent studies do reveal that increasingly, retail outlets are using digital media to convey promotional messages. So, how can in-store media suppliers help businesses maximise the benefits of a digital media investment?

“Suppliers must help retailers translate their business objectives into the correct visual content strategy,” says Vanessa Warren, “and guide them through to the best technology options and stop bombarding this sector with empty promises. There simply is no one shoe fits all solution with digital media.”

Core examples of the Mood Media approach lie in its existing networks as well as in those about to be rolled out to UK stores and organisations over the coming months. According to Tibor Kovari, UK and Ireland MD for Mood Media, “Visual design teams work with our clients to identify the most appropriate objectives for their business and then translate them into the right content strategy. Our visual service is an end to end solution that incorporates content creation, technology, installation and on-going support and maintenance”.

When creating the best audio visual identity for a business, creative departments at Mood Media progress through a systematic and comprehensive process, all the time considering consumer demographics, trading patterns, brand values, media objectives and the budget allocated to the project.

So what advice does Mood Media provide for prospective clients looking at a visual project? “Mood Media is keen to offer advice,” says Vanessa Warren, “and has developed a veritable

checklist for businesses considering digital media, no matter how simple or complex the solution. To create the best media solution for your brand, it is essential your provider understands what it is you want to achieve from a digital network.

To help the creative process, here’s a list of questions put together by Mood Media that, says Vanessa Warren, should form the basis of any initial creative brief meeting with your in-store digital media supplier.

On business objectives, look at how you see your business developing over the next five years. Ask yourself what are the biggest challenges facing your business in the current marketplace and what initiatives are in place to address these challenges?

The marketing objective is straightforward, maybe blindingly obvious, but because of just that, gets forgotten or swamped with a rush to the head for new technology and all that it offers. Just ask yourself what do you want visual media to do for your business?

Then ask in what way do your marketing objectives reflect your business objectives? You can then expand the concept a little by asking whether or not you want to integrate audio visual objectives to other above the line and below the line activities.

Taking on-board the concepts of digital technology and particularly in-store radio, TV and screen media networks, look pointedly at your brand and ask what are the brand values and what is it you want your customers to think about your brand? And don’t forget to keep in mind whether there are any short or longterm plans or intentions to change the brand in the future?

In essence, customers are key to the cause in retail screen and digital media. So, what are the key customer demographics and, importantly, what is the average dwell time? Allied to that, it is important to identify, with respect to providing a digital media service, what are the key

objectives for visual solutions within your company? And that means identifying objectives for promotions, entertainment, imaging, information, revenue and source.

Look at how many promotional campaigns you do in a year. Vanessa Warren says look at whether your promotional calendar integrates above the line activities with in-store campaigns? From there, there is a whole string of questions that need answering. Do you anticipate changes to your promotional campaign strategies? How many changes or updates do you want to integrate into your visual campaigns? Do you want your visual solution to be broadcast throughout your estate? Are you considering regionalised campaigns?

Widen the scope: do you want a hands-free solution? Do you want the ability to update your content via your head office or locally? Do you want a manager to interact with your visual solution on-site?

So from addressing each and every one of those questions, a brief of what you want and indeed need in a digital network emerges. Once the initial brief is put together, get together with your preferred supplier and go through a systematic process before developing a proposal together. And make sure, says Vanessa Warren, that your provider researches your stores, all the time considering store lay-out, consumer demographics and trading patterns. Then you can be confident that a comprehensive proposal can be assembled that clearly and simply identifies the key elements for the system that you really do need to achieve without being side tracked to the not quite right but it will do scheme of things.

Getting to the nitty gritty there are some key parts to the proposal that really need to be considered, with questions answered too. With respect to the creative, you need to know whether the content is going to be required to reinforce the brand or showcase products. Maybe it’s to improve store design, entertain



customers or highlight promotional offers. Moreover, is it to improve PoS effectiveness and compliance, and/or to generate additional advertising revenue, and will it be used to reduce PoS waste, print and lead times?

The question of content, yes it's king and has to be treated as such. That means assessing the pros and cons in detail as there are pitfalls from a wrong decision. Beyond the style content being proposed there is an important decision to make on whether you use customised content or integrate existing TV and print advertising content into the mix. The pitfall here is blindingly obvious, that we all know only too well: if you are going to use exiting TV footage or indeed existing anything, make sure it is right for purpose, because mostly, it won't be! TV ads, for example are far too long and need dwell times that often busy passers-by in store don't have time for, unless of course it's stunning every second of its playtime and then you have a result and a crowd management problem.

Jocularity aside, existing content developed for other media may be convenient and on the face of it cost saving but it could be a wasted cost which is no good to anyone. Music on the other hand, and this includes simply music videos, is a different kettle of fish. For music videos, says Vanessa Warren, you need to know if the video branding is being added and the same for the artist and track name. And is it silent content or synchronised audio?

For content delivery, Vanessa Warren says ask how content is to be delivered and stresses that you get references for the technology you want or it is suggested that you install. Players absolutely must maintain content integrity on delivery. If they don't, it's turn off and a waste of time, money and effort. Also look at the effectiveness of integrated audio and what types of visual content the player technology will support?

All the hardware is equally important in digital media technology. It's no good having the best player in the world and the best content if you choose, low quality screens at the sharp end. Weigh up the pros and cons of LCDs, plasmas, LED screens and even holographic displays. High Definition is here and now, although costly at present but stunning. Choose wisely. Even consider interactive display platforms but for each look at the cost implications and benefits but don't cut corners on issues that affect quality delivery because no one will watch them.

Managing the service and content is often a logistics issue and whichever way you choose, outsource or manage the system yourself get the blindingly obvious right first time. Look at frequency of updating and for the ability to add local content. And if you choose a managed system rather than a manage it in-house system, make sure there is a dedicated account management team set-up to support your service. If it's in-house, look at the job functions

of staff working on your service.

Other vital issues that must be in the consideration mix from day one include on-going support and what happens when something goes wrong because if something goes wrong your system has blank screens! Iron out whether there is a support network in place, whether managed internally or externally, that can answer questions you may have so you can be sure the procedures and indeed repercussions of even the slightest failure or blip. Importantly on the kit you decide to install, get references from other satisfied customers first and talk to them unencumbered and on their own!

For content, see demos and work with your supplier on creating content for the demo too because that's the real test. And when you have that, test out just how quickly content changes can be made.

Like wrong screen or players, it's all a waste of time, cost and effort if you put your screens in the wrong place, the same too if the management end is crammed in some unworkable corner. Get properly created and detailed specifications outlining screen types, sizes, positioning and even cabling. It's important hear too to keep an eye on costs and benefits as well as the pros and cons of alternatives. On pricing per se, get clear prices, look extremely carefully for hidden costs and look at exactly what you get for your money. And it goes without saying, run a trial before accepting any proposal.

The idea of all these questions and considerations, says Vanessa Warren, is not to frighten anyone off but to educate the marketplace on what exactly is involved, further, what to demand from digital media suppliers. "Regardless of simplicity or even complexity of a solution," she says, "digital media just will not be effective unless each and every interconnecting element is carefully and creatively constructed in total accord with the initial project objectives."

So in its more specialised digital media niche, what does Mood Media add to the mix?

An Integrated approach is what Mood Media offers, says Vanessa Warren. "We provide a one-stop creative agency that takes all the key elements and puts them together to create a digital solution that works best for the client. Our phased approach looks at content first then technology of course that is our raison d'être where we can emphasise our passion for the delivered message and the way in which that message is communicated.

"Our visual programs have one thing in common," continues Vanessa Warren. "They are all different. You might see the same music video clip in some stores, but your corporate communication, your logo animations and your advertising are always customised to fulfil your core objectives. Photos, graphics, text, animations and real videos bring screens to life. Mood Media works to define what to play and how often, ensuring the right mix of promotion, information



& entertainment for your customers and staff is created."

As always the proof is in the pudding. Mood Media has chalked up a veritable range of clients across Europe, Asia and Australia including McDonalds throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Miss Selfridge, G4 and Republic in the UK, Virgin Mega Store, Vodafone and Total in Europe. "We are keen to introduce our digital platforms to the UK market," says Tibor Kovari, "to showcase what we can do for brands and ultimately help to provide an effective platform for businesses to communicate with their customers."

SFR, part of Vodafone, has 550 stores in France and runs on Mood Media. A mixture of technologies is installed to deliver the spectacular in customer retail experience. Touch-screen interactive kiosks provide information hubs for the store: a digital customer services representative explains SFR's latest product range and plasma screens display promotional content as well as entertaining music videos and a specifically programmed musical identity plays throughout the stores.

Rexel, the electrical and hardware chain, has a network of 1686 sites in 24 countries throughout Europe, America and the Asia-Pacific. Around 60% of its customers are tradesmen from the residential or non-residential construction industries. Mood Media partnered with Rexel last year to deliver a forward thinking digital network.

inexel TV is the result and Mood Media manages the system for over 250 Rexel stores so far. Digital content is a mixture of information on various trades, as well as promotional and branded content. inexcel TV also updates customers on the local traffic, news and weather, special industry reports and there is entertainment for customers whilst in store. "What is interesting," says Vanessa Warren, "is that Mood Media works as a media agency for Rexel, sourcing advertisers who want to promote themselves on inexcel TV and as a consequence, Rexel's TV network is completely funded by advertisers."