

Follow-up SignIPS technical questions

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Context

As part of the assignment, I conducted research on the technical aspects of digital signage to make the process from implementation to operation work. During the research, however, I came across a few ambiguities that I could not find (clear) answers to online. To answer these, I sent the questions to SignIPS, a Dutch company that specialises in narrowcasting.

Questions and answers

For the technical research, I was able to find a lot of answers and information about digital signage, how it works, and what steps are possible to implement it in the working environment. The questions I asked SignIPS are therefore more focused on the details. As a result, I gather more (expert) information, and we can take this into account when we convey our results in practice.

I also briefly discussed with the group about these questions being good and got approval for it.

The questions and answers received are:

What are the instructions for implementing digital signage? How do you implement it for multiple screens?

This one was already answered in a later research by others and me before I got the answers; One player is required for each screen to narrowcast. E.g., for 5 screens, 5 separate players are required. Images and videos can be uploaded into the players using software from the digital signage company.

What does a CMS for digital signage typically look like?

There is no "typical" CMS for digital signage, if you want to get a better understanding of what this would look like, I suggest downloading and analyzing several digital signage systems, as there are a lot of free ones on the internet. This would give you a better understanding of how these systems work.

What does a player look like?

Players usually look like a small box, something you would attach to your own TV, for example. The players we use or have used are the Minix media Player and the ODROID-N2. This gives a good idea of what a player usually looks like.

How to connect a player to a wall-mounted TV screen with HDMI?

We use our own custom-made supports. But you can also use ordinary supports if they fit. Otherwise, we have also seen people who just solve it with a cable tie.

From the answers, I can say that I got more clarity on the implementation of digital signage in detail. For the second answer, as a follow-up, I researched different digital signage software myself to compare with each other.

Comparison of software for digital signages

Because every digital signage system is different, there is no 'typical' CMS according to SignIPS. From the advice, I therefore looked for some (free) digital signage systems to try out and compare with each other to have direct first-hand experience.

As there are many different digital signage services, I only picked three; DigitalSignage.com, OptiSigns and Opensignage. I chose these because I could easily sign up for these services, and at least offer a free trial. Many other services require company credentials, a paid plan, or contacting the company to access the software.

I tested the three services to look at the process from signing up to broadcasting the screens, and its features.

The process in chronological order	DigitalSignage.com	OptiSigns	Opensignage
Creating account to use the service	✓	✓	✓
Required installation of software for casting	✗	✓	✓
No paid plan required	✓	After free trial of 14 days	✓
Using website or software to manage the content	✓	✓	✓
Built-in template/screen maker	✓	✓	✗
Upload own images/video for screens	✗	✓	✓
Physical player required to cast	✗	✗	✗
Webplayer	✓	✗	✗
Entering a pairing code in the software to cast the screens	✗	✓	✓

After conducting the tests, I found that although the platforms share some similarities and achieve the same goal of casting the screens, they differ in terms of features, the signup process, and the steps required to cast templates to the screens. However, regardless of which service chosen, the setup process is simple, straightforward, and can be completed within 20 minutes.

Conclusion

During the technical research of narrowcasting, I stumbled upon a few uncertainties that I couldn't find the answers to online. To this, I send some questions to the narrowcasting company SignIPS to gather more information. Because I could find most of the general information, the questions were more on the detailed technical side.

I asked about the players, how they looked like and the process of connecting them to a wall-mounted tv-screen. I also asked about how a typical CMS for the narrowcasting looked like.

From the answers about the players, I learned that players are usually sized like little boxes to attach to a TV. When connecting to a wall-mounted TV, it is either done with mounts (custom or ordinary) or a tiwrap.

Regarding typical CMS, there are none according to SignIPS and recommended to look and analyze several digital signages to better understand them. I took on this and tried three different Digital Signages services to compare; DigitalSignage.com, OptiSigns and Opensignage.

From comparing just those with each other, I found that despite having the same goal in casting screens, they still differ from each other in some features, limitations, and the process of setting up the narrowcasting. For example, OptiSigns and Opensignage allow users to upload their own images and videos, while DigitalSignage.com doesn't.