

# Harley *Knows Best*

**H**arley-Davidson is one of the few brands that truly understand the creative potential of digital signage networks at retail. Foot Locker is another.

It's not that the technology involved is especially impressive. Rather, it's that both brands use the medium to grab the shopper emotionally.

Harley's idea is a simple one. It features brief profiles of local riders that are all about what it means to be someone who rides a Harley. In a similar vein, Foot Locker features the extraordinary stories of otherwise ordinary, local athletes.

Both brands work with a Manhattan-based company called MediaPlace to create content that is quite extraordinary (you can see some of Foot Locker's videos online at [realathletes.tv](http://realathletes.tv) as well as on YouTube). "It's a chance for kids to look up on these screens and see people just like them, walking down the same road they're walking down," says Scott Kushner, ceo of MediaPlace. "It also sends a positive message about a quality of life that instills confidence in young people."

This may sound like the kind of soft-sell approach that would be unlikely to move product at retail, but in fact Harley's videos makes you want to buy a bike and Footlocker's vignettes get you pumped to buy the gear you need to go out and play ball, or whatever.

## AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

The Harley and Foot Locker examples shouldn't be so unusual, but unfortunately most brands tend to regard anything that happens in-store as just about devoid of emotional content. The irony of this is obvious, because most shoppers would tell you that shopping is nothing short of a visceral experience.

This very subject came up recently while I was participating in a panel discussion on the future of

digital signage networks at a conference hosted by Henry Stewart in New York City. I was joined on the panel by Pat Hellberg, who until recently was director of Nike's Brand Content Studio, and Mark Zwicker of Alchemy, a division St. Joseph Communications and Canada's largest content creation organization.

Other than the outstanding content on display in Nike's own retail stores, Pat said his favorite use of in-store digital media is from Hollister, the teen surf brand. "It couldn't be more basic," Pat explained.

"Their digital signage application is nothing more than a monitor that has a live shot from one of the beaches in Los Angeles, which just shows the waves crashing on the beach, live, along with the water and air temperature. That's all there is to it."

In other words, Hollister doesn't try to sell anything directly, but it puts the shopper in a very positive, aspirational frame of mind. As Pat said: "It's like okay, let's go surfing

now, everybody's learning how." It's not unlike my own work at EnQii with Liberty Travel, whose digital signage features beauty shots of beaches during the dead of winter in New York City, inspiring people to think about taking a vacation.

Mark chimed in with a similarly simple concept he had seen at Albertson's, in the seafood section, where the retailer features 30-second clips of its own "celebrity" chef showing how to prepare fish from fridge to plate. "They really see an increase in seafood sales as a result," Mark reported.

The Harley, Foot Locker, Hollister, Liberty Travel and Albertson's examples each take direct aim at one of the greatest myths of digital signage at retail — that it's just a digital version of traditional, print point-of-purchase signage. Clearly the potential here is much greater than that, not only to enhance the shopping experience but also to increase sales.

**Digital signage networks offer a new kind of creative canvas**

The point is that if a goal of “shopper marketing” is to be responsive to the shopper’s “need states,” then our view of digital signage at retail must broaden to include the shopper’s loftiest aspirations as well as their more mundane informational needs.

#### DRAMATIC POTENTIAL

Although this can be done rather simply, as Hollister shows, it can also assume a more dramatic scale. For example, Mark mentioned another favorite digital sign of his—the M&M board in Times Square.

“The M&M brand is fun to begin with, and they do some neat things with it,” he said. “If you’ve ever watched the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, you’ll have seen how they have the M&M’s characters sitting on a bleacher, just watching the parade go by.”

Pat brought up the Caesar’s Palace Mall in Las Vegas, where one of the high-end fashion retailers has spectacular 100-inch vertical signs that show nothing more than videos of models walking up and down the runway. “If that isn’t a branding statement that puts you in a mood to buy, I don’t know what is,” Pat said.

Mark predicted that, within two years, instead of a screen on a wall, the wall *itself* would be the screen. “We’ll have what we’re calling digital wallpaper, where you’ll be able to have the walls come alive with content,” adding: “You’re not likely to see that in a Wal-Mart environment, but in a Prada environment, you might have that runway model walking around the entire store and totally changing the shopping environment. He also noted that the cost of the technology required to do something like that is falling sharply.

Given all of this creative potential of digital signage at retail, the obvious question is why advertising agencies haven’t jumped on this new and exciting creative opportunity to connect with consumers on an emotional level.

Mark suggested that the lack of interest is partly because of an overall lack of knowledge of digital media, in combination with a lack of metrics to measure its effectiveness. But Pat pointed out that the ROI on other kinds of in-store media has yet to be quantified, either.

He’s right. In fact, if you catch certain retailers in one of their more candid moments, they will tell you that they get only about 60 percent compliance when implementing static signage at retail. However, with digital signage, it’s possible to monitor compliance

through network servers and know that you are now at full compliance.

So, even if digital signage performs only at the same level as static signage (typically, it actually performs better), you can guarantee 100 percent compliance. That translates into about a 60 percent increase in performance, which is often overlooked in ROI measurements.

#### A GLANCE NOT A TRANCE

Advertising agencies also need to recognize that digital signage networks offer a new kind of canvas for creativity. All too often, digital signage networks have been misused as a repository for re-purposed television commercials. This almost never works for a variety of reasons, starting with the fact that television commercials involve audio that may not be appropriate or desired within a digital signage environment.

Using a soundtrack often is not practical at retail because some digital signage networks either don’t include audio or, if they do, store employees turn it off. Nor does the 30-second format of most television commercials work with digital signage, because shoppers don’t stop long enough to watch. In most cases, you need to get your idea across in nine seconds or less.

As a consequence, advertising creatives, who are accustomed to creating a “trance” with relatively long-form 30-second television commercials have not yet acclimated to the creative challenge of working within the “glance” timeframe of digital signage networks.

That’s both the challenge and the opportunity of digital signage networks, which is far larger than just a way to convey tactical sales messages. It is a powerful channel for the kind of creativity that can match a shopper’s “need state,” connect emotionally to his or her aspirations and, yes, drive sales at retail. In some in-store environments we can create that “trance” state and subsequently move the shopper to a purchase. Now that is powerful creative! ■



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