



# The Industry Through the DSE Looking Glass

## The Market Gathered in Vegas this Past March, And This is What We Learned



BY ALAN C. BRAWN

At this point in the year — not too early but also not too late to where the big trends are all played out — there is probably no better gauge of the digital signage industry than the health and status of the Digital Signage Expo. And the industry itself is just about at that point in its maturity that most of the top players can still fit under one roof.

That roof was recently the Digital Signage Expo, which wrapped in March. DSE industry icons such as Samsung, NEC, Sharp, and LG were joined by a newcomer to commercial-grade displays, Toshiba, as they ramp up to join the digital signage fray. Wandering back through the hall, you saw mount companies such as Premier, Peerless, and Chief showing every mount configuration under the sun — from video wall mounts to single displays to kiosks, with one, Premier Mounts, even showing a rather hot BBQ under an outdoor display (with live temperature gauge to prove it) to show how their environmental enclosures worked! Now that drew a few smiles.

All the big CMS companies, including Capital Networks Group, Scala, Real Digital Media, and Omnivex, among others, had large exhibits to treat attendees to their latest and greatest, and giants Intel and Google made their presence felt by adding even more credibility to the evolving professional nature of the

digital signage industry and markets. Capping off all the monster-sized exhibits were the small-but-powerful booths and hidden treasures (read: solutions) were more the rule than the exception, but required a little more exploring on the part of the determined attendees. There were some real gems to be seen in the “outback”! So in this sense of being amazing, attractive, and enthusiastic, the DSE 2105 was a “wow.”

### GEAR CHECK

Some will suggest that the show did not reveal any blockbuster level technical breakthroughs, but I disagree. If last year was the year of 4K displays, this year was the year of LED. No, not LED backlighting for LCD, but direct view LED. In speaking to Steve Hargis of Bass Pro Shop, and I must add a member of the DSF Board of Directors, he noted the “LEDs were in your face everywhere with a trend towards even smaller dot pitch. Samsung’s very impressive 1.1 mm was fantastic and I thought at first it might be a 4K flat panel. It’s also a nearly seamless tile in 16:9 aspect vs. some competitor’s 4:3 aspect. It will naturally make a more suitable display aspect if 16:9 is desired, but may also be built to random sizes and offsets. Remarkably clear at 10 feet or more away, and I see a trend in some video walls with monitors going away at this dot pitch continues to improve and impress. Bezel? What bezel?”

Others worth of note were Silicon Core’s 1.9mm, Planar’s 1.6mm, and

AOTO’s 1.2mm technologies to round out my point that this was the year of the direct view LED. With my crystal ball firmly in hand, I can see that you ain’t seen nothing yet!

Of course 4K LCD flat panels were shown in so many booths that it was impossible to count them all, and they have expanded in the sheer number of suppliers offering them and in both size offerings and lower costs. On the media player side, the new dual-head Android player from VIA deserves a mention, as well as Cenique’s 4K-capable Android player. As we round out the picture, it is important to note that interactivity was even bigger this year, with seemingly everyone discussing interactive technologies, content, and applications.

One nearly hidden gem was Planar showing off transparent OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) displays in a few sizes, combined into an impressive collage. The image was easy to overlook — “hidden” away at the back of their booth — but if you stopped to examine it, it showed the promise started by the transparent LCDs (that were still a strong presence). Sharp also showed off a very impressive steeply curved LCD display as a technology demo — not the gentle curve of some consumer TVs today, but a very deep curve (something like 60 degrees!) that could be suitable for wrapping a column with a video wall or creating unique shapes.

One thing that definitely deserves a



If last year was the year of 4K displays, this year was the year of LED. No, not LED backlighting for LCD, but direct view LED. Samsung's very impressive 1.1 mm LED, shown here at DSE, looked at first glance like a 4K flat panel.

note was the appearance of newcomer to DSE — none other than Google. Intel has had a strong presence for a couple of years now, so seeing another IT tech giant come in (and in a big way, they had a large booth packed with educational seminars) is not itself surprising. Their approach is novel, they are touting their Chrome platform (in the form of Chromeboxes, like those made by Asus and Samsung) as a low cost digital signage media player, and they paired it with compatible signage software like the notable (and free) Rise Vision. Really quite an impressive showing, and indicative of what may come from the company. They definitely have application capabilities that can be leveraged for digital signage, and we should all stay tuned to see what comes out of them in the future.

From somewhat of a random product perspective, here are just few cool things worthy of note:

- There was a product called Audio Everywhere and it allows multi-lingual audio for digital signage over WiFi to your smart device. It can be used for languages or just broadcasting a signal to your earbud in places like museums, terminals, airports, etc., that support the service. This was found in the “innovations” section of DSE.

- There were new small-scale displays from ELO Touch with sizes ranging from 10 to 21.5 inches in touch and non-touch versions. It was a solid use of Android, but, unlike some competitors, they lock down an OS for longer periods of times, offering more stability vs. having multiple OS systems out there. They appeared to be well designed and intentioned for use in retail or similar circumstances at POP (point of purchase).

- Last but not least on the product side of things, Premier Mounts flexed their design muscle and built an actuator swinging barn door-type mount. It allowed a nearly zero clearance install against glass, for, for example, storefront displays facing outward. Maintenance was simplified by simply pushing a button, and the entire set of screens in the video wall rotated back out for work, and yet kept tight tolerances for critical wall alignment.

#### PEOPLE ARE TALKING

At DSE, I interviewed numerous attendees, manufacturers, and also members of the Digital Signage Federation Board of Directors. Here are some direct quotes:

“With the roundtables, on floor presentations, and the educational sessions, attendees were truly engaged. I heard multiple instructions that I should talk to this person about my needs as they just presented on some great information.”

“The end-user circles were great. We saw a lot of people interacting with others in their vertical markets.”

“Tons of qualified attendees.”

“Companies were working together. Everyone was sharing ideas, strategies, and delivering these to the end users.”

“I was pleasantly surprised at the high interaction we had with the higher education vertical at the DSF Booth and Networking Circle, and the education programs in general.”

“I think the fact that DSF had a record number of new member sign-ups at the booth (on the DSF’s 5-year ‘anniversary’) is a telling sign of the industry coming together and really stood out to me. It indicates that our message as being the ‘voice’ of the digital signage industry is actually being heard.”

All of these glowing quotes sound as if they came from the DSE public relations department but they did not. They came directly from the people who attended and participated in the show. To my mind, and that of a lot of attendees, exhibitors, and industry volunteers, DSE 2015 was a “wow” in more ways than one. ■

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