

## Cellular Connectivity Enhances Digital Signage

High-speed wireless Internet helps deliver digital signage efficiently, without the cost of cable or DSL lines.

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**B**oth digital signage and wireless technology have grown at an exponential rate in recent years. Until recently, the two were rarely merged. However, joining digital signage with cellular connectivity can reap numerous benefits for businesses.

### Why cellular is more convenient

Installing a hard line-based service such as cable or DSL presents businesses with a number of logistical challenges. If the business purchasing digital signage is a national one, then it will have to work with several different cable and DSL providers in different markets, resulting in different installation protocols, different support numbers and different billing procedures to be managed.

“It has its challenges,” said Jason Dennis, director, wireless strategies, at Walsh Wireless, a San Ramon, Calif.-based wireless communications company.

Another concern is that a business may not own the building that it occupies. Installing cable or DSL can mean piercing an exterior wall, requiring the company to

get permission from the landlord, which may delay or halt the installation process.

Timeliness is another important factor to contend with. Brian Lees, vice president and general manager of Diversified Media Group, a Kenilworth, N.J.-based company that manages, builds and designs digital signage networks, says most landline installations will take anywhere from 30 to 60 days, but a cellular installation can occur overnight. All a customer needs is



*A cellular connection allows digital signage to become more portable and is easier for a business to install than a landline-based service.*

the availability of a cellular carrier and the proper equipment, which can be shipped overnight.

Just as a cellular phone allows people mobility and advanced communication on the move, cellular Internet connections allow digital signage to become more portable. A cellular Internet modem is essentially a cell phone without a keypad. It can be placed on the back of an LCD screen so that no matter where the sign is moved, an Internet connection will be available.

If the business wants to move a digital sign to the front of the store for a specific sale, for example, the move can happen easily. A hardline connection, on the other hand, would make such a move more difficult as cable would need to be extended from the DSL or cable modem connection out to the screen location.

Cellular technology provides flexibility, allowing digital signage to be deployed in almost any environment.

“The point is to provide a simpler and more cost effective method of installation,” Dennis said.

Because of this added flexibility, customers who want to use digital signage for a limited time, such as a seasonal promotion, can rent a sign, get a cellular connection and have a working piece of digital signage quickly. If a landline were required, that would necessitate costly installations and de-installations after the promotion ended.

Lastly, hardline connections are not feasible in certain locations. In very large spaces such as malls, train stations or environments where a client does not own the actual property where the signage is

being installed, a hardline install is not possible, but cellular provides a viable option.

“(Cellular connectivity) is enabling whole new classes of deployment to be done in an effective manner,” said Lou Giacalone Jr., president and founder of CoolSign, a Beaverton, Ore.-based company that creates digital signage software.

### Cost issues and misconceptions

No matter how many perks a service plan may offer, one of the main concerns of any business will be the cost factor. The good news is that cellular digital signage costs significantly less for installation, and the monthly cost is comparable to that of a cable or DSL line. The estimation of a cellular installation can be anywhere from 60 to 80 percent cheaper than a new cable/DSL installation.

Lees projects the typical monthly charge for a terrestrial DSL line to cost between \$50 and \$150 a month, while the average cellular data plan will cost approximately \$50 a month.

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According to Dennis, a common misconception regarding cellular digital signage comes from people fretting about the quality of coverage. A potential customer may mentally compare cellular signage to the coverage provided by their cellular phone, thinking, “Well, my cell phone cuts out sometimes in the middle of conversations, so why would I want my digital signage to be cellular?”

While a drop in connection may be a problem experienced by users of cellular telephones, it must be understood that a cellular phone requires continuous synchronous connections to flow smoothly, while digital signage is centered around data. If a data transmission is erroneously dropped, the modem will immediately reconnect, allowing the digital signage to recommence with no lost information or change in service. Additionally, many digital signage providers produce data that is downloaded in advance so that the user will not be aware of the interrupted transmission.

Traditional cellular phone service is better in areas where there are large concentrations of people. In a person's home, however, the coverage may not be as thorough due to the less-crowded habitation of rural and isolated areas. Digital signage always will be placed in high-traffic areas, and those areas will always have better cellular coverage.

As cellular connectivity and digital signage increasingly go hand in hand, it will become even more affordable. Data transmissions for digital signage occur primarily at night, when cellular usage is down, allowing cellular carriers to offer affordable deals to companies using wireless service for digital signage.

"The carriers are getting more aggressive with sales plans catering to digital signage," said Giacalone.

### A bright future

As demand increases for mobile technology, such as smartphones and laptops, demand will also increase for digital signage to offer the same flexibility as other popular wireless products. Customers can expect the partnership between wireless connectivity and digital signage to continue and flourish.

"As cellular coverage areas strengthen and speeds become quicker, it's becoming much more prevalent in digital signage," Lees said.

***About the sponsor:** Founded in 2002, Walsh Wireless Solutions is a systems integrator focusing on cellular wireless solutions. Walsh helps companies design, engineer, deploy and manage wireless infrastructure specific to digital signage networks, kiosk networks, POS, ATM, mobile vehicle solutions, satellite back channel and wire line backup. Its growing list of Fortune 500 and SMB customers is a testament to the company's ability to help customers at any stage of their wireless deployment to ensure success.*