



EnGage Delivers: Lowest Total Cost of Ownership

The foundation and technical depth of a technology platform combined with ease of use are critical for a digital signage network to achieve Lowest Total Cost of Ownership.

The right choice helps drive business. The wrong choice adds work, complexity and higher ongoing costs.

When companies are developing objectives and plans for networks – ad-based, retail or private marketing and employee communications – a critical element is sorting out the Total Cost of Ownership, or TCO. It's a number that reflects not only what it will cost to get screens lit, but real world costs over networks life cycle.

Running numbers for fixed technology costs is relatively easy. More involved is sorting out ongoing resource needs, and the wrong technology choices can have an immense impact on those long-term numbers.

It boils down to several factors:

- Resources needed to deploy the network;
- Resources needed to operate it;
- Content product needs and costs;
- Future-proofing the platform.

To put this in some context, let's look at how TCO might apply to a third-party advertising and consumer information network focused on the health care sector.

Deployment

Rolling out a network is all about the human factor – how long will take to do something, and therefore how much will it cost.

Choosing technology that installs easily and requires minimal on-site effort means less time on the premises. It can be the difference between a media player getting plugged in and working out of the box, and field technicians and main office technicians spending a lot of time on the phone to get players running, one by one.

In health care facilities, large or small, deployments will probably have to be done after hours, so that normal patient services are not disrupted. That might mean overtime, and more cost. That extra hour on site might add another \$100-\$150 to the deployment cost, and over 100 sites, that can add up to a big, problematic number that maybe wasn't even in the budget.

Operations

Day to day operations of large networks require two key roles – one handling the coordination, scheduling, targeting and distribution of media material; the other ensuring optimal network uptime. Hardware and software choices can play a huge role in determining how many people are needed to do that work.

Many scheduling platforms are based on pre-determined, ordered lists of files and shared groupings of sites. Any new site that gets added, that has unique media characteristics like a “Welcome to XYZ Clinic!” greeting – requires another unique playlist. A platform that adds more work with every new venue will also start requiring more and more people to manage it.

EnQii’s EnGage platform design takes advantage of database capabilities to automate scheduling based on attributes - like store type, location, foot traffic, and demographics – and allow easy, precise targeting with minimal work. With EnGage, only one or two people can manage large networks with immensely sophisticated media targeting demands.

Network operators also need to factor in IT demands. Managing the technology platform in-house requires people to do things like maintain the software and server and networking hardware. In-house management also introduces costs such as shared, secure hosting, high volume bandwidth and emergency power.

The alternative is using a Software as a Service provider that takes on all the day to day IT tasks, and generally lowers overall costs by sharing them across several clients, while offering clients the elasticity to scale up quickly and on demand without add new people or hardware. Again this is part of the design of EnQii’s EnGage platform.

The other key operational issue that EnGage addresses is how it automates monitoring and provides full visibility and access to what’s going on with a deployed network. To control costs, operators want a platform that can identify and remedy problems in the field without sending someone to the site.

Content

Content on screen networks needs to be refreshed regularly if it is going to capture and hold viewer attention. Whether outsourced or brought in-house, content production is almost always a large operating budget item, so finding a platform that introduces automation and local controls is important.

The well-evolved, EnGage platform automates news and information feeds, queries data fields from external sources, and updates automatically such items as restaurant menu and meeting room displays.

Additionally, content costs can be controlled by putting local messaging and updating tools into the hands of people on site. Instead of a clinic manager asking the central office to add a message announcing a flu shot program, for example, Web-based tools let the local manager do the work. Network operators using EnGage retain full control over what and how much local managers can do with the messaging tools.

Future Proofing

Media platforms are rapidly converging. The wrong platform choice can restrict the ability to integrate with emerging communications and retail technologies, and the most extreme cases force a complete hardware and software refresh, well ahead of plan, just to stay competitive.

In choosing a software platform, operators need technology that is not restricted by operating systems and hardware, and designed to anticipate and address steadily evolving media and systems requirements. At a minimum, the architecture has to be open to third-party development, and the provider should encourage innovation and customization.

EnQii EnGage and TCO

EnQii's EnGage platform for digital signage represents a decade of development work focused heavily on addressing the core influences on TCO. We work across a wide range of vertical markets, and have a particularly deep background in the health and wellness sector with such clients as Health Media Network, Care Media, Take Care Health (Walgreen's), Cruise Media Group and Spectrum, plus fast casual and food service, ad-based networks and retail. We understand the challenges brought on by the dynamics of these sectors, and provide valuable guidance that saves money from the start.

Workflow efficiency is optimized through the use of dynamic scheduling. EnGage lets users build their own pre-determined playlists or have complex, granular playlists for large networks built on the fly, using the platform's sophisticated database capabilities. EnGage is easy to learn, use, and manage on an ongoing basis. The Web 2.0-driven user experience includes a customizable dashboard, rich interactive charts and reports, and drag-and-drop convenience. Users can create custom views of their network, and produce content to suit business needs and preferences.

The platform represents years of careful attention to network operational needs, with very substantive tools for monitoring and device management that drive on-site servicing and repair needs down to bare minimums and give operators both macro and micro views of how things stand minute to minute.

OnSite Messenger enables approved users at local sites instantly, securely create custom messages and change structured data to support such things as clinic information screens. The platform has also been designed and steadily refined to be open and flexible for the many needs of clients, and the many types of systems and data that may plug into or influence a network.

"EnGage gives our clients an incredible amount of flexibility in the way they can plan their media messaging," says Stuart Armstrong, President of EnQii North America, "and as their businesses really take off, they've got a platform that can handle growth at any pace or scale, and also deal with the customization they might need."