

Diamond Visions

Aimee Kalnoskas, Editor-in-Chief

What does the Society for Information Displays (SID) and Dodger Stadium have in common? A lot of displays and the fact that I was at both venues on the same day last month, giving me a unique opportunity to see the digital signage on the show floor and in action at the ballpark. Having attended hundreds of trade shows and not one single baseball game until that point, I still can't imagine any correlation between the two but there it is — everything from 420 TFT-LCD screens promoting upcoming events at the stadium, to multi-storied screens strongly suggesting you put yourself behind wheel of a new Toyota. It would be remiss not to mention, of course, that the scoreboards themselves have come along way from the days when implementing a score change usually meant leaning out of portholes or climbing up a ladder to change out numbers. In 1980 Mitsubishi introduced Diamond Vision and became the first company to introduce large-format video displays with their installation at Dodger Stadium for the 1980 Major League All-Star game. Now those digital scoreboards compete side-by-side with advertising. My gracious hosts and long-time Dodger fans found the digital signs behind home plate intrusive and waxed nostalgic about the days of the simple blue and orange Union 76 sign above the scoreboard, unblinking and unchanging.

In a presentation given at the SID 2007 show in Long Beach, CA last month, founder and president of Display Search, Ross Young, stated that only four of the top 12 applications for flat panels experienced growth in 2006, and of those four only two -- TVs and public displays -- experienced growth of over 60 percent. However, flat panel displays are now overly dependent on the TV market for growth. Prices are dropping, and margins are shrinking and, despite the crowds surrounding the 1040 displays on the SID show floor, manufacturers should not be placing their future bets on consumers upgrading to anything a whole lot larger than 700. The migration to larger screens is fast and furious but it will slow down, perhaps quite dramatically. Excluding the people who live in second-storied home theaters, most of us will simply run out of wall space.

According to Paul Semenza, vice president, display research for iSuppli Corp., a big opportunity for TFT-LCD revenue growth is in professional displays, including digital signage and conference room projectors. Semenza predicted professional display revenue will reach \$14.6 billion in 2011, up from \$10 billion in 2007. Several of the manufacturers I spoke to at SID are a bit more conservative and are still cautious in their approach to this market. It is a significant up-front cost for providers who then must convince advertisers that there really is a return on investment (ROI). But outdoor advertising can't be TIVO'd out, and the flexibility of being able to automatically and remotely control the advertising message based upon demographics or geography, for instance, can be very appealing.

There are challenges such as network stability and power issues that could stand in the way of rapid adoption of digital signage, but the nearly certain drop off in

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

demand for large screens for home TV could spur energies towards the other strong markets for these screens. It sure would save a lot of poster sheets and glue.

Just in case you are interested, the Dodgers broke a four-game losing streak that night by one run. We stayed until the end while the oldest rookie the Dodgers have ever had (at 36 years old) took his place on the pitcher's mound and closed the game.

And I added a few new words to my vocabulary...

cheers,

Aimee Kalnoskas

Source URL (retrieved on 12/24/2014 - 9:25pm):

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