



As more advertisers and brand agencies look for something extra special in their campaigns, **Rob Fletcher** investigates the value of crossmedia technology and how it can shed light on new sign-making opportunities



We are lucky in the sign-making sector in that we are not short of new technology. Whether it is manufacturers offering new wide-format printers, digital signage giants promoting a new type of screen, or simply a supplier championing an innovative new material, it almost feels like an endless conveyor-belt of opportunity.

With this new technology, however, comes increased expectation from customers—especially those looking for something a bit special. And it is here that the term ‘crossmedia’ comes into play. An increasing amount of signage companies have started to consider this technology as part of new

projects, in order to attract advertisers that want to create something unique. By name and by nature, crossmedia is any visual communications technology that literally crosses over from one type of medium to another. A good example is a printed poster that becomes interactive by linking through to digital content on a smart phone via near field technology (NFC)—the same system that takes money off your bus or tube pass.

Bearing in mind the host of technologies that sign-makers have at their finger-tips, how far can they push this technology? Just what is out there for companies looking to add some-

thing new to their service offering? And how have such businesses been using this technology?

### **Innovation and growth**

Brightmove Media delivers real-time, geo-targeted digital advertising from the roofs of London’s iconic black taxis. The London-based firm has spent the last few years researching, developing, and testing its new offering—Taxicast. Chief executive officer, Piers Mummery, believes crossmedia can act as a growth market for some sign-makers.

“I think the importance of cross-media for the sign industry depends on the signage application and signage



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media that is deployed,” says Mummery, adding: “However, given that the majority of advertisers are looking at increasing ways of defining measurement and return on investment (ROI), any form of crossmedia integration can assist if linked to performance.

“ROI and performance measurement is critical to brands and advertisers and introducing technologies that enhance and improve ROI and measurement can only be good for all concerned. If a campaign does well, advertisers will be keen to do more and the marketing world should assist in this process.”

He also points out the difficulty of measuring the impact of the out-of-home (OOH) sector, suggesting that integrating crossmedia technology and the interactivity it brings can help get an idea of how campaigns are progressing.

He draws on the service Brightmove offers as an example of how established sign-making techniques can be adapted to integrate crossmedia technology. The firm combines LED digital signage with the mobility of taxis, and the benefits of geo and time technology, to deliver an advertiser experience that is highly relevant. Mummery says this allows for the delivery of a message to the right person, at the right time, in the right location—something he describes as the ‘holy grail’ of advertising.

“Innovation is the lifeblood of all industries and I believe that crossmedia is only the beginning,” declares Mummery, adding: “Augmented reality, robotics, databases and visual recognition systems can create whole new marketing experiences. As creative agencies begin to work closer with and embrace technology, consumer experiences will improve.”

### Personal touch

Multitouch is another firm keen to showcase the opportunities that crossmedia technology can offer. The firm provides interactive multi-user displays and software platforms that can transform what signage can offer to consumers and brands—with the growth of interest in the technology driving development of new products.

“It’s certainly an area that’s creating a lot of interest, and this is one of the reasons we introduced Codice”, explains vice president of business development at the firm, Hannu Anttila.

Driven by the firm’s ‘Enriched Reality’ technology, Multitaction Codice claims to turn anonymous public interactive displays into personal, two-way tools that benefit users and content owners. Codice markers can be printed on any every day object such as ID cards, season tickets, or loyalty cards—to enable users to identify themselves by placing

the object on the display. Codice marker codes can be associated with any personal information such as name, email address and phone number, and used with a variety of applications ranging from loyalty applications, to corporate use in events and marketing. In addition, the firm says interplay between ‘public’ large displays and ‘personal’ phones and tablets is of ‘huge importance’.

The technology that drives this method is based on Multitouch’s proprietary ‘Computer Vision Through Screen’ (CVTS) technology. It uses 2D optical markers for real-life object detection to uniquely identify any object attached to a marker. In addition, Enriched Reality supports blob tracking, which recognises basic geometric shapes including circles, triangles and rectangles.

“It also allows our Multitaction displays to recognise Codice markers, which could be used for things like VIP passes, tickets, badges, and Enriched Reality applications with product sample,” explains Anttila.

He adds: “Multitouch is a key technology to add to digital signage, so digital content can engage the public in a more interactive and experiential way. Viewers become users; that is to say, rather than passively observing or even ignoring content, people engage interactively with it and this interaction is incredibly valuable to companies.”

Multitouch acts as a first-hand example as to how this crossmedia technology can be used, having been a part of a number of ventures.

One project saw Harrods install a Multi-Taction table with Enriched Reality functionality—BeautyTouch

(Above) Multitouch’s Codice technology can be printed on any every day object, allowing the user to have what it describes as a more personal experience

(Below) Enriched Technology from MultiTouch is based on its Computer Vision Through Screen technology



from DigiTact. The 360° solution offers interactive retail marketing to brands looking to give their customers an exciting in-store experience.

“Counters that make use of interactive technology to display content dynamically help sales assistants keep customers engaged for longer, delivering brand messaging on demand and lengthening the window of opportunity to encourage a customer to make a purchase,” concludes Anttila.

### How consumers think

Our-of-home (OOH) media agency, Kinetic, takes a similar approach and is keen to educate the sign industry on the possibilities of crossmedia. Global director of insight and marketing, Nick Mawditt, says this type of technology offers opportunities that are ‘crucial’ to sustain the growth of digital signage in a changing consumer world.

“As media converges to the full extent, the OOH digital landscape offers real potential to fully engage and activate consumers through relevant and dynamic content,” says Mawditt, adding: “Kinetic’s research of numerous interactive and digital campaigns in the past year identifies a real consumer willingness to activate brand campaigns, as well as an immediate demand for activating offers using mobile coupons.

“The additional opportunity for data capture via smartphone and social media amplification creates a very real opportunity for brands to engage and deliver goods and services for people on the move in various OOH locations, situations and mindsets.”

Mawditt identifies three reasons why brands and companies are opting for this technology—opportunity for people to engage with brands; consumer positivity; and adding impact to communications campaigns with engagement, conversion rates and longevity.

“Signage companies are key for this because people will engage with accessible, streamlined, and visually advanced technology. This mirrors experiences in everyday life in how we are using smartphones, tablets and other screen experiences,” he explains.

In terms of crossmedia trends, Mawditt points to activation technologies like NFC and quick response (QR) codes as areas likely to see more usage. In addition, the combined needs of, and full incorporation into, smartphone releases of these technologies will present further communication opportunities.

He also predicts an increased uptake of interactive 6-sheets and user-

Kinetic has undertaken a number of studies and experiments to discover what types of crossmedia technology helps gain the interest of consumers



The crossmedia trial by JCDecaux and Kinetic featured both QR codes and NFC technology—allowing consumers to interact with signage using their mobile devices, and access extra material

generated content (UGC), while advertising projects are likely to incorporate crossmedia features such as the addition of touch, sound, and other stimuli to digital OOH campaigns—with a focus on consumer interaction.

Such forecasts come from the firm’s various testing and evaluation of campaigns looking at interactive experiences, gaming and retail engagement for the likes of Lloyds TSB and Argos. The experiments have helped Kinetic gain a valuable insight into what makes consumers tick and

how the firm can effectively tailor its solutions.

### Interaction is key

Sign industry giant, JCDecaux, worked with Kinetic on a recent project, where the two firms completed a trial of crossmedia technology integrated into signage. JCDecaux’s 6-sheet sites in the Reading area saw all panels equipped with QR and NFC response mechanisms, with a range of products and promotional mechanics tested. JCDecaux airport marketing director,

“At present, opportunities undoubtedly exist for companies to gain the high ground and pioneer the integration of this functionality into their core product offering”





“The combination of the most desirable, most affluent, most technologically-enabled consumers with the best-located, most visible, state of the art visual displays should be unbeatable”

Steve Cox, says the experiment gave both companies a great insight into the popularity of crossmedia techniques.

“Across the test we learned that there’s a real desire amongst consumers for more of this technology, and we now have a clear idea of how to best maximise response potential,” Cox explains.

He adds: “Inspired by the pace of change online together with the proliferation of ever-more powerful mobile technology, media owners have striven to forge links between their platforms and these new communications opportunities. Outdoor advertising is no exception.”

Sky is one company to notice such benefits and teamed up with JCDecaux in an OOH drive to promote Sky Go Extra, a service that allows customers to download films or programmes from Sky and watch them on the move—without the need for wi-fi or 3G/4G connections. Taking over space in Charing Cross, Liverpool Street, Euston, and Manchester Piccadilly rail

stations, the two-week campaign used traditional advertising methods, as well as digital and interactive OOH—with this latter option proving to be of most interest.

In a media first, an interactive six-sheet was located on the concourse of each station, allowing passengers to choose a programme that best matched their journey time. The screen prompted users to submit their destination, work out the amount of time they had and, through a QR code, link the customers on the Sky Go website. The interactivity drew in plenty of notice, with the campaign showing the potential interest this type of technology can create.

Cox says this new uptake and innovation makes the crossmedia sector a ‘constantly evolving one’, believing we can only expect more innovations as demand grows.

“This type of interaction will become increasingly prevalent,” says Cox, adding: “At present, opportunities undoubtedly exist for companies to

Sky teamed up with JCDecaux to offer an interactive experience with its campaign to promote Sky Go Extra—enabling customers to download content to their mobile device after interacting with signage

gain the high ground and pioneer the integration of this functionality into their core product offering. Campaigns of this nature will deliver more for appropriate advertisers, but they will also cost more to implement. This incremental revenue is up for grabs for the companies that can get the technology working fastest and with the least complexity and hassle for the advertiser.

“Alongside QR and NFC interaction, we’ve already seen augmented reality, geo-targeting, and 3D. The potential for linking this level of innovation with the ongoing proliferation of digital screens capable of changing content in real-time is staggering.”

This constant evolution may be the most exciting part of crossmedia. It seems there is no limit to the possibilities of what the technology can offer to our industry, and keep it relevant in the modern market. Whether it is QR codes and NFC capabilities, or even facial recognition software, crossmedia has the potential to move the sign industry into a brave new world.