Digital signage for TVs: why the screen your customer already owns is all you need

For anyone starting a digital signage business, the single biggest upfront cost is hardware. Many newcomers assume they need to buy dozens of commercial-grade displays, dedicated media players, and a rack of supporting equipment before they can sell their first package. That assumption closes the door before most entrepreneurs have even knocked.

The reality is simpler. Most of your potential customers already own a television display that can do the job. With the right approach, that screen in the break room or above the reception desk becomes a working digital sign. The savings go straight into your margin and let you offer a lower entry price to clients who would otherwise never consider the service.

What makes a TV suitable for signage

A modern television display is, at its core, a large monitor with an HDMI input and a media player built in or connected externally. The screen resolution of even a mid-range TV is high enough for text, logos, and video loops. The internet connection in most businesses is already fast enough to stream content or pull updates from a cloud-based content service. Power supply is not an issue: a TV uses less electricity than most office printers.

The only missing piece is software. A media player - either a small stick plugged into the HDMI port or a built-in smart TV operating system - can run a digital signage application. The app fetches content from a server, displays it in a loop, and updates whenever the business owner changes the playlist. The customer does not need to buy a new screen. They already have the hardware.

How to turn an existing TV into a sign

The process is straightforward. The customer provides the television display. You provide the media player, the software licence, and the content design. The media player connects to the TV via the HDMI input. The software authenticates with your content service over the internet connection. Once configured, the screen shows the customer's menu, promotions, or welcome message without any further intervention.

For wall mounting, standard VESA brackets work with almost every flat-screen television display made in the last ten years. The installation takes an hour. The customer keeps their TV for normal use when needed, or dedicates it to signage full time.

What this means for your business model

When you sell signage for existing business TVs, your cost per location drops dramatically. You are not amortising the price of a display over the contract term. You are not carrying inventory. You are not financing hardware that might fail or become obsolete before the contract ends. Your recurring costs are limited to software licensing, content updates, and occasional support.

That changes how you price your packages. You can offer a lower monthly fee because your hardware investment is near zero. The customer sees a smaller number on the invoice and says yes faster. They also feel smarter about the decision: they are using equipment they already own rather than buying something new that does the same thing.

Device compatibility: what to check

Not every television display works equally well. Before you promise a solution, verify a few basics:

- The TV must have an available HDMI input that is not used by a cable box, game console, or streaming stick the business relies on.
- The screen resolution should be at least 1080p for readable text and sharp images. 720p can work for very simple content but looks dated.
- The TV should be able to stay on for long hours. Most modern LCD and LED sets are designed for continuous use, but older plasma models are not suitable.
- The internet connection in the room must reach the TV. Wi-Fi is fine for most applications, but a wired Ethernet connection is more reliable for video-heavy content.

If any of these conditions are missing, the customer may need a small upgrade - a cheap HDMI switch, a Wi-Fi extender, or a newer TV. Even so, the cost is a fraction of buying a dedicated commercial display and media player from scratch.

Content services and recurring packages

Once the screen is running, the ongoing value comes from content. A static image that never changes is not signage; it is a poster. Real digital signage rotates through offers, updates, and branding automatically. The content service you provide should let the customer update their playlist from a web browser or mobile app, schedule changes in advance, and display different content at different times of day.

That service is what justifies the recurring fee. The hardware is a one-time setup. The software and content management are what keep the customer paying month after month. If you bundle content design, template creation, and support into the package, you build a relationship that lasts longer than the TV on the wall.

Common concerns and how to address them

Some customers worry about burning out their TV by running it all day. Modern sets are built to handle extended use. The backlight may dim slightly over years, but the same thing happens to a TV used at home for eight hours a day. A dedicated commercial display has a brighter backlight and a longer warranty, but the difference matters mainly for 24/7 operation or outdoor locations. For a standard office or retail environment, a consumer TV works fine.

Another concern is whether the TV will still work for normal viewing. A simple solution is to add an HDMI splitter or a switch so the TV can toggle between signage input and a cable box or streaming device. The customer gets both uses from one screen.

There is also the question of wall mounting. A television display that sits on a stand takes up counter space and can be knocked over. Wall mounting is safer and looks professional. Most mounting kits include clear instructions, but if the wall is plasterboard or brick, a qualified installer should handle it. You can either offer installation as an add-on or recommend a local handyman.

Scaling the model

Once you have a few customers running on their own TVs, you can scale without buying hardware. Each new client brings their own screen. Your only incremental cost is the media player and the software licence. That keeps your capital expenditure low and lets you grow faster than a model that requires you to buy a display for every location.

You also reduce your risk. If a customer cancels, you take back the media player and the licence. The TV stays with them. You are not stuck with a used display that you have to refurbish, store, and resell. The hardware that belongs to the customer stays with the customer, and your assets are small, portable, and cheap to replace.

What to watch out for

Not every business has a TV that is suitable. A very old set with low screen resolution will make your content look bad. A TV that is already used for something else - like a restaurant that runs a sports channel on the same screen - may need a second display or a splitter arrangement. And some customers simply prefer the look of a sleek commercial display and are willing to pay for it. In those cases, you can offer both options and let them choose.

The key is to present the existing-TV option as the standard, not the compromise. It is faster to install, cheaper to start, and easier to maintain. For the customer, it means no new hardware to buy and no extra clutter. For you, it means a lower barrier to the first sale and a faster path to recurring revenue.

When you position your service this way, signage for existing business TVs stops being a workaround and becomes the main selling point. It is the reason your pricing can undercut competitors who insist on selling new displays. It is the reason a small cafe or a dental office says yes instead of filing your quote in the bin. And it is the reason your business can grow without a warehouse full of screens.