

Air Canada Centre ready to light up sophisticated, ambitious digital signage network

By pressDOOH

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Digital signage consultancy DDC orchestrates end to end solution for 320-plus screen network designed to boost fan experience and drive incremental revenues for building owner/operator Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment

The Air Canada Centre is about to turn on a \$3 million digital screen network that will be among the most sophisticated in the sports facility world, using a concept and project plan orchestrated by veteran digital signage consultancy Digital Display & Communications (DDC).

The project was built around a media communications plan that sees the fan experience dramatically enhanced, sponsor messaging opportunities boosted and a media sales plan developed that should see the building owner, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, recover its investment in roughly two years.

The facility, home to the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs and NBA's Toronto Raptors, now has more than 320 HD-quality video display monitors installed in a wide variety of configurations in the public areas. The screens serve several purposes, but many are replacing traditional backlit poster advertising boards, enabling MLSE to change messaging by event and on very short notice. Network digital screens give MLSE's media department the ability to tailor advertisers and schedules by event and target audience.

The screen network is part of a massive \$50 million facelift to the landmark facility, which is among the five busiest sports and events centers in the world. The facelift is targeted to be ready this fall as the NHL and NBA return to action.

MLSE managers knew they wanted to transition the facility entirely to digital, but having limited direct experience, were struggling with just how to bring it to reality, said DDC president Stuart Kirkpatrick. "They brought us in to help them take what was a concept, and really get it grounded ... so that there was some sort of process," Kirkpatrick explained. "They had quite a number of issues they needed to address, and we helped out with all of them."

Central to the process was DDC's Full Picture Workshop process, which the Waterloo, Ontario-based company uses with all of its clients. DDC takes its clients through a process that starts with strategy and objectives and steps through the elements of a plan, all the way through to deployment and operations.

That initial strategy engagement turned into much more, Kirkpatrick said, with various members of the DDC team helping develop everything from realistic media revenue forecasts and content programming concepts to guiding the vendor selection process and managing the installations. DDC is also doing some of the creative content work for the screen network.

DDC was instrumental in the very early stages in helping us to define not only our business objectives, but the philosophical approach as well," said Dwayne Brown, MLSE's manager of venue services. "Digital Signage is so much more than just placing a display on the wall and sending a graphic to it. Location, audience, time of day or event, type of content – it all needs to be taken into account and DDC is aware of that. Their guidance has helped us design a unique system that is sure to catch the attention of the thousands of people that come through our gates every event."

"During the installation phase," Brown added, "DDC has provided people who are able to take a personal

pride in getting the job done. They've worked long hours and have been really committed to seeing the install to a successful completion. “

Kirkpatrick is particularly pleased at how the project, which will get its first public showing next week, is a significant step forward in realizing the potential for digital screen media in sports and events facilities. “The MLSE people are sophisticated and they did their homework. They could see the value in doing a lot more than just putting up a bunch of TVs all over the place, which is still pretty typical. This is very different.”

Screens are set in a variety of configurations and clusters to provide more presence and visual interest. At one newly renovated entry, 42 LCD flat panels are stitched together and other areas feature screen clusters. One area that was using still images for a history wall is now a cluster of different-sized and oriented screens, with rotating images and narratives on the images that can be heard if fans call designated numbers and listen using their mobile devices.

Other key business partners active in the project included IBM for network services, Omnivex for media playback software, TTUFF Technologies for media players and consultant Lyle Bunn.

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Digital Display & Communications is an integrated communications, strategy and solutions agency focused on helping companies launch and then run effective, sustainable digital signage networks. Using more than a decade of direct experience, DDC's expert team helps client partners think through, design, build and manage award-winning programs. DDC is based on Waterloo, ON. Our website: <http://www.thefullpicture.com>

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