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Excerpt from *Lighting Up the Aisle, Principles & Practices for In-Store Digital Media*

Where does the money come from?

Whether your motivation is emotional or strategic for implementing an in-store digital media solution, you will be challenged with the question, “How do I pay for this?” Every corporate business culture and economic ecosystem is unique and yours is no exception. Rather than asking, “How do I pay for this?”- consider asking, “Where does the money come from?”

Over the years, we’ve seen many clever rich media based designs and implementations fall by the wayside because this basic question was never addressed or answered by the network designers. At this stage of the game you’ve already gone through the reflective process of questioning and establishing why a digital media based solution should be part of your customer’s shopping experience. If not, you haven’t been paying attention. Do that first!

Inevitably those three letters get thrown into the alphabet soup – ROI. Yes, return on investment (ROI), those three simple words that have the power to stop your project cold, as they may have a few times already. Despite its power and apparent clarity, it is often used as an excuse rather than a reason. A rewarding return on investment can come in very different currencies depending upon the economic perspective. The currency for a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) will certainly be dollars. For the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), it may be overall shareholder value. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) may be looking at network efficiency but for the Chief Merchandising Officer (CMO) it may be the number of category transactions. The point? Determine up front whose ROI (or what collection of KPIs) you need to deliver and understand the “currency” that will be used to determine and define the success of your in-store digital media network.

A noteworthy corollary to this tip is the following statistic: over the past nine years, we’ve been directly and indirectly involved in the design and implementation of dozens of digital media networks. With the exception of two or three instances, “enhancing the customer (or shopping) experience” has always been one of the top three success criteria for the network. Yet when it came time to funding a second phase or enterprise roll out, the enhancement of the customer’s experience, nor its value, was factored into the disappointing corporate decision not to move forward. In light of this fact, try to make certain that everyone in the village uses the same currency to value the customer experience.

Here’s a game to pinpoint this. Draw an organizational sketch of your business ecosystem with particular attention to the in-store initiatives – department-by-department, silo by silo, brand by brand, agency by agency, channel by channel and customer by customer. In this game there are three banks: Advertising, Merchandising and Promotion. The only rule of the game is that the money has to flow through and be allocated by these three banks, with the goal of tracking the flow of money through the banks and your business ecosystem. The game is won when you determine where the money originates, to and through whom it flows, why and for what. The insight and understanding you’ll gain from playing – and winning – this game will be invaluable in answering the question, “How will I pay for this?”