

**This is the third part in a series about getting started in digital signage for ProAV dealers.**



As we've progressed along this series about getting started in digital signage, we've covered aspects of the technical and business sides of the category. In this installment, we'll examine the need to find the right vendor partners.

Dave Haynes, Digital Signage expert, pundit, and owner of **Sixteen:Nine** explains that part numbers and lengths of cable and electrical are the easy part. It's Haynes' position when he coaches integrators that before they look at any technology they have to go through the exercise of figuring out what the objectives of both their clients and themselves are. Haynes says, "Until you have that really clearly defined, you can't go to the next step, which is building a strategy."

With regard to what the objective are for the installation, Haynes asks, "What's your plan? What's involved; who's going to do it; are you going to outsource; are you going to own the code?" In addition he counsels integrators that they have to know who has ownership of the finished installation: who's going to stick with it, and where the buy-in from the client is going to come from.

Once you have that sorted out, Haynes says that you still have to figure out your programming. "Until you understand the volume and scale of your programming, you won't know what technology you'll need." And that's where partnering with the right vendors is essential. Equally essential is asking the right questions.

## Getting Started In DS: Part 3 -- Beyond The Technical

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17. 06. 2011

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Haynes points out that when you sit down with the technology and software vendors you have to ask what they're good at. "The sales guys are just trying to do their jobs, but with more suppliers than demand, they'll say 'we can do that!' and then pray that the R&D engineers can deliver on it." So not only do integrators need to ask hard, probing questions, but they also need to be able to interpret the answers and run them through their BS filter. "It's really important to do that due diligence on the company and to determine if the company has legs." Haynes says, "You go to a tradeshow and look at their booth and think they're the big fish, and what you find out is that a lot of the most successful companies in the space don't go to tradeshow. They don't blow their budgets; they go directly to clients."

The other key factor for integrators is that they have to find partners, for software in particular, that are going to be with them and decide how much they're willing to take on and how much they're willing to farm out. Haynes says, "When you sign on with a company you have to find out what level of support those companies will do vs. what you'll have to do internally." Integrators are typically reselling a software application, and while some vendors offer enterprise level support, in other cases the integrator might be expected to provide first- and second-level support and only send clients off to the software company in the event that everything's gone sideways and nothing is working. In the meantime, that in-house support may be a real time and resource drain, especially for a small business without the manpower to set it up.

Haynes sums it up by saying that, "If you choose the wrong dance partner, you may spend an inordinate time supporting existing clients instead of turnkeying them. If that's the case, then you've got the wrong partner."

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