Written by Linda Seid Frembes, rAVe Columnist
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Okay, so sorting out what has happened in the brouhaha between the two year old *Digital Signage Association (DSA)*
and the month-old
Digital Signage Federation (DSF)
hasn't been easy, but it has been entertaining.

Actually, it's been like the reading equivalent to watching the slow-motion reel from a prize fight. In real time, there were some fast punches, some awkward responses, and then someone was on the floor.

Let's recap, shall we? *Exponation*, the producer and owner of Digital Signage Expo, announced the formation of the not-for-profit DSF on February 17, one week before Expo. Stressing the fact that DSF is a non-profit is a finger in the eye to the DSA, who has long been tied to their parent company NetWorld Alliance for funding. The terms of the DSA/NetWorld Alliance relationship was often a sore point for the industry and there were accusations of NetWorld influence over the DSA.

At the time of the DSF announcement, a Web site was already in place, as was the interim board. While the announcement itself may have been a small surprise, it seems like Exponation had put key elements in place before opening their collective mouths to tell the industry.

Meanwhile, the DSA was caught a bit flat-footed. David Drain, executive director of the DSA, and Bob Michaels, president of Magenta Research and an active DSA board member, both tell me that a full board meeting was already planned to happen at Expo. On the voting docket was changing DSA's status to a non-profit. "NetWorld has been our incubator for the past two years, and now it's time to gain our independence," says Drain. And Michaels swears that in the year-plus he's been involved with the DSA, he never saw any undue influence from NetWorld.



Fair enough. So on February 24 (right in the middle of Expo), DSA announces they are incorporating as a non-profit and are securing proposals with trade show companies to establish a digital signage show and conference of their own! According to their announcement, "DSA is set to announce its plan by May 3 for a conference & trade show to be held in 2011."

(DSA was a very visible sponsor at Expo, too. Awkward!) So net-net, here's what we have. In one corner, there's the DSA – older, many more members, switching to non-profit status, and seeking to start their own show. In the other corner, there's the DSF – very new, a handful of

members, a non-profit from the get-go, and sharing the parent company who owns and operates Digital Signage Expo.

A few issues are up in the air. First is that when I contacted the DSF during the week of March 15, the response I got from Angelo Varrone, CEO of Exponation, was this: “My company’s role, as producer of DSE, is to support the start-up of the independent, not-for-profit organization. We helped get it started and backed the initial launch at DSE 2010, but we don’t speak for the organization. There is an interim board and they are in the process of holding elections for officers. Because of this there is no one who could or would speak to you officially or on the record at this point prior to the upcoming election (which won’t occur before your deadline).”

Okay, so big splash of an announcement and then there’s no one to speak for the DSF? Why not hire a talking head PR flack in the interim? (There are plenty of them who are out of work right now and would welcome the assignment.)

Second issue is that DSA really was a big supporter of Digital Signage Expo (and we can only assume that relationship is over.) Drain says that “we’ve had a good relationship with industry trade shows. In announcing our plans, we want to create a world-class show for the industry.” Ouch! So all eyes on DSA for 2011 to see what world-class really means, I guess. And eyes on Expo 2011 to see who steps up to replace DSA as a sponsor.

So, I also had to ask Drain about comments made by Adrian J. Cotterill, editor-in-chief of the *Da ily DOOH*
, that called the DSA “arrogant” and “dawdling.” Drain says he was taken aback by those comments. He points to the openness of the DSA and their willingness to communicate via groups like LinkedIn and Facebook, and really found no evidence of arrogance.

Drain also says that in the past 60 days, their memberships have grown from 425-ish members to over 450 now. So, is more being made of this rift than need be? His response: “I think so.”

So, who will win this fight? Only time will tell. DSF has attracted some big names like NEC Display Solutions, Harris Corporation, and Wendy’s International to their board. A rush of members from DSA to DSF will tip the boat in their favor, for sure. In the meantime, Michaels urges that industry members need to make their own educated decision as to which one to choose. I couldn’t agree more.

Linda Seid Frembes is a rAVe columnist who covers AV technology, installs, market trends and industry news. Linda has worked with high profile AV manufacturers, trade organization, systems integrators, rep firms and dealer/distributors in the industry including John Lyons Systems, Eastern Acoustic Works (EAW), Northern Sound & Light (NSL), and InfoComm International, among others. Reach her at linda (at) ravepubs.com.

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