

SIGN INFORMATION

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1. What are they?

Electronic variable message centers are computerized programmable electronic visual communication devices capable of stringing and displaying multiple messages in dozens of formats and at varying intervals. Similar to an old-fashioned reader-board, they allow their owners to change copy frequently, but without the cost of replacing missing or broken letters and without the physical labor involved with changing copy.

Unlike the traditional reader-boards, an electronic message center can communicate variable messages as people pass by. And allow its owner to advertise specials while also displaying public service information or other items of public interest, and the effectiveness of an electronic message center is not limited by the space or surface area constraints of reader-boards.

Advantages:

- Copy changes can be variable, controlled, and easily completed with a computer.
- Communicate variable messages as people pass by, allowing more and better opportunities to communicate with the public.
- With the automated dimming and focusing system they can be made to be viewed in critical positions for the public where needed.
- Advertise specials while displaying public service information or other items of public interest.
- "Brand" your business site in the local community.
- Back up your investment in your business by providing the best and most cost effective form of paid advertising. The only form of advertising that may be more powerful is word of mouth, which cannot be purchased or controlled.
- Electronic variable message centers act as your "salesmen on the street," attracting new customers to your business location.
- Market your products and services to your immediate trade area and prevent wasteful advertising expenses.
- The effectiveness of an electronic message center is not limited by the space or surface area constraints of reader-boards.
- Can be used for political or social events.
- Save the costs of replacing missing or broken letters.
- Physical labor is minimized with changing copy and you eliminate the physical liabilities.
- The message can be changed to meet the needs for information of specific retail customers.

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2. How are message centers used?

They are used by businesses that want to control their own graphics and message units and change their communications to meet customer needs.

- Large Corporations – have used such devices for years, in forums ranging from sports stadiums to Times Square, to advertise their products in a dynamic format that allows the advertiser to change their message frequently and easily.
- State Highway Departments – have also realized the value of electronic message centers, as they have come into more frequent use to inform and direct traffic in large metropolitan areas thereby easing traffic congestion and increasing traffic safety. Large-scale urban studies are currently being done to expand message center use in this area, with other “intelligent” components, to create integrated intelligent transportation systems. Under the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) they are used for safety and emergency purposes as well as to guide regulatory sign uses.
- Local Banks – Most people are familiar with the time and temperature units that have been found on the signs for local banks for years.
- Small Businesses – Although these units have been quite expensive in the past, often costing around \$10,000 or more for a small, simple unit, recent technological breakthroughs have drastically reduced production and operating cost, bringing these dynamic visual communication devices within an affordable range to small businesses. Those businesses that have already utilized these communication devices are quick to realize their advertising power, as most people in their communities look at these signs frequently.
- They are used extensively by entertainment, restaurant, gaming, or theme parks to create a district or zone effect.
- These units quickly “brand” the business site in their communities.

3. We have a sign – Why does my business need a message center?

Consider for a moment the speed at which traffic passes by the average business. A motorist has only a few seconds to see and comprehend any given sign. For example, on a street with traffic passing 45 miles per hour, a car that is 500 feet in front of a given sign will only have 7.6 seconds to read the sign before it passes under normal driving conditions. With the limited amount of time available to catch the attention of passing motorists, it is important for a business' sign to be conspicuous.

Because of their changeable copy and illuminated letters, and their traditional use as a public service device, motorists often spot electronic message displays quickly. Additionally, electronic message displays may have greater visibility from further distances, especially in poor lighting conditions, giving the motorist additional time to see the message displayed while safely maneuvering his or her vehicle.

Message centers are also used to advertise entertainment, gaming, and theme parks in districts such as Times Square, Las Vegas Strip, and Glitter Gulch.

Most importantly it will increase a business's share of revenue. This comes about with the “branding” of the site using specific logos, reinforcement of other advertising messages, generating exact impulse stops and changing customer buying habits once they have stopped, as well as allowing for public service notices.

4. How will an electronic message display work best for my business?

The electronic message display rapidly becomes a landmark in your local community, offering a valuable public service to the entire community by displaying:

- Public service information
- Civic events
- Personal and holiday greetings
- The current time and temperature
- Any specific advertising message put forth by the display's owner

Passing viewers often look forward to reading clever new messages, and they may even come to rely upon the message service in some settings. But most importantly to the business owner, the passing viewers will remember:

- What the business is and
- Where it is located

Is an electronic message center a cost-effective advertising medium?

Yes. Businesses often select their advertising medium, and messages, based upon the cost per thousand exposures of their message to the public.

Compare the figures below:

- Newspaper advertising – the cost on average is about \$7.39 for 1000 exposures within a 10-mile radius of the business location.
- Television – the cost on average is approximately \$6.26 per 1000 exposures.
- Radio – the cost is about \$5.47 per 1000 exposures.
- New LED electronic message center display – assume, for example, that you spend \$10,000 on this type of system, and that it's useful life is about 10 years. The amortized daily cost of the message center would equal to \$2.74. Add to this the daily cost of electricity for this new LED unit to be \$0.20, giving your business a message center expense total of \$2.94. Assume further a daily traffic count of cars passing your business of 20,000 vehicles. Counting exposed drivers only, would have the cost of less than \$0.15 per thousand exposures!

Media Type	Direct Mail	Newspaper	Radio	TV	Electronic Message Centers
Market Definition	15,000 pieces	Sunday Circulation 24,700	Dallas, TX HUT lvl: 33,100 Station X with 27 share	Potential listeners of two major in-market stations, 11,600 AQH per day	24,700 cars (34,600 occupants)
Cost	Postage/ Printing	Full Page* (readership @ 70: 17,300) 1/4 Page* (readership @ 70: 17,300) 1/2 Page* (readership @ 70: 17,300)	2 week blitz, 5 days per week on 2 stations Heavy schedule: \$243 9x/day	2 week news sponsorship 5x per week Total: 10x \$550-\$695 per spot	\$8.00 - \$16.00 (Cost for 1 day)
Cost Per Message	\$133.33	Full Page - \$83.81 1/4 Page - \$30.49 1/2 Page - \$12.35	\$22.09	\$26.19 to \$33.10	23¢ to 46¢
Total Cost	\$2000	Full Page - \$2070 1/4 Page - \$753 1/2 Page - \$305	\$2430 (2 weeks)	\$5500 - \$6950 (2 weeks)	\$240 - \$480 (per month)

Best of all, with an electronic message center, a business does not have to worry about missing their target audience, becoming “yesterday’s news,” or about expensive production cost for changing their message, as happens frequently with the other forms of advertising.

With an electronic variable message display, the business owner:

- Owns their form of advertising
- The advertising works for them 24 hours a day all year around.
- It is their “salesman on the street” attracting customers into the business
- The advertising speaks directly to their potential customers as they drive past the business location, and the electronic message display makes their business a landmark in their community.

Note: Dollar for dollar, the other forms of advertising cannot come close to matching the efficiency of the electronic message display.

5. What level of return on investment can I expect?

For businesses that choose to enhance their signage with an electronic message display, the business owner typically sees an increase in business from 15% to 150% using the smaller number, consider the following example.

A small business generating \$1,000.00 a day in revenue adds an electronic message center. The business soon increases by 15%, adding another \$150 a day to total revenue. That translates into an additional \$1,050.00 a week in revenue, or \$54,600 per year in revenue that clearly adds to business profit.

It is also important to keep in mind with this example that investment in the electronic message center necessary to generate the above revenue would likely be less than one-third of the amount of revenue generated in the first year of its operation.

6. How much can I expect to spend on an electronic message center?

LED technology:

Technological breakthroughs have drastically reduced the costs of producing these communications devices and have eliminated the previous level of expense for operating message centers. For example, new LED technology is available that allows message centers to: operate 24 hours a day continuously for over 11 years with out requiring LED (“bulb”) replacement, AND consumes electricity at a daily cost of only \$0.20, or approximately \$74.00 a year.

Best of all, this new type of message center can be purchased for much less than its predecessors. As for the environmental impact, it must be understood that the great bulk of power consumption for these signs takes place at night, when there is usually more power being generated than used. Consequently, these signs are often a revenue contributor rather than an absolute energy user.

Incandescent bulbs/older technology:

Until recently, the cost of these devices has been prohibitive for most every type of business except large corporations, which have been know to spend a minimum of \$35,000 for a small message display to over \$500,000 for larger displays.

Additionally the cost of routine maintenance, particularly light bulb replacement (on average, an incandescent bulb will last about four months during 24-hour a day operation) and the cost of electricity to light the display (with a standard incandescent 30-watt bulb message center operating 24 hours a day, the cost is slightly more than \$10.00 per day, or \$3,760.00 per year just for electricity.)

7. Is an electronic message center cost effective?

Yes. Businesses often select their advertising medium, and messages, based upon the cost per thousand exposures of their message to the public. Compare the figures below:

- Newspaper advertising – the cost on average is about \$7.39 for 1000 exposures within a 10-mile radius of the business location.
- Television – the cost on average is approximately \$6.26 per 1000 exposures.
- Radio – the cost is about \$5.47 per 1000 exposures.
- New LED electronic message center display – the cost is cut to about \$1.90 per 1000 exposures.

Datatronic Control, Inc. offers leasing programs, which include service and maintenance, thereby bringing the unit to an even more affordable range.