Remaking Mark's Work Wearhouse

By Peter Saunders

Mark's, a wholly owned subsidiary of Canadian Tire, is renovating and redesigning its clothing stores across Canada. Formerly known as Mark's Work Wearhouse, the retail chain is incorporating digital signage into its new shopping environments in multiple forms, including both passive and interactive displays.

As a central component of the overall rebranding process, Mark's has selected ADFLOW Networks, an information technology (IT) company based in Burlington, Ont., as its new digital signage provider, working in partnership with Mediavation, a Montreal-based advertising agency. Their goal is to use innovative, dynamic in-store media more strategically than in the past, to deliver unique shopping experiences for each customer and achieve a variety of business objectives.

Forming a partnership

Mediavation is a longstanding agency partner to Mark's, having worked with the retailer for 20 years. It has been the driving force behind the new vision for in-store digital media, including content creation. The company recommended ADFLOW to help achieve this vision after a previous digital signage system had not met the retailer's expectations and needs.

"We and Mark's decided to partner with ADFLOW after much due diligence," says Joseph Levy, president of Mediavation. "The decision was made mainly because of their years of experience and proven expertise."

By way of example, ADFLOW had previously arranged liquid crystal displays (LCDs) in strategic zones of Grand & Toy stores, including outward-facing displays in the front windows that were readable even in the glare of sunlight. And the company had paired passive and interactive displays in both Rogers and Telus stores, including 'lift/touch' systems that brought up pertinent product information on-screen when triggered by a customer picking up a tethered mobile phone. The projects provided precedents for Mark's.

Formerly known as Mark's Work Wearhouse, the clothing retail chain is rebranding stores across Canada.

"We felt they had a powerful and flexible system that would allow us to integrate our multi-platform digital signage strategy seamlessly," says Tom Ranieri, associate vice-president (AVP) of store design for Mark's.

ADFLOW was called upon to provide everything from hardware components to content development, based on ideas from Mediavation's collaborative teams.

"We are delighted to be their in-store digital media partner and a key contributor to this initiative," says Mike Abbott, president of ADFLOW. "Retailers today are looking for new and more effective ways to promote their brands, educate and entertain their customers and drive sales. Mark's and Mediavation are leading the way together by creating a unique and engaging shopping experience."

The deployment began in 2011 and will reach both the new rebranded stores and upgraded existing stores over a two-year period, on a region-by-region basis.

Points of focus
The initiative involves four main points of focus: brand enhancement, the in-store experience, customer education and driving sales.

The current strategy for Mark's is based on communicating with customers with an emphasis on the added value of innovative clothing. A standing floor fixture with a built-in 1-m (40-in.) portrait-mode touch screen, for example, runs an interactive game, product demonstration videos, 'what to wear when' suggestions and an electronic flyer with each week's promotions. By showcasing its clothing through an entertaining and visually appealing display medium, Mark's hopes to inform customers about the products' value in a compelling manner.

LED-based digital billboards have been installed at some stores near highways and major thoroughfares.

Beyond these sales-related goals, the digital signage strategy is also intended to help drive traffic to the Mark's website and facilitate interactive staff training. Mediavation has developed the multi-purpose content strategy and uses ADFLOW's web-based content management application on an ongoing basis to schedule when and how the elements it has created will appear on each type of display.

Mediavation's in-house animators use Flash software and upload all of their files to the web application, where they can create campaigns, set up playlists and loops, enhance interactivity and finally preview, approve and schedule the content to be played at specific times on specific displays.

Strategic screens
The new digital media network includes large-format LCDs called World Screens, the aforementioned interactive (*i.e.* touch-enabled) screens called Touch Points and LCD-based video walls behind the sales counters.

The 1.3-m (52-in.) World Screens are wall-mounted in prominent locations throughout each store to help create the desired shopping ambience.

The wall-mounted 'World Screens' are intended to enhance the in-store ambience.

The Touch Point screens are meant to be both entertaining and educational, informing customers about the benefits of the retailer's wide range of lifestyle clothing products, in terms of design and innovation. They are installed in pillars called Tech Towers.

 "The content on these displays prompts consumers to touch the screen and learn more about the profiled products," explains Wayne Ruttle, ADFLOW's vice-president (VP) of sales. "The displays are mounted at eye level, facing out onto the aisles."

The video walls display high-resolution content for the purpose of brand enhancement. Given their size—each wall comprises four 1-m screens—and positioning, they are easily visible from anywhere in the store.

In addition, redesigned Mark's stores will feature 1-m LCD panels called Product Innovation Fixtures. These digital signs will be built into merchandising areas to help drive sales.

Finally, some key stores that are visible from major highways and thoroughfares are extending digital signage outdoors with large light-emitting diode-based (LED-based) dynamic billboards. Mark's did not want to use a separate content management system for these signs, so ADFLOW was asked to integrate them into its web-based application, too.