

SOFTWARE EDITORS

INTERVIEW

HEADLINE.TV

Founded in 2002 by digital signage software specialists, Headline.TV delivers software solutions and know-how for on-screen information and advertising channels. Together with partners, Headline.TV offers a full-service concept comprising hardware, software, content management and system integration. Their markets and areas of application include cable TV, Point of Sale, Point of Information, Transport, and Corporate. The service delivers advanced functionalities in the field of planning, content creation, approval, scheduling, publishing, distributing, playing and reporting. Headline.TV has partners, customers and running installations in Denmark, Norway, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain and Germany. The solution is used by major European and international companies within telecom, television, media, advertising, transportation, and system integration.

www.headline.tv

OLIVIER PLAS
President & CEO



Olivier Plas plans to lead Headline.TV into further international expansion, out of Denmark, together with local and international partners. He is French born, and after an international education in the USA and in France, he obtained an MBA in London. He has had leadership roles with leading firms in Europe, the USA and Australia, in software sales and in strategy and systems consulting.

Cleverdis: How does Headline.TV intervene in a digital signage project?

Olivier Plas: Together with our partners, we deliver the three essential digital signage project components: contents, software and hardware, but Headline.TV comes from the software side.

Our job is to take the complexity of the solution away from the user, thanks to a web based tool (Application Service Provider – see opposite page): we host the solution for the client, he rents it from us and accesses it through a user-friendly screen. From then on, users have the means to concentrate on what is important: influencing their point of sales information, generating extra sales, relaying campaigns or decreasing perceived waiting time...

Cl.: How do Headline.TV products adapt to specific client issues?

O.P.: It is simple, thanks to hosting and remote consulting on the PC player in your store! Our clients don't want to be software or technology experts, but expect a "best of breed" solution. Our solution attracts highly demanding customers - like cable TV companies (UPC, RTL) who want perfect flowing content and a professional finish. But it is also suited to retailers, transportation companies, schools... The Headline.TV solution adapts to most standardly available components (PC players, standard screens, content creation and editing tools). We thus decrease the risk

linked to dedicated equipment. Our solution is also template based, so updating and adding new information is simple to do. But if some functionality lacks, we can develop it.

Cl.: How do you plan a digital signage project using your software, and what advice would you give?

O.P.: The essential first step is to know where you are going with this media, plan accordingly and generate a content structure which will make life easier afterwards. We are experts at this, so no need to start from scratch. Then you schedule the airtime, the dynamics, and once data is validated, you can go on to publishing, choosing and activating channels. After that, distribution and actual playback are automatic. The rest is optional: reporting and statistics, system monitoring and alerts, updates... In terms of advice, I would underline the role of a good pilot: get as close to the real situation as possible, and use it to validate some real hypothesis. Finally, remember that content is king!

Cl.: Tell us about the key issue of efficient statistics...

O.P.: Everybody says they have reports, but "the devil is in the detail"! There are several ways to do stats... We can tell you if a spot has actually been shown on the specific screen you are interested in. In taxis, we even set sensors under the passenger seats for accurate reporting!

Cl.: Do you have examples of other solutions you have deployed?

O.P.: Wireless solutions have generally been more tricky: updating content when a ferry docks, or setting a player in a taxi (a hostile and very regulated environment for technology!). One of our first big clients, in Switzerland, wanted to reduce the perceived waiting time in their stores (Swiss Com). Infotainment content was created, with a kind of soap opera that was a great success, and has been going on since. As for results, perceived waiting time has reduced greatly and sales have increased.

Cl.: So what are the challenges to expect in this market?

O.P.: Well first, this advertising media still has to prove its use compared to other traditional media, but I think you wouldn't see today's development if retailers hadn't realised the actual benefit of digital signage... The "offer" side of the market is still unstructured, which sometimes makes it difficult also for us to go forward. On the "demand" side of the market, customers sometimes don't know through whom or how to buy this new media, which makes being seen a challenge in itself. Many customers are looking for their first generation network, but in 3 years time, they will be looking for the right network and we feel we already are "future proof"!



© Photo: Headline.TV

Why the ASP model is a bonus...

By Olivier Plas

© Photo: Headline.TV



What is an ASP? Definition-wise, an "Application Service Provider" manages and distributes software-based services and solutions to customers across a wide area network, from a central data centre.

This enables outsourcing of some or almost all aspects of information technology needs, and is especially appropriate for Digital Signage, because our customer's business is not IT, but retail - for example!

So the word "service" in ASP is really there for a reason: we see ourselves as delivering a service and know-how.

It is true that as a business model, ASP has had infancy problems, but these tend to be overcome. There's no excuse for not getting it to work properly... And if software guarantees are needed in case of default, standard ways now exist to give these guarantees to a partner or a customer.

So better acceptance of the ASP model is a trend today and of course we at Headline.TV have benefited from it. Indeed, we're a young company, but we've had a strong growth thanks to the values the ASP model delivers to our customers.. Indeed, its main benefit is that our people and our partners are deeply involved with our clients along our 36 month relationship with them (standard length of a Headline.TV contract). Actually we have a direct interest in satisfying them, because otherwise, we hear from them everyday! "Off the shelf" software entails more risks once purchased. It still must be locally installed, up-graded...

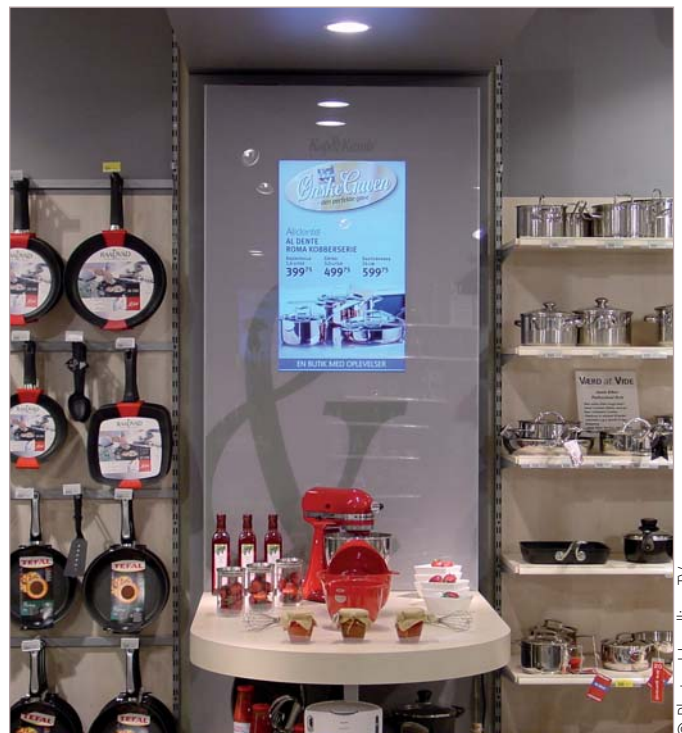
There aren't that many companies that have the same approach. Currently, in our digital signage arena, under a handful do in the countries we operate in. This will surely change in the coming years

ASP POSSIBILITIES...

- From a business point of view, an ASP approach to digital signage has clear business advantages as opposed to decentralised approaches (DVDs or local software). First, headquarters are sure the media is present in the store. The advertiser is certain his spot is shown and therefore gets a better return on his advertising investment. Store staff or taxis can concentrate on what they do best: face customers!
- The software solution delivered by Headline.TV is an ASP service, based upon Headline.TV's server park. The customer does not buy software licenses, but an ongoing service. This means that we take a greater responsibility in ensuring that the customer has a solution that works - more so than a standard software supplier.

- Updating with the latest version is included in the price and is done automatically (provided the customer wants it). The software and services are therefore always up to date and state of the art, during the whole 36 months of the standard contract.
- ASP includes services like a help desk, a kind of hotline operated through our hardware partners, who go into the stores, diagnose the problem, identify whether it comes from the hardware or the software. If it is a software problem, we will fix it remotely. In short, roles are well defined and we have a service level agreement with the end customer, including security, and back-up procedures, for example.
- ASP is not monolithic. You don't need all the upgrades if you don't want them, nor do you have to use all the modules. The Headline.TV solution, for example, is based on optional modules that give access, depending on the choices made, to asset management, statistics, etc.
- Involvement with the client is important, and it's the same with our partners. That's a very strong point, as partners as well as clients are more involved and quite appreciate it. We react to their needs. If a client wants more functionalities, we can develop them.
- Costs also tend to be lower when you choose an ASP solution, because the fixed costs of starting such a solution are spread over a greater number of installations. We have low starting costs, because there is no need to set up a server, a connection or a database. Those costs are spread on our client base. Costs are even lower if you account for the better exposure of advertising for example. And operational costs are low as well, as we do the upgrades ourselves and as there is no need to educate people locally.

What more could you ask? One thing is for sure: even though competitors aren't numerous on the market for the time being, more and more retailers are seeing the advantages of ASP solutions, and the market will no doubt pick up on this rapidly...



© Photo: Headline.TV