

Choosing Touch vs Non-Touch



CHOOSING THE RIGHT DIGITAL DIRECTORY FOR YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

In terms of choices, digital building directories offer such an embarrassment of riches that it can be hard to even know where to start. Digital touch static? Digital non-touch, non-static? Interactive touchscreen? Wall mount, desk mount or floor mount? What about screen size? Refresh rate? Software? It's no wonder we have so many clients interested in making the switch from old-style strip or paper directories who come to us frustrated from just trying to wrap their heads around the available digital options, not even counting other innovations such as 3-D mapping, wayfinding and mobile integrations.

Therefore, we thought it might be a good time to get back to the basics, in order to give those considering investing in digital directories a jumping-off point from which they can begin their exploration. Let's start with the differences and benefits of touch vs non-touch directories, and how they are best deployed in different environments.

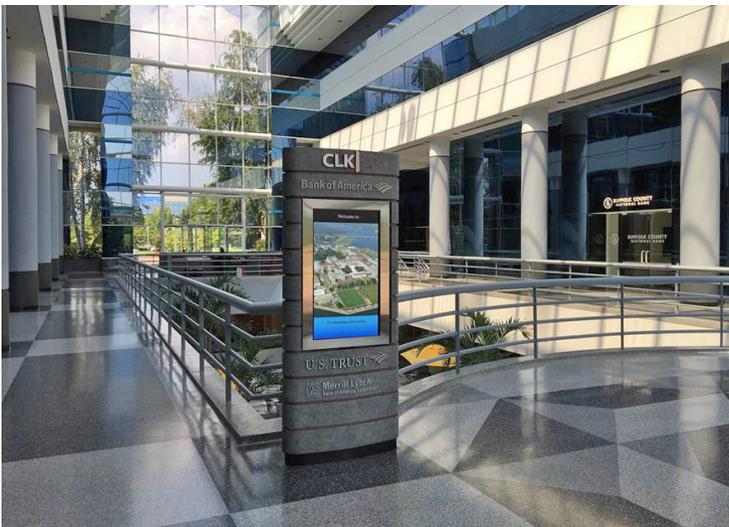


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First, it's important to understand the terms touch and non-touch for what they actually are and do. A non-touch digital directory can be one of two things: either a static screen that always displays the information, such as office numbers and locations, or a screen that rotates through a set series of different informational "slides". The entire screen can change, or just sections of the screen, but in both cases, this both are considered to be non-static, non-touch digital directories.

On the other side, we have digital touchscreen directories, which offer different levels of interactivity, depending on the complexity of the software. Some simply allow for one- or two-button operation, giving users the ability to "page through" different screens, and return to "home." Others function more like a tablet, with full-screen touch capabilities, offering a more fully interactive and even immersive user experience.



While it may at first glance seem that interactive touchscreens would be the most practical choice, offering more opportunities for customization, it is the environment in which the directory will be deployed that should be of primary concern and have the most influence on whether a touch or non-touch display is chosen. This is why considering the three Ss -- setting, situation and surroundings -- are so important when considering what kind of directory to purchase. This is best illustrated by examining at a few use cases that illustrate why and when touch or non-touch digital directories would be most appropriate for specific business requirements.

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when considering what kind of directory to purchase. This is best illustrated by examining at a few use cases that illustrate why and when touch or non-touch digital directories would be most appropriate for specific business requirements.

Let's start with "Situation": for what purpose(s) will the directory be used? For instance, if an airport wants to display digital flight information, they

are going to need a very large display that's easy to read by multiple people at a distance, which can be expensive. But that screen becomes a much bigger investment if it also needs to be a touch-capable. Since most airports only need to display a rotating, constantly-updating list of flight data, there's no need for the additional expense of purchasing a screen that can be made interactive.

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On the other hand, if a large medical campus needs to direct patients, visitors and vendors around several different buildings, spread over a square mile or more, it's likely that they will need more than just a simple display screen. Instead, a better choice would be smaller, full-touchscreen kiosks offering personalized wayfinding solutions that create a more comprehensive and relevant experience for end-users.

Finally, between the two above-mentioned solutions, there is another category of deployment, one that is considered "touch," or "interactive," but not as complex (or as costly) as a directory that is completely interactive. These are often configured for simple operation, giving users the ability to "page through" different screens, and return to "home." An example of this would be some of the embedded screens in the headrests of many commercial airplanes. They are interactive in a limited way with software and hardware than reflects that specific use case. Passengers can "page through" and select from a list of movies or TV shows at the bottom of the screen, but the entire screen isn't touch enabled. This is changing of course, especially as these technologies become more common and prices fall -- a fully immersive flight entertainment experience is certainly already on its way.

Next up is our second S, "Setting." The term "setting" refers to the environment in which the

building directory be used. Will it be placed in an apartment lobby, on a medical campus with multiple buildings and hundreds of floors or in a mixed-use live/work development? These are just a few examples, but each poses a unique set of challenges for end users that a digital directory would potentially be used to solve.

Let's say the plan is for a digital building directory for a 40-floor apartment building in New York City. First, because it's unlikely that multiple people will be using the directory at once, making a touchscreen that is less than 26" is a good choice. But how interactive, that's the question. If this will just be used to find tenants within the building, then a basic "page through" type of functionality is fine. However, higher-end wayfinding options can also be integrated, such as the ability to offer customized maps and information about the surrounding area, or to show the weather, news or building announcements, too.

For the mixed-use development, although a simple one- or two-button directory could be deployed, it's usually not the best choice. There are often multiple buildings, that includes

residences, stores, restaurants and entertainment venues. This is an excellent opportunity to do a lot more than just give users basic location information. Instead, choosing a full touchscreen directory that can showcase grand openings and sales, allow patrons to purchase tickets to movies, search for specific stores via an on-screen keyboard, make dinner reservations and even route users most efficiently over multiple stops can be a much better use of interactive wayfinding and directory technology.



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Finally, the large hospital campus has its own set of considerations for building an appropriate digital directory. As more individuals are likely to be in wheelchairs or have differing levels of physical abilities, ADA compliance will be necessary. These directories must also offer a completely frustration-free experience, as patients are often upset, anxious or short on time, depending on the reasons for their hospital visit, and this is especially true for patients, who are the hospitals customers. The last thing a hospital system needs is what amounts to a poor customer experience on what may already be a difficult day for them. While basic, non-touch digital directories may be fine if they are to be deployed on each floor to assist in finding the correct office or individual room, interactive, touchscreen wayfinding can be one of the most powerful ways to help patients feel more calm and in control while in what is often a stressful environment.

This brings us to our final S: "Surroundings." The term "surroundings" refers to the immediate placement of the directory within its environment. It answers the question, "where does the directory installation make the most sense?" This decision greatly impacts whether or not a touchscreen is necessary.

For instance, if the directory is for an office building with 15 tenants, and all can comfortably be displayed on the screen at once, along with their location, a simple, static, non-touch wall mount directory may serve those purposes completely adequately. However, if the facility is larger, or tenants require greater functionality, such as a digital receptionist option, then advanced software will be necessary and a touch screen with high levels of interactivity will now be required, and installation of the directory as a freestanding kiosk is likely the more accessible choice.

Even those property management companies who staff their lobbies with receptionists often find that automating part of the front desk experience with options like visitor check and wayfinding software can be extremely useful, especially during the busiest times of day. A desk-mount interactive directory, located at the reception desk, is often the best choice in this case. Visitors may then get many of their wayfinding needs met digitally, but still have access to a staff member if they require additional assistance.

What about an apartment building? Smaller facilities can easily make do with a simple wall-

mount static digital interface, but a high rise in Midtown Manhattan has completely different requirements. With 100 or more tenants, they would at the very least need limited, one- or two-button touch screen capabilities so that visitors are able to scroll through a list of tenants. Digital receptionist software would allow visitors to be granted access to the lobby once "buzzed in." And because it would need to be touch-accessible to all visitors, installing the directory as a floor-mounted enclosure would likely make more sense than mounting it on the wall.

While the decision to invest in a touch or non-touch digital directory may not be simple, careful planning and a thorough grasp of your own "three Ss" can go a long way toward helping you make the right choice for your business. We invite you to submit a request for proposal online or call (800) 628-3603 today and RedyRef will be there every step of the way to assist you in creating the best possible digital directory for your company's unique needs and goals.