

Next is Now

How retailers at New York's Westfield World Trade Center are embracing digital.

AT THIS YEAR'S DIGITAL SIGNAGE WEEK IN NEW YORK (Oct. 24-28), Westfield's shopping center at the World Trade Center – housed in the long-awaited WTC Transportation Hub, or Santiago Calatrava's Oculus building – was big news among attendees.

I, like the rest of the industry, was curious to see what the tenants would bring to the table in what is arguably one of the most unique and distinctive U.S. shopping centers since The Shops at Crystals opened in Las Vegas in late 2009. There's no better environment for retailers to bring their "A" game to create digital content that showcases the world-class brands in residence. I also hoped to see new approaches to integrating digital signage elements into the building's highly designed retail interiors and windows.

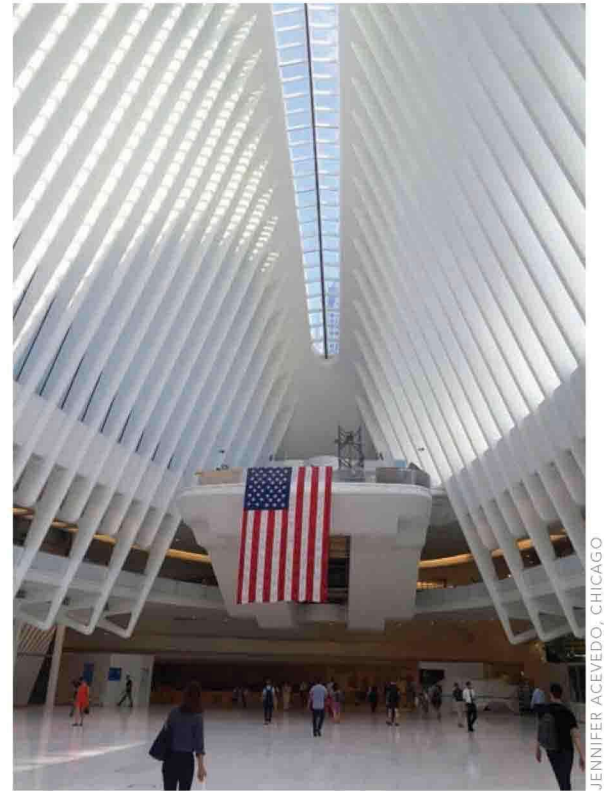
Shoe brand Sam Edelman (New York), a company with a long history tied to its namesake, opened a store in a double-height space that creates drama and allows room for well-positioned branded graphics. The retailer has opted to place its digital entry behind the cashwrap.

What caught my attention about the effort was the way digital

signage was incorporated into a beautifully framed larger backlit graphic. One of the biggest issues facing brands when deploying signage is how to incorporate the hardware in a way that doesn't make it look like a TV, and they did this very well.

Gorgeous products require more than just lifestyle shots, and London-based jewelry retailer Links of London tells an attractive story from its back-wall digital signage to a well-crafted window display. Even a support column is transformed into a visually stunning bracelet-like, stacked sculpture. The use of a mirror-based digital frame not only integrates smoothly with the finishes, but also takes advantage of foot traffic – shoppers passing by create the illusion of activity.

Combine Tissot's winning look with its great use of a large architectural digital column and well-placed digital signage, and this store was one of my favorites. As I've said many times, it's not the screen as much as the content and the way it has been integrated into the design strategy that really makes an impact. Tissot has struck that fine balance that often eludes in the digital signage world.



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Links' three-sided column clad in 6-by-2-foot screens shared content that was not only branded but also showcased great product moments. The Oculus interior is a "snow field" in white, so this color-rich digital content pushes out into the customer transit space. Scale and angle play an equal role in the way your eye encounters a feature that draws you in to see more and consider the brand message. The space also features lit frames that incorporate smaller images and product displays; the use here of layered displays is what I'd call "best practice."

Forever 21 (Los Angeles) was another brand that showcased an updated look, moving digital content to the forefront in its latest New York store. Here, designers chose to create digital columns that mix featured merchandise with styled, music-infused fashion content that was all about its young and trendy audience's lifestyle.

Making a more subtle statement, wine and spirits emporium Pure Liquid (New York) features a striking barrel stave ceiling and fixtures that offer the perfect backdrop for bottles of wine and craft spirits. Here, the digital experience is limited, yet like a great wine, it's impeccably scaled and balanced for its environment. Take note, too, how the large screen is mounted above the cashwrap, creating a headline that can be used for custom content. The screen and its content reinforce customer service-oriented messaging about the product and promote the brand's online presence.

I encourage those of you living in or visiting New York in the coming New Year to keep your eyes open to how the use of digital is scaled and integrated into important brands. Take photos and start documenting all things digital – the year ahead promises to bring even more innovation and tools for designers of all types. ▴



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