# Managed digital signage: recurring revenue models for signage entrepreneurs

Digital signage networks generate income long after the screens are mounted. For an entrepreneur who installs and maintains screens for restaurants, retail chains, or corporate lobbies, the real financial opportunity lies not in the one-time hardware sale but in the recurring payments that follow. Managed digital signage shifts the business from a project-based model to a subscription-like stream, and several distinct revenue models make that possible.

## Software-as-a-service (SaaS) on a monthly fee

The most common recurring model is a monthly software fee per screen or per location. The entrepreneur provides the content management system (CMS) that lets the client update menus, promotions, or messages from a browser or mobile app. The client never owns the software; they pay for access. The entrepreneur covers hosting, updates, and basic support within that monthly fee. This model works well for multi-site operators who want consistency without managing software licenses themselves. The key metric is screen count: more screens mean higher revenue, but also more complexity in content distribution and device monitoring.

## Tiered service plans

Not every client needs the same level of service. A small coffee shop may only want a basic slide show of daily specials, while a car dealership might require video loops, social media feeds, and real-time inventory integration. Offering multiple tiers lets the entrepreneur capture value from both segments. A typical structure includes a basic tier with limited content updates and email support, a professional tier with more frequent updates and phone support, and an enterprise tier with dedicated account management, custom integrations, and priority response times. Each tier carries a higher monthly fee and often a longer contract term. The entrepreneur must define clear support limits for each tier to avoid scope creep that eats into margins.

## Content creation and update retainers

Many clients lack the time or design skills to produce engaging content. An entrepreneur can offer a monthly retainer for content creation: designing new menu boards, seasonal promotions, or event graphics. This retainer sits alongside the software fee and the hardware lease. The entrepreneur either hires a designer or partners with one. The retainer model builds customer retention because the client becomes dependent on the entrepreneur for both the

platform and the creative output. When a client considers switching providers, they face the cost of redesigning all their content from scratch. That switching cost is a powerful lock-in.

## Hardware lease with managed services

Instead of selling screens and media players at a margin, the entrepreneur leases them. The client pays a fixed monthly fee that covers the hardware, installation, software, content updates, and remote monitoring. This managed digital signage bundle simplifies budgeting for the client: one predictable payment replaces several capital expenditures and variable service invoices. For the entrepreneur, the lease model improves gross revenue predictability and allows them to refresh hardware on a cycle that keeps the network modern. The operating expenses include hardware depreciation and repair reserves, but the monthly fee should be set to cover those and still leave a healthy margin.

One real-world example is a quick-service restaurant chain that uses a Whataburger Menu screen to display rotating specials. A managed digital signage provider might lease that screen, update the menu items weekly, and monitor the device remotely for failures. The restaurant gets a reliable display with zero maintenance burden, and the provider earns a steady monthly check. That is the essence of the lease-plus-managed-services model.

## Revenue sharing on advertising

In high-traffic locations, the screen itself can become an advertising asset. A managed signage entrepreneur can sell ad space on the network to local businesses or brands and share the advertising revenue with the location owner. This model works best in gyms, waiting rooms, bars, and retail stores where screens are visible to a captive audience. The entrepreneur handles ad sales, content scheduling, and reporting, and takes a percentage of the ad income. The location owner gets a reduced monthly fee or a free screen in exchange for allowing ads. This model requires a sales effort and a minimum number of screens to attract advertisers, but it can generate significant upside beyond the base subscription.

## White-label partnerships

An entrepreneur can license their managed digital signage platform to other businesses, such as AV integrators or IT support firms that want to offer signage to their clients without building their own software. The entrepreneur provides the CMS, the device management backend, and the support infrastructure under the partner's brand. The partner pays a wholesale monthly fee per screen or a revenue share. This model scales quickly because the partner brings existing client relationships and sales muscle. The entrepreneur focuses on platform reliability and feature development while the partner handles the customer-facing work. White-label

arrangements often include a minimum screen commitment to ensure the partnership is worthwhile for both sides.

## Performance-based pricing

A less common but growing model ties the monthly fee to outcomes rather than inputs. For example, a signage network that displays up-sell prompts at a fast-food counter might charge a percentage of the incremental sales generated by the prompts. This requires integration with the point-of-sale system and careful attribution tracking. The entrepreneur takes on more risk because revenue depends on the client's sales performance, but the potential reward is higher and the client sees the service as a profit center rather than a cost. This model demands strong analytics and trust between both parties, but it aligns incentives perfectly: the entrepreneur is motivated to make the content as effective as possible.

When a Whataburger Menu screen uses performance-based pricing, the provider might earn a small share of every extra combo meal sold because of a dynamic promotion displayed on the screen. Both the restaurant and the provider win when the content drives sales. This model is still emerging, but early adopters in quick-service and retail are testing it.

## Choosing the right mix

Most successful managed digital signage businesses combine several of these models. A typical client might pay a monthly software fee, a content retainer, and a hardware lease all in one invoice. The entrepreneur's job is to match the model to the client's size, technical comfort, and willingness to pay. A small independent store may only want the lease-plus-software bundle, while a regional chain might want the full managed service with content creation and performance tracking. The entrepreneur who can offer flexible options and clearly communicate the value of each tier will attract a broader client base and build a more resilient revenue stream.

Recurring revenue changes the financial dynamics of a signage business. It smooths out the cash flow, increases the value of the company if it is ever sold, and deepens client relationships. The upfront effort of setting up a managed digital signage network is higher than a simple hardware sale, but the long-term payoff is a steady income that grows with every new screen brought online. For signage entrepreneurs looking to build a sustainable business, these seven recurring models provide a practical framework for turning screens into assets that pay month after month.