What goes into running a managed signage service

Running a digital signage network for other businesses sounds appealing. Customers get a modern way to communicate, and the operator collects a steady monthly fee. But what does it actually take to deliver that service? The costs are not always obvious. Someone who wants to start or grow a managed signage business needs to understand where the money goes before they can price their packages properly and keep customers happy.

The core components of a managed signage service

A managed signage service typically covers the hardware on the wall, the software that runs the content, and the people who keep everything working. Each of those three areas has its own cost structure, and the mix changes depending on whether the operator owns the screens or the customer does.

Hardware: screens, mounts and players

The most visible cost is the screen itself. Commercial-grade displays cost more than consumer TVs because they are built to run for long hours, have better brightness, and include features such as remote monitoring and scheduled on/off times. Consumer TVs can work in some settings, but they tend to fail faster in continuous use and often lack the input controls needed for reliable digital signage.

Each screen also needs a media player, either a small dedicated device or a built-in chipset that can run the signage software. Players range from simple USB sticks to mini PCs. The choice depends on the software requirements and the type of content being shown. A restaurant chain that changes menu photos once a week can get away with a basic player. A retail store that runs video loops and live social media feeds needs something more powerful.

Mounts, cables, and installation labour add up too. Running power and network cabling to a screen in a ceiling or on a wall can cost more than the screen itself if the building requires custom work or long cable runs.

Software: the recurring platform cost

Every screen needs a content management system. Most reputable signage platforms charge a monthly or annual fee per screen, per player, or per account. This fee covers the cloud dashboard where the operator schedules content, the player software that fetches and displays that content, and ongoing updates and bug fixes.

Some platforms offer a reseller program, which lets an operator buy software at wholesale rates and bill the customer a higher amount. The margin between the wholesale cost and the

customer price is where the operator makes money on software. But the operator also carries the risk: if a customer stops paying, the operator still owes the wholesale fee for that screen unless the platform allows pausing or cancelling the licence.

Content: creation and management

Content is often the part that new operators underestimate. A screen with no content or with stale content looks worse than no screen at all. Someone has to design the layouts, write the copy, source images, and update the playlists on a regular schedule.

Some managed signage services include content creation in the monthly subscription. Others charge a separate setup fee and then a lower monthly rate for scheduled updates. Either way, the cost of a designer or a content template system must be factored in. If the operator does the design themselves, the cost is their time. If they outsource it, the cost is the agency or freelance rate.

Recurring revenue versus one-off costs

A healthy managed signage business relies on recurring revenue. The monthly subscription for software, content updates, and technical support creates predictable income. But the upfront costs, screens, players, mounts, cabling, and installation labour, must be recovered before the recurring revenue becomes pure profit.

Some operators charge a one-time installation fee that covers the hardware and labour. Others spread the hardware cost into the monthly subscription over a contract term. Both approaches work, but they affect cash flow differently. Spreading the cost keeps the monthly price higher and ties the customer into a longer contract, which can reduce churn. Charging upfront lowers the monthly fee but requires the customer to write a larger first cheque.

Technical support and maintenance

Screens fail. Network connections drop. Players freeze. A managed signage service promises to keep the screens running, which means someone has to respond when something breaks.

Support costs include the time of the person who answers the phone or email, the spare screens and players kept in inventory, and the travel time to a site when a remote fix does not work. Many operators limit their support to business hours and charge extra for emergency after-hours calls. The cost of spare hardware should be budgeted from the start, because waiting for a replacement to ship while a customer’s screen is dark can damage the relationship.

For a small operator, support might be handled by the same person who does the installations and content updates. As the customer base grows, dedicated support staff become necessary. The cost of that labour eats into the margin unless the subscription prices are set high enough to cover it.

Customer account management and billing

Each customer account needs to be set up in the software platform, configured with the right player licences, and linked to a billing system. Invoicing, payment collection, and chasing late payments all take time. A managed signage service that uses a separate billing tool or a manual invoicing process adds overhead every month.

Operators who sign up multiple customers through the same reseller program can streamline this by using the platform's own billing integration, if available. Otherwise, the cost of accounting software or a virtual assistant for billing should be included in the operating expenses.

What it means for the operator

Understanding these costs helps an operator price their managed signage services realistically. A package that charges just enough to cover the software licence and a bit of profit on hardware will leave no room for support, content, or the operator's own time. The result is a business that feels busy but barely breaks even.

A sustainable model accounts for all the recurring costs, software, content updates, support labour, spare hardware, and billing overhead, and then adds a margin that rewards the operator for managing the whole system. That margin is the true value of a managed signage service: the customer pays for convenience and reliability, not just for a screen with a slideshow.

One way to see how these pieces fit together in practice is to look at a real provider such as jollibeemenus.com. Their approach to launching a digital signage business using existing screens and reseller software shows how the cost structure works for someone starting out. The site walks through the typical package model and the recurring revenue that makes the business worthwhile.

At the same time, every operator should check their own numbers. The cost of hardware in one city might be different from another. The labour rate for installation varies. The software platform's reseller program has its own pricing tiers. What matters is that the total cost per customer screen is known before the first invoice is sent. That knowledge, combined with a clear contract that sets expectations for support hours and content updates, turns a managed signage service from a side project into a reliable income stream.

Operators who take the time to map out their costs and build a pricing model that covers them will find it easier to grow. They can take on more customers without worrying that each new account will eat into their profits. And they can sleep better knowing that the monthly subscription they charge is enough to keep the screens running, the content fresh, and the business profitable.

For anyone exploring this space, resources like jollibeemenus.com offer a practical starting point. The site explains how to structure packages and build a customer base without needing to manufacture hardware or develop software from scratch. That kind of blueprint can save months of trial and error, especially for someone who wants to focus on the service side rather than the technical plumbing.

In the end, a managed signage service is a bundle of hardware, software, content, and support wrapped into a predictable monthly fee. The costs behind that bundle are real and varied, but they are also manageable when the operator understands them. With the right platform, a clear pricing model, and a commitment to keeping the screens useful, the business can become a steady source of recurring revenue.