

## Digital signz for digital times

### *Corwin's brainchild informs region's tourists*

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*Staff Writer*

Flowers sway in the afternoon sun, their reds and yellows and oranges starkly contrasting against the blue of the sky, reeds blow in the wind, ripples spread across the surface of a pond.

Bright as the colors may be and idyllic as the scene may look, it's just the introduction to the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden provided by an interactive, high-definition, 42-inch plasma screen TV at the garden's information center. Along with an identical system at the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum, the garden installed the information center July 28 as part of the first wave of a partnership between Santa Barbara-based Vital-Signz and Museums and Cultural Attractions of Santa Barbara. The plan is to install similar displays throughout the community to highlight local landmarks and connect visitors with events occurring throughout town.

"The idea is to connect the community," said Richard Corwin, the Emmy-winning former Hollywood sound engineer and

chief executive officer of Vital-Signz.

Now Corwin is preparing to connect more of the community, with plans to install similar kiosks at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Mission Santa Barbara, the Ty Warner Sea Center and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. He is also in preliminary talks with members of the business community in downtown Santa Barbara to explore the idea of installing similar kiosks at State Street storefronts.

Vital-Signz' target market may be museums and cultural locations, but it is essentially a tech business. At the heart of the product is a software application that works with a touch-screen overlay installed on the plasma screens.

Like the technology, the deal between Vital-Signz and Santa Barbara attractions is straightforward: Corwin provides the hardware and his crew at Vital-Signz, including Chief Technology Officer Kris Campanale and Software



A Santa Barbara Maritime Museum employee demonstrates how to use Vital-Signz interactive information center in the lobby.

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# VITAL-SIGNZ

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Engineer Steen Pederson provide the know-how, programming, and software updates; the cultural centers, meanwhile, provide a venue and all the content, including maps, event calendars and samples of artwork.

There is one exception when it comes to content, however. Corwin has relied upon Chapman University film students Whitney Freedman and Joe Dietsch to film the locations featured in the virtual tours.

Venues get the info centers for free. However, Vital-Signz has a revenue stream from interactive advertising space it sells at the bottom of the displays. Visitors can click on the ads—current advertisers include local farmers markets and outing companies—and see more detailed descriptions of the businesses and high definition images of their products.

So far, it appears the response has been positive.

“What it brought to us was the ability to have a little bit more comprehensive presentation for visitors,” Botanic garden Development and Marketing Manager Amanda De Lucia said. “When someone comes to the garden who maybe is limited in terms of their mobility, they can even come to our kiosks and see different parts of our garden they wouldn’t normally be able to see.”

Each Vital-Signz display has an accessible spot low on the touch

screen that switches the icons on the screens to a low, horizontal arrangement. That way, an individual in a wheelchair, for example, will be able to scroll through the various offerings on their own.

In addition to the photos and videos on the system, there are collections of art related to the location that visitors can explore.



In addition to museum, Vital-Signz hopes to target its technology to the business community.

The genres are varied, including photography of the site, paintings and videography. There is also narration explaining what visitors might see in different places.

“The idea was to have impressions of Santa Barbara,” Corwin said.

As soon as Vital-Signz is able to stabilize its system, Corwin said, it will examine marketing the product further afield. The company still has kinks to work out. Updates to content are done

remotely, so there are challenges making sure there is reliable broadband access able to transfer the large amounts of data necessary for high-definition video between the different locations.

While the displays allow users to explore any of the sites at which they are located, they also include links to other attractions throughout the community and the ability to access content hosted at other places with Vital-Signz displays. Tourists finishing a trip to the Maritime Museum, for example, might explore the display, see an advertisement for a business they’d like to visit and plan their visit the next day to the Botanic Gardens.

“It’s a wonderful link for all the participating locations,” De Lucia said.

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