One-time campaign work or ongoing digital signage services for agencies

Understanding the choice between project work and recurring services

When an agency or a digital signage reseller first enters the market, the natural instinct is to treat every job as a standalone project. A client needs a screen setup, some content, and a campaign that runs for a few weeks. The agency builds it, delivers it, and moves on. That approach has its place, but it leaves a lot of value on the table. The alternative is to build a service around the screens themselves, offering ongoing management in exchange for a monthly retainer. Each model suits different clients and different business goals, and understanding the trade-offs helps you decide which path to take for each opportunity.

What one-time campaign work looks like

In a one-time campaign arrangement, the client pays a single fee for a defined scope. This typically includes hardware setup, software configuration, content creation for a specific promotion or event, and perhaps a few rounds of revisions. Once the campaign ends, so does the engagement. The client owns the hardware or leases it, and the agency has no further obligation. This model is straightforward to quote and easy for clients to understand. It works well for short-term events, seasonal sales, or businesses that only need digital signage for a specific launch or exhibition.

The main advantage for the reseller is that cash flow is immediate. You invoice once and the project is done. There is no need to manage ongoing relationships or chase monthly payments. However, the downside is equally clear: every new project requires new sales effort. There is no recurring revenue to smooth out the lean months, and gross margin depends entirely on how efficiently you deliver each campaign. If a client later wants to update the content or add screens, that becomes a new project with a new proposal, which can feel like starting from scratch.

Why ongoing service models appeal to resellers

Shifting from project-based work to a managed signage service changes the financial picture considerably. Instead of selling a one-off solution, you offer a package that includes hardware maintenance, software platform fee, regular content updates, and technical support - all wrapped into a monthly retainer. The client gets predictable costs and a system that stays current without extra effort. You get predictable income and a relationship that deepens over time.

For the reseller, the math becomes about lifetime value rather than deal size. A single screen installation that might have generated a modest one-time fee can instead produce steady revenue month after month. As the screen count grows across a client's locations, the retainer scales too. This model also aligns incentives: you want the screens to perform well because happy clients stay longer and expand their deployments. Content updates become a regular touchpoint rather than a reactive fire drill.

When each approach suits the client's situation

Not every client is ready for a long-term commitment. A pop-up store, a trade show booth, or a seasonal campaign may only need signage for a few weeks. Pushing an ongoing contract in that context feels forced and will likely lose the deal. The one-time campaign model is the right fit there. It is simple, low-risk for the client, and gets the job done without ongoing paperwork.

On the other hand, a restaurant chain with multiple locations, a retail brand with permanent stores, or a corporate office with meeting room displays all benefit from consistency. These clients do not want to renegotiate every time a menu changes or a new promotion launches. They want a partner who keeps the system running and the content fresh. For them, a managed signage service is a better fit. The monthly retainer covers the platform fee and a set number of content updates per month, with room to add more screens or services as they grow.

There is also a middle ground. Some clients may start with a one-time campaign to test the waters and later transition to an ongoing service. If you design your offerings with that path in mind, you can convert project clients into retainer clients when they see the value of regular updates and proactive support. This hybrid approach lets you win deals that would otherwise go to a pure project shop, while building a base of recurring revenue over time.

Practical considerations for pricing and packaging

When you offer a managed signage service, the key is to separate the components that the client sees from the ones that drive your costs. The hardware can be sold or leased, but the real margin lives in the software and services. A platform fee covers the license for the content management system. Service tiers let clients choose how many content updates they need each month and what level of support they want. Screen count affects the platform fee and the complexity of maintenance, so it makes sense to price in bands rather than per-screen, especially as the client scales.

Client billing should be transparent but not overly detailed. A monthly invoice that lists the service tier, screen count, and any extra updates is easy for a client to understand and approve. Avoid burying costs in line items that invite questions. Instead, bundle the core services into

the retainer and charge separately only for major additions, like a new location or a custom content series. This approach keeps the relationship simple and reduces churn.

Building a business around recurring revenue

For an agency that wants to grow predictably, shifting toward ongoing services is a strategic move. Recurring revenue smooths out the cash flow cycles that plague project-based work. It also creates a natural upsell path: as a client's screen count increases, so does your retainer. The gross margin on software and services is typically higher than on hardware, so every additional screen or service tier improves your bottom line without proportional cost increases.

That said, not every reseller needs to abandon project work entirely. Many successful businesses run a blended model where one-time campaigns feed the pipeline and retainer services provide stability. The trick is to recognize which clients fit which model and to design your offerings so that a project can evolve into a service relationship over time. When you do that, you build a portfolio that grows with your clients and creates the kind of steady income that makes the business more valuable in the long run.

Making the decision for your next client

Before you quote a new opportunity, take a moment to assess the client's long-term needs. Ask about their plans for the signage six months or a year from now. If they are unsure, a one-time campaign is the safe bet. If they talk about multiple locations, regular updates, or a desire to "set it and forget it," they are signaling that they value the convenience of an ongoing service. In that case, present the managed signage service as the option that saves them time and effort while giving you predictable income. The choice is not about which model is better in general; it is about which model fits the situation. Knowing both approaches and when to use each one is what separates a reseller who chases deals from one who builds a business.