Subscription services or one-time projects for new signage providers

When you start offering digital signage to clients, you face a fundamental business decision: do you sell each installation as a one-time project, or do you build a recurring revenue model with subscription services? Both paths have real trade-offs, and the right choice depends on your client base, your cash flow needs, and the kind of relationship you want to maintain with customers after the screen is on the wall.

Digital signage software sits at the center of this choice. It determines how you manage content, how your clients update their displays, and how much ongoing support they need from you. Whether you lean toward project work or subscriptions, the software you choose shapes what you can deliver and how much value you can add over time.

One-time projects: clear scope, clear finish

A one-time project means you design the system, install the hardware, configure the software, hand it over, and move on. The client owns everything outright. There is no monthly bill, no ongoing commitment from either side. This model works well for clients who want a simple setup and have their own staff to handle daily updates. A restaurant that changes its menu weekly through a tablet interface, for example, might prefer to buy the system once and be done.

The appeal for you as a provider is straightforward: you get paid in full at the end of the job. There is no billing cycle to manage, no subscription churn to worry about, and no long tail of support requests that eat into margins. For a new provider with limited capital, a few well-priced projects can build a solid revenue base quickly.

But the downside is that your income stops when the project ends. You have to keep finding new clients just to stay busy. And if something goes wrong with the system six months later, the client may still call you. Without a service agreement in place, that call is either a free favor or an awkward conversation about money.

Subscription services: steady income, ongoing responsibility

Subscription services flip the relationship. Instead of selling a system, you sell access to a platform. The client pays a monthly or annual fee that covers the digital signage software, remote access, technical support, and often the media player and content management. The hardware - the display screen itself - may be included as part of the package or sold separately with a lease.

For clients, the subscription model lowers the upfront cost. They do not have to buy expensive hardware and software licenses all at once. They get a predictable monthly expense that fits an operating budget rather than a capital one. And they know that support is included, so they never have to worry about who to call when a screen goes dark.

For you, the subscription model creates a base of recurring revenue that grows over time. Each new client adds a predictable monthly amount to your income. After a year of consistent sales, you have a portfolio of customer accounts that generate cash without requiring new sales effort every month. That stability is hard to achieve with one-time projects alone.

The trade-off is that you take on more responsibility. You are on the hook for uptime, content updates, and technical fixes. If a client's display screen fails, you need to replace it quickly. Your margins depend on how efficiently you can deliver support and how well you manage hardware costs. A subscription pricing model that is too low will leave you scrambling to cover support time. One that is too high will scare away price-sensitive clients.

Hybrid approaches that work

Many successful signage providers do not choose one model exclusively. They offer a hybrid that blends the strengths of both. A common approach is to charge a one-time fee for hardware installation and setup, then a monthly subscription for the content platform and support. The client gets a clear upfront cost for the physical work and a manageable ongoing fee for the service package that keeps everything running.

Another hybrid model is to offer tiered subscriptions. A basic tier might include just the software license with remote access and limited support. A premium tier adds hardware maintenance, priority technical support, and content creation services. This lets clients choose the level of involvement they want while giving you multiple revenue streams from the same account.

Some providers also offer a lease-to-own option. The client pays a monthly fee that covers hardware and software for a set period, say three years. At the end of that term, they own the hardware and can either continue the software subscription at a lower rate or switch to a different platform. This approach works well for clients who are unsure about long-term commitment but want the flexibility of subscription pricing.

When each model suits the client

The best model depends on the client's situation. A small retail shop with one screen and a single employee who handles updates is likely happy with a one-time project. They do not need ongoing support and they want to avoid monthly bills. A chain of coffee shops with twenty locations, on the other hand, benefits from a subscription. They need centralized content

management, remote monitoring, and quick replacement of faulty hardware. The subscription gives them that consistency and lets them scale without reinventing the process at each location.

For clients in industries with high staff turnover, such as quick-service restaurants, a subscription is often the safer choice. New managers do not have to learn a complex system from scratch. The content platform handles templates and scheduling, so even inexperienced staff can keep the menu board accurate. If something goes wrong, they call you instead of trying to fix it themselves. That reduces their downtime and protects your reputation.

For clients with tight budgets, a one-time project may be the only way to get started. A hardware-only sale with a free or low-cost content platform can be a good entry point. Once they see the value of digital signage, they may upgrade to a paid subscription that adds features they did not know they needed.

Building recurring revenue from the start

If you are a new provider, you might wonder how to balance these options. One effective strategy is to begin with a mix. Take on a few one-time projects to build cash flow and gain experience with installation and setup. At the same time, develop a service package that you can offer to those same clients after the project is done. A simple monthly fee for content updates, remote monitoring, and priority support can turn a one-time buyer into a recurring account.

The phrase "7 Ways Entrepreneurs Can Build Recurring Revenue With Digital Signage" captures the mindset shift that new providers need. You are not just selling screens and software. You are selling a service that keeps those screens valuable month after month. The recurring revenue comes from the services that surround the hardware, not from the hardware itself.

As you grow, you can refine your subscription offerings based on what your clients actually use. Some may want help creating content. Others may need frequent hardware upgrades. A few may want you to manage everything so they never have to think about the screens at all. Each of those needs is an opportunity to add a new service tier or a custom subscription package.

Practical considerations for getting started

Whichever model you choose, a few practical steps will help you succeed. First, make sure your digital signage software supports multi-tenant management. You need a single dashboard from which you can manage all your customer accounts, push updates, and monitor screen health. Without that, scaling a subscription business becomes a nightmare of logins and manual checks.

Second, set clear terms for what is included in your subscription and what is not. If a client wants to add a new display screen mid-contract, does that require a new installation fee? If their media player fails because of a power surge, do you replace it free or charge for the hardware? Being explicit upfront prevents disputes later.

Third, think about your own cash flow. Subscriptions bring in steady money, but they start small. You may need a few months of project work to cover your initial costs before the recurring revenue becomes meaningful. Plan your finances accordingly so you are not forced to discount subscriptions just to get clients in the door.

Fourth, invest in good documentation and self-service tools. Every support call you can avoid saves you money and keeps your margins healthy. A knowledge base, video tutorials, and a simple ticketing system let clients solve basic issues on their own. That frees you up to handle the more complex problems that truly need your expertise.

Finally, remember that the phrase "7 Ways Entrepreneurs Can Build Recurring Revenue With Digital Signage" is not just a slogan. It points to a real opportunity. When you structure your business around recurring services, you build a asset that grows in value over time. Each subscription account is a small engine that keeps generating income while you focus on finding the next client. That is the kind of business that can weather slow months and still come out ahead.