



Selling the Digital Outdoor Medium

Key points for taking advantage of the advanced technology

Overview

Digital outdoor advertising is arguably the newest, most exciting advertising medium to come of age in the last fifty years. It is an amalgamation of the staid, old traditional billboard with the power of today's broadcast media. It incorporates the versatility of the Internet and can provide a synergistic link with a Web site. In short, it is the medium for today's world.

Selling digital outdoor advertising is exciting. The medium itself is a frequent topic of conversation in agencies, ad placement firms, and marketing groups all over the world. The oldest medium has been thrust into the limelight in an exciting new form, as static faces have transformed into multi-image information resources for the passing public.

Selling this new medium places you in a position to offer the latest in advertising concepts in the location-specific format which has been the mainstay of out-of-home media.

This white paper is written as a guide for those who sell the medium. It explains some key points about the versatility of the technology, offers some strategies for the placement of the ads, provides some suggestions for advertisers, and offers some market segments where digital outdoor advertising has been successfully deployed.

History

Electronic display systems have been used for decades as attraction-generating embellishments on the face of billboards. These changing elements, such as gas-pricing-changers, room-rate displays, interest-rate displays, and other variations on this theme offered a changing element to the traditional billboard. While these displays remain as valuable tools for many advertisers, these are not the topic of this paper.

This paper deals with the new, full-face digital display which was first pioneered by Lamar Advertising in 2002 and 2003. Originally offered by Lamar in five markets in the custom size of 14' by 40', the format was quickly adjusted to match the modern-day billboard standards.

In 2004, Clear Channel Outdoor introduced its first digital outdoor bulletins in Cleveland, Ohio. Concurrent with that time frame, Lamar deployed its first Digital Poster network in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

In the years that followed, a tremendous amount of trail-blazing has been done by those two companies and the many other companies which were early adopters of digital outdoor. The development was brisk and exciting as out-of-home advertising firms brought the new concept to advertisers. As the ad community began to embrace the concept of programming for the space, a whole series of creative questions arose, most of them starting with the phrase "Can it do...?" These early ad industry inquiries spawned new development for Prismview, which established Prismview Creative Group to assist with the development of new utilities to match the demand of the new advertising formats. This group proved instrumental to the development of the new medium.



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History - continued

Prismview recognized from the beginning that there was an enormous amount of work to be done in the development of the new advertising concepts. A deal was struck between Prismview Creative Group and the digital outdoor providers; Prismview would provide the software development for free, if the new development could be included in a software revision which would be provided to the industry, free of charge. That arrangement continues to this day and has proven to be a win-win for Prismview and its digital outdoor customers. Prismview still provides frequent software upgrades at no charge to its digital outdoor customers.

Defining the Display

The digital outdoor display, simply put, is any billboard which has been outfitted with a programmable face. In almost all scenarios, the technology is light emitting diode (LED), programmed remotely through a computer. Programmed content is created on a host computer, which may be located anywhere, and then sent - usually via the Internet - to the onboard computer located in the digital billboard. That content is stored in a schedule at the display location until such time as it is changed or updated through another communication from the host computer. Content may be downloaded for future display for months in advance and will automatically present in its allotted time slot and for the duration specified.

The actual programming of the content is a simple task usually handled by a person at the outdoor advertising company. For those not staffed for the programming function, Prismview Creative Group offers a programming service to download messages. For those new to the digital outdoor experience, Prismview offers a trial period during which it accepts responsibility for the programming. During this period, Prismview Creative Group uses the digital outdoor client's actual display and advertising sequences as a vehicle for training the staff at the billboard company. This allows the new provider to get up and running immediately, while delaying the decision whether to staff the programming position.

The digital outdoor display, as provided by Prismview, is a medium intended to require a minimum of operational involvement from the billboard company. Prismview accepts responsibility for the functionality of the display equipment. It monitors each display on a 24/7 basis, 365 days per year, visually by webcam and through a remote diagnostics program. At such time as a failure occurs, Prismview dispatches the appropriate technical staff to repair the display. It is not the responsibility of Prismview customers to monitor the function of its Digital inventory. (See the Prismview "The Layered Service Approach for Digital Displays" White Paper)

The Prismview digital outdoor display is designed to automatically adjust illumination, to an infinite number of levels, throughout the day and night to ensure that the image is properly portrayed in relation to the current ambient light.



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Defining the Medium

In almost all scenarios, the digital outdoor medium is depicted in a series of still images. The power of the medium is not in movement, but rather in changing information. Many people have incorrectly assumed that an animated or video clip type presentation would be of greatest value. However, while the movement would attract attention, it is in conflict with the limited time that a passerby has to view the message.

The best advertising content is similar to a traditional outdoor image. It has pictorial content and limited word placement. It is an ad designed to be understood in one impression. The impression is enhanced by the nature of LED illumination. The light is evenly dispersed without hotspots, does not spill from the top, bottom, or sides of the display, and adjusts for maximum impact to the current light conditions.

The true value of the medium is in the changing information. This is a continuing area of development for most advertisers and one where an astute account representative may add great value to an advertiser. Because the potential exists for each advertiser to present a continual stream of changing messages, there is an opportunity which brings with it a series of innate creative challenges. Most notably, how many different concepts should be advanced during the period of a day? How should those ads be staged? How frequently should they be updated? (More on this subject under "Creating the Ad Strategy.")

A digital billboard may be an advertising medium for a single advertiser or may be a shared impression display whereby several advertisers take advantage of a premium location. To date, most digital outdoor displays are of the latter variety, with a group of advertisers sharing a space.

For a location shared by multiple advertisers, the traditional format is for each advertiser to display an impression for a fixed period (usually 6 - 10 seconds), immediately followed by the next advertiser, then the next, until the rotation is complete, at which point the cycle starts again. The number of advertisers in such a rotation is usually four to six. A rotation of more than eight advertisers is never recommended.

The most common format would include six advertisers, each displaying for six seconds for a maximum rotation time of 36 seconds.

Depending upon the length of the read, this maximizes each advertiser's visibility and increases the likelihood of being seen.

If your digital billboard is visible for 1,100 feet, for example, with a speed limit of 45 mph, without benefit of a stop light, then every advertiser will be seen by approximately half of the daily effective count (DEC). With the average driver passing a given location 20 times per month, that provides an opportunity for each advertiser to present a wide variety of messages to the passing public.

Within each loop or rotation of advertisements are blocks of space which may be used at the discretion of each advertiser. Some advertisers are content to show the same impression with each turn of the rotation. Others have a series of ads which they wish to be shown in succession. This format serves as its own rotation or loop within the multi-advertiser rotation.



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Creating the Ad Strategy

The digital outdoor advertisement should share little in common with a traditional billboard ad other than both being location-specific visual media.

The past knock on billboard advertising had to do with stagnation. A new image meant a new vinyl print and the labor to install it. Consequently, the cost of frequent ad revisions usually meant the same image was left to languish for months longer than was effective.

The power and impact of the digital ad is in the continual update of information. Because there is no cost associated with the update of a digital ad, there is nothing short of creative limitations to prevent an update.

Unfortunately, the creative aspect has been a hurdle for many businesses. The very versatility and expansiveness of the medium has unearthed the creative weakness in many companies' marketing and advertising campaigns. Particularly as it relates to smaller, local advertisers, in the absence of an advertising agency, there is the need for some creative direction. In such a scenario the outdoor advertising account executive is well positioned to assist the business with a strategy with which the advertiser may build awareness and sell product.

Using as example an advertiser which is one of six in a rotation (each ad being six seconds in duration); there are 14,400 available ad spaces for that advertiser in a 24-hour day. Technically, it is possible for each individual spot to be filled with a different message. With 14,400 different ads at one extreme and one ad in continual rotation being at the other, many advertisers opt for the single ad, playing 14,400 times per day. That is not what digital outdoor is all about.

The power of the medium is in the ability to share information to the passing public that the business wants to impart. By helping the business develop a list of concepts, to show them how and when the images are best displayed, the outdoor advertising provider offers a significant service to its advertiser. Ultimately, this amounts to more work initially. But, the end result is a satisfied advertiser, far more likely to renew or even expand its commitment to outdoor advertising.

The creation of a digital outdoor strategy is different for each business type, but the general concept is the same. What works are a series of ads which feature the various calls to action for the business, updated regularly to keep the content current.

Example: A builder is prepared to run an ad which features its prominent name and Web site address, along with the tag line "Building _____, one house at a time." While that ad may be good copy for a static billboard, it wastes the opportunity available with digital outdoor.

What if that builder provided a series of ads which could be run at different times of the day? One ad might speak to the locations where the builder can be found. Another might offer specific houses for sale. Still more ads might link to a special financing offer or price reductions for new home purchases.



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Creating the Ad Strategy - continued

The builder has a lot of valuable information to be imparted to the public. By helping that builder craft ads that establish a dialogue with the passing public, the ads provide a value measurable in dollars, both for the business and the outdoor advertising company.

The same concept may be applied to any business. As advertising executives, we should first look at the business from the perspective of what it has to offer. Take a look at other media campaigns in an effort to find synergy. Then offer the client a means to expand his or her reach through a series of digital outdoor ads. Then help them establish a time-line for creative updates.

Selling the Space

Digital outdoor should be sold as premium space with the anticipation of a premium campaign. The medium is different than traditional outdoor advertising and, frequently, draws a new wave of advertisers with a historically patronized different media.

Because digital outdoor advertising is a new concept, a significant portion of the initial presentation should be tailored to educating the customer on the relative value of the medium. Secondly, time should be spent in educating the customer on how to create an advertising strategy specific to the capabilities of the digital medium. Prismview offers its customer a proprietary PowerPoint presentation in electronic and print format, which may be used as a part of your presentation. Prismview will, at no charge, customize the presentation with your company logo.

Critical to the presentation should be emphasis on the concept of fresh, pertinent, and timely information. The digital outdoor medium is a functional tool which may serve as an extension of the business into the consciousness of the passerby. If the ad is timely, it may serve as a call to action.

It is usually constructive to show clients examples of timely advertising. As they see an example, there is a natural tendency to fully visualize the concept relative to their own business.

Example: An automobile dealer is located two exits from a freeway digital outdoor display and one block from the freeway exposure. The dealer has contracted to be one of six digital ads, running in rotation at six second intervals. A series of ads are created to showcase several aspects of the business. A strategy is established whereby two ads will alternate in each of four different day-parted segments. At the bottom of each ad is a permanent banner which says, "Right at Exit 92."



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Selling the Space - continued

The day-parts and the ad concepts can be established as follows
(For purposes of this document, the concepts are shown in lieu of the actual creative.)

Day Parting Concepts

Time of Day	Ad 1	Ad 2	Ad 3
6AM to 10AM	Oil Change in 15 min or Less!	We Have Financing!	#1 Service Dept
10AM to 3PM	It's Hot Outside... It's cool in our Showroom	Over 300 Used Cars	30 New Models
3 PM to 8PM	Free Hot Dogs Tonight Bring the Kids!	The New Malibu is Here!	Free Tank of Gas
8 PM to 6 AM	Showroom Open til Midnight	Win a New Car! Drawing Tonight	Service Dept Opens at 6 AM

Please note that three individual departments have been spot-lighted; new cars, used cars, and service. The messages for each have been choreographed to reach a particular audience, based on the anticipation of what the passerby's particular disposition is for that time of the day. Each ad tells the prospect what is offered, where it is available, and when to act. There is a call to action that is timely.

In order for this example ad to remain fresh, there should be a schedule associated with the ad contract which provides for regular updates.

It should be acknowledged that this is an ideal marketing scheme that is rarely, fully realized by digital outdoor advertisers. The concept is still sufficiently new that most advertisers have yet to go to this extent to present timely and effective advertising. However, by presenting the concept in its entirety, it assists customers in best developing a multi-presentation portfolio for this new medium.



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Which Businesses Make Good Digital Advertisers?

The best advertising prospects are those with diverse businesses and frequently changing inventory, circumstances or events. As noted in the example above, automobile dealers and other vehicle sales entities are good candidates. Many retailers have a wide variety of products and services to offer with inventory changing consistently. Some of these are proficient at using co-op advertising funds to offset the full expense.

What follows are other examples of good candidates for digital outdoor advertising:

Other Media - It is a testament to the power of digital outdoor that other media have become some of the most common early adopters. Television, radio, and newspaper have all been advertisers on digital outdoor in order to draw a larger market share for the particular media outlet.

Television Stations - Use effective day-parted messages to feature upcoming programming. During the evening commute, ads might feature current news stories which are downloaded from the station's Web site, using the Prismview conditional image capabilities. The stories, coupled with the stations channel location and news schedule provide a powerful lure to the evening commuters. During the day, the programming line-up may be highlighted.

Radio Stations - Use digital outdoor to feature special programming and utilize the Now Playing feature to draw listeners to the station.

Newspapers - Utilize digital outdoor to increase circulation by advertising special sections and features in the news.

The Lottery - Lotteries are a classic example of the need for timely information. Because of the conditional image feature, advertising may be sold to the lottery with the assurance that the numbers will change automatically, at the predestined time.

Casinos - The typical casino has a wide variety of activities to feature. Some casino games require the conditional image software to ensure that the cumulative earnings opportunity for live games is properly advertised.

Sports Teams - Professional sports, in particular, are in a constant drive for ticket sales and special event promotions.

Event Centers - While these centers are usually government affiliated with small advertising budgets, they offer an excellent resource for short-term, premium-rate ad sales to the event groups which rent the space. Auto shows, boat shows, gun shows, all are short-term events with significant advertising budgets. Likewise, these events draw exhibitors with significant budgets for show promotion. The smart event planners will co-op their advertising with one or more exhibitor sponsorships.



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Which Businesses Make Good Digital Advertisers? - continued

Music Theaters - Many music venues have significant budgets for the promotion of touring groups. A particular event may be spotlighted as well as upcoming schedules and ticket sales.

Restaurants - Restaurants are the most common example used to demonstrate day-parting. Each segment of the day either precedes or is in conjunction with a meal time. A restaurant may advertise current specials associated with each time period.

Financial Institutions - Many banks and credit unions have become aggressive advertisers. All of these institutions have a plethora of products and services, most with changing interest rates.

Summary

Selling the medium is ultimately what it is all about. Prismview has tailored its product and operational services to ensure that selling the ad may be the real area of focus.

Prismview recognizes that this new medium continues to be an evolving entity. As such, the company is interested in working with you and your advertisers to develop new strategies, selling tools, customized utilities, or anything that may be on the horizon.

Never hesitate to contact your Prismview representative to ask for assistance. Prismview is committed to the growth and evolution of the new digital outdoor medium.

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