

Outdoor advertising for business markets

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Abstract

A review of the history and current prevalence of outdoor advertising suggests that although the medium is very effective it is not widely used in business-to-business markets. A case for using outdoor advertising is deductively made based on the unique characteristics of business markets such as: geographic concentration of buyers, need to target buying center members, advantages of having integrated communication, possibility of creating derived demand, and targeting trade shows. This paper offers recommendations on when and how to use outdoor advertising based on unique business market characteristics, industrial promotional objectives and business product classification. Research propositions and directions for future research are offered.

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1. Introduction

It is now generally agreed that industrial advertising objectives must be set within promotional objectives, which are understood in the context of marketing and corporate objectives (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005; Hutt & Speh, 2004; Lichtenthal & Ducoffe, 1994; Patti, Hartley, & Kennedy, 1991). While the primary communication vehicle in business-to-business (BTB) marketing remains the salesperson, non-personal methods of communication including advertising, catalogs, the Internet, trade shows and other forms of promotions have a unique role in the communication process. Effective advertising can make personal selling more productive (Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005; Hutt & Speh, 2004; Dwyer & Tanner, 1998). Morrill (1970) concluded that dollar sales per salesperson call were significantly higher when customers had been exposed to advertising². Evidence shows that advertising

can open doors for an industrial salesperson (Ray, 1982) and several studies (Korgaonkar, Bellinger, & Smith, 1986; Parasuraman, 1981) found that advertising generates awareness and favorable attitudes thereby supporting sales rather than directly causing them.

One study (Lichtenthal & Eliaz, 2003) identified the attributes of each promotional medium that make it best suited for a particular communications task (see Table 1). Others (Dwyer & Tanner, 1998; Hutt & Speh, 2004; Messner, 1991) have similarly identified different options available to business marketers.

However, outdoor as a medium has been conspicuously overlooked in recent systematic discussions on the nature and use of this medium as it pertains to business marketing promotional forms (Bingham, Gomes, & Knowles, 2005; Blythe & Zimmerman, 2005; Hutt & Speh, 2004; Messner, 1991; Patti et al., 1991).

The myriad options available have confounded both business and consumer markets. Contemporary buyers get exposed to more than 3000 messages per day in one form or another (Kotler, 2003). For advertisers, the choices available have also increased dramatically. Almost every option is reaching saturation and getting a share of mind can be challenging (Ries and Trout, 1982). In fact, there has been a

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² Based on a study involving 100,000 interviews on twenty-six product lines at 30,000 buying locations.

Table 1
Business media linkages to communication objectives

| Objective | Awareness | Knowledge | Liking | Preference | Conviction | Purchase |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------|------------|------------|----------|
| Publicity | X | | | | | |
| Advertising | X | X | X | | | |
| Fax | X | X | | | | |
| E-mail | X | X | X | | | |
| Direct mail | | X | X | X | | |
| Catalogues | | | X | X | X | |
| Online | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Trade shows | | | | X | X | |
| Promotions | | | | X | X | X |
| Telemarketing | | | | | X | X |
| Face-to-face | | | | | X | X |
| Outdoor* | X | X | | | | |

Source: Lichtenthal and Eliaz (2003), "Internet integration in business marketing ethics" *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 32, Iss. 1; pg. 3.

* Appended.

tremendous explosion in the use of advertising, to an extent that it has become a nuisance rather than a method of information dissemination.

The focus herein is to look at the nature and purpose of outdoor advertising as it concerns business marketing. Outdoor is the oldest mass communication medium known to man and received much attention in the U.S. between the years after World War II and the early 1980s (Agnew, 1985; Henderson, Landau, & Feldman, 1980; Wilson, 1952). However, there is a dearth of material about this communication mode, especially as it pertains to business-to-business communications.

The use of outdoor advertising in a BTB context is explored next. Key BTB marketing characteristics are first identified and their implications for the associated use of outdoor as a medium are evaluated. Second, traditional advertising objectives used in BTB communications strategy are examined to identify the niche that can fulfill. Subsequently, the traditional classification of business goods/services is examined to evaluate the conduciveness of these different categories for using outdoor advertising medium. Finally, the latest technological developments in the field of outdoor advertising are examined and their impact towards usage in a BTB context is discussed.

2. Outdoor advertising characteristics

Outdoor advertising includes all forms of advertising that provide out-of-doors exposure. These forms may be pictured, written or spoken (Agnew, 1985; Nelson & Sykes, 1953; Wilson, 1952). Prevalent forms of outdoor advertising include billboards, street furniture, transit and alternative forms (see Table 2).

Billboards are the predominant form of outdoor advertising and are further classified into bulletins, 8 sheet posters (smaller size), 30 sheet posters (larger size), wrapped 30 sheet posters, squared wrapped posters, spectaculars and wall murals based on size, shape, and placement. Technol-

ogy has provided outdoor advertisers with myriad options. Most recently, the liberal use of electronics has created "spectacular" billboards that look like giant screen televisions, some even with sound.

Street furniture also provides very interesting options for out-of-home media usage. Some of the most prominent forms of street furniture are bicycle racks, bus bench/bus shelter advertising, kiosks, sidewalk posters, shopping mall displays, in-store displays and one sheet (small) posters.

Transit advertising in outdoor media is seen on transit or places of transit in airports and subway stations, as well as on buses, taxicabs, trains, etc. Advertising on movable type media like taxicabs and trucks has been shown to provide high recall rates.

Finally, there is an alternative form of outdoor media that comprises almost all options not covered in the above three forms. This is probably the fastest evolving category and includes such options as trash receptacle advertising, airborne displays, digital displays, carton and cup advertising, movie theater advertising and stadium and arena displays.

Outdoor has come of age and has the capability of reaching an audience on a national scale or on a market-by-market basis (Wilson, 1952). Outdoor advertising has evolved to the extent that it can be almost as useful as some traditional forms of advertising like newspaper, radio and TV. Outdoor is strikingly different from other media in one essential aspect—the medium does not circulate the message to market but rather the market circulates around the medium. "The medium delivers its message to people on their way to work, play or shop (Wilson, 1952)." For instance, an executive going to work to deal with a full day of computer-related problems would probably look out for messages from Dell, Hewlett Packet or Epson. It may seem like a trivial distinction, but if one takes into account the psychological frame of mind of people at the time the message is delivered, it is surely a powerful medium³. One of

³ Selective exposure and attention are likely salient in the outdoor arena.

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