OUTDOOR ADVERTISING: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE INDUSTRY

LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Technology has touched upon almost every facet of our lives and has made it easy to inform buyers about the merits of goods and services. The Internet has revolutionised the process of information dissemination to pinpoint the buyer that is most likely to be receptive to a particular product or service given the time and place. The outdoor advertising industry is in the middle of a revolution. Outdoor advertising is evolving at a rapid pace in essentially three areas: measurement of effects; technology in construction and the broader array of options.

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. Morril (1970) concluded that dollar sales per salesperson call were significantly higher when customers had been exposed to advertising. Evidence shows that advertising can open doors for an industrial salesperson and several studies have found that advertising generates awareness and favorable attitudes thereby supporting sales rather than directly causing them. 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. In fact, there has been a tremendous explosion in the use of advertising, to an extent that it has become a nuisance rather than a method of information dissemination. Enter the world of "Outdoor Advertising".

Literature Review

Outdoor Advertising

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. 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. Technology 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 theatre 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 medium.

One of the biggest advantages of outdoor advertising has over other mediums like television or magazines is that ''your audience can't zap, discard or even click away from it'' (Business Wire, 2002a,b,c). This medium also differs in that it targets a ''market in motion'' and thus requires a special technique of presentation. Since the maximum number of words one can effectively use in outdoor advertising is seven (Business Wire, 2002a,b,c) there is no room for detailed explanations. Outdoor advertising may best serve as a reminder that helps register the brand to achieve a top-of-mind recall when the ''want'' in the buyer needs to be fulfilled.

Measurement of outdoor advertising has received much attention, and various technology-driven solutions are being implemented to acquire data that will put outdoor advertising at par with other media. Media ratings companies are using technologies like GPS to acquire data that will soon provide audience demographics, geographic definitions, audience estimates such as reach, frequency and Gross Rating Points (Business Wire, 2002a,b). Such information will allow business marketers to specifically target the highly segmented market of business products.

''Digital billboards that can instantly adjust their messages to the passing audience are popping up everyday in major cities across the world,'' (Emling, 2003; Kuchinkass, 2003). This should interest business marketers who fully target advertising. Several examples include: ''intelligent billboards'' that detect leaking radiation from car antennas to calculate the most popular radio station and adjust their messages to suit the drivers passing by; ''oscillating billboards'' on top of buses that change messages as the bus moves from one area to another; and ''sound enabled billboards'' that come equipped with a motion-sensitive infrared device that can launch a recorded message or a jingle lauding the billboard's sponsor. All are technological advancements that have already been tested and applied (Emling, 2003; Kuchinkass, 2003).

No more are the options in outdoor advertising restricted to posters, signs or billboards. New options are being devised on an almost daily basis. Billboards that move with you in the railway tunnels, advertising on children's strollers, and advertising on trashcans are all examples. While the use of all such innovations may not directly impact business operations, they do provide the business marketer with options that can creatively target the members of the buying centre.

The Message
On average, magazine advertisements receive 1 or 2 seconds of attention. Visual elements are the primary appeal—90 percent of magazine readers first look at the graphic element; of that group, 65 percent process the graphic intent. Text follows imagery; for the readers who weave from image to words, only 2 percent of the written content is processed. It is reasonable to expect that the appeal of all outdoor advertisement will decrease as the amount of text increases. Furthermore, the size of the text—expressed in average letter size—should correlate positively with the effectiveness and appeal of outdoor advertising posters.

The message is simple: A large amount of information creates a message complex that can generate confusion, especially in a transitional medium as outdoor advertising. A less-is-more principle remains a reasonable assumption: the fewer informative elements used, the more appealing and effective the poster. In an analysis of television commercials, the use of brand-identification elements had a positive correlation with attention and recall: Brand coupling increased by about 55 percent when a brand logo was prominently and clearly displayed. Regarding layout, photographs were found to be more favorable than drawings for quick brand recognition. Large headlines were found to slow down brand recognition, possibly because of their distraction from the brand. The use of a black font has proven to enhance brand recognition.

CBS Outdoor used a tachistoscope to determine how long it takes to recognise the brand/product advertised in 187 outdoor posters in the Netherlands. Additionally, CBS Outdoor measured the creative appeal of these advertisements. Using 80 content and format variables, an explanatory model

was developed to measure creative appeal and brand/product recognition.

Some preliminary findings:
• Clear branding and the inclusion of new-product information enhance product recognition.
• Large amounts of text and pictures of people delay product recognition.
• Lengthy, large headlines, information cues, humor, and images of women delay brand recognition.
• Short headlines, a somewhat longer body text, and a product shot enhance the creative appeal of posters.
• Specifying a brand name in the headline or providing price information reduces appeal.

Recommendations made from the research for Product Recognition:

• Specify the product name in the head line and/or copy text.
• Include a product shot (but not in the bottom right corner of the poster).
• Use a photograph of the product – not with a person, especially not one making eye contact with the viewer.
• Do not use an illustration when you can use a photograph.
• Reduce the amount of information – feature short headline, do not put too many words on the poster.
• Minimise colour clutter.
• Use blue as the dominant colour of the poster; avoid red as the dominant colour.
• Highlight new product information – "New!".
• Use a black font and avoid a white font.

Recommendations made from the research for Brand Recognition:

• Provide a clear branding in the headline and/or copy text in a large font,
• Place a logo in the upper half of the poster (and do not place the logo in the lower-right corner)
• Mention one information cue, but avoid too much information or too many product components.

Branding the Modern City

The most common application of branding within cities is focusing on the visual elements of branding such as the creation of a new logo, the incorporation of a new slogan and the design of advertising campaigns around those visual elements. Nonetheless, branding encompasses other fields of activities that decidedly influence and form a city's brand.

The stance of city branding advocates is rooted in two premises. The first is that the city takes its form, content and meaning in peoples' minds. People "meet" and understand cities through accepting their own perceptions and processing those perceptions into their own understandable image of the city. In general, people make sense of places or construct places in their minds through three processes (Crang, 1998; Holloway and Hubbard 2001). First, through planned interventions like planning, urban design and so on; secondly through the way in which they themselves or other people use specific places and, thirdly, through various forms of place representations like films, novels, paintings, news reports and so on.

In general city branding, as applied in practice, is centering on the creation of a favourable image or the change of a negative or indifferent image of the city and has found its tangible application around three main strategies: first, various promotional campaigns and visual identity tactics; secondly, the creation of signature buildings as landmarks for the city or the invention of new ways to integrate existing landmarks in the promotion of the city; finally, the staging of various types of events in the city.

Branding needs to be thought of as a continuous process interlinked with all marketing efforts and with the whole planning exercise. Indeed as Chandler and Owen (2002) suggest, branding is the process by which attempts are made to influence how consumers interpret and develop their own sense of what a brand is, what it is about and what it means. From this point of view, branding becomes almost synonymous with the whole process of marketing itself. It is from marketing that consumers take, whether actively or passively, some of the raw materials that they use (partly consciously but largely unconsciously) to help build their own sense of what a brand is. Branding is attempting to create associations with the city; associations that are emotional, mental,

psychological, moving away from the functional – rational character of marketing interventions.

Outdoor media landscape

Through window displays, signboards, billboards, posters and other forms of outdoor advertising, advertisers have sought to capture the attention of people waiting for the bus, catching a train, stuck in traffic or walking through shopping precincts. However, over the last decade or two, there have been significant changes in both the quantity and form of outdoor advertising. Where urban advertising might once have been dominated by static billboards and shop signs, advertisements now commonly adorn bus shelters, buses, train stations, trucks, scooters, taxis, public toilets, rubbish bins, newsstands, fruit stalls, flower stalls, and public telephone booths. Specialist media companies also display advertisements on screens in lifts, foyers, shopping malls, airports, in-shop displays, and university student union buildings. Furthermore, traditional static billboards and signs are increasingly giving way to screens which can display video and animated advertisements. Such trends are not restricted to a few large or wealthy cities. Indeed, some outdoor media companies now have major operations in hundreds of cities across every populated continent. Advertising spending is increasingly dominated by large multinational corporations who seek to advertise their many products and services across regional and global markets.

Catering to the needs of these advertisers, there has been a dramatic restructuring of advertising agencies and media buyers through takeovers, mergers and consolidations that have given rise to regional and global agency networks. These agency networks have been formed in efforts to provide "one-stop shops" for the regional and global campaign needs of multinational advertisers, offering both the global reach and local knowledge that they require. Finally, there has also been a parallel regionalisation and globalisation of media companies. Again, this process has at least in part been driven by the desire to capture advertising revenue through offering advertisers and their agencies and media buyers a single point of access to a range of media forms and markets.

A small number of multinational business groups have come to dominate the global outdoor media market, some of which are part of larger multinational media conglomerates. Clear Channel Outdoor (headquartered in San Antonio, USA) has emerged as the world's largest outdoor media company, with over 900,000 advertising displays in 49 countries across five continents. The JCDecaux Group (headquartered in France) is the second largest global outdoor media company, operating over 900,000 advertising panels across 54 countries. Both companies offer a range of outdoor advertising formats including billboards, street furniture and transit advertising. Other major companies have established regional networks. For example, CBS Outdoor and Titan have significant outdoor media holdings in markets across North America and Europe, while APN Outdoor has holdings across Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia.

In recent years, traditional media formats such as print and television have suffered declining advertising revenues around the world as advertising spending moves increasingly towards "new media" such as the internet and mobile phones. Against this trend, however, spending on outdoor advertising has grown in many national markets in recent years . For example, in the UK, outdoor advertising is the fastest growing "traditional" medium, having improved its share of total advertising revenue from 4.5% to 5.5% between 2000 and 2007.5 In the USA, the world's largest outdoor advertising market, outdoor advertising is a smaller proportion of overall advertising revenue. However, it experienced above average growth during the 2000s (PQ Media, 2007). In China, outdoor advertising growth averaged 26% per annum between 1990 and 2003, and had by then emerged as the third largest advertising medium behind television and newspapers.

Industry representatives have suggested that the growth of outdoor advertising can be attributed to the increasing significance of the city's public spaces within the new "attention economy" (Davenport and Beck 2001).
The very proliferation of advertising opportunities associated with the growth of new media, according to this explanation, has actually served to enhance rather than reduce the strategic value of the city as an advertising space.

As JCDecaux's 2005 Annual Report put it:
"Broadcast and cable television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the cinema and the internet compete in an increasingly competitive and complex environment. This media fragmentation ultimately benefits outdoor advertising, which has become the only mass medium capable of reaching consumers as they go about their everyday lives. Outdoor advertising is also a particularly cost-effective way to reach the public." (JCDecaux, 2006).

The Ugly Side to Outdoor Advertising

While outdoor advertising may well be the one form of advertising that you cannot turn off, by virtue of its location in the public realm it is also highly vulnerable to unauthorised modification and alteration. Furthermore, advertisers have often accessed outdoor advertising space for "free", in the form of bill posters, pole posters, and other forms of outdoor advertising that have been tolerated in many spaces even where they may have been technically illegal. So, the monetisation of outdoor media space in part relies upon the capacity of outdoor media companies both to protect their media against vandalism and alteration, and to commodify the places with the highest exposure by purchasing, and then monopolising access to, those places.

In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission specifically lists the display of pin-ups as an example of sexually harassing behaviour. While sexual harassment legislation in both Australia and the United States covers sites including workplaces and educational institutions, such legislation has not been designed to include sexual harassment occurring in public space. The reality that outdoor advertisements on public display are visually very similar to sexually harassing pin-ups. References of these examples have been collected as part of a year-long study of outdoor advertising in Melbourne, Australia. The visual similarities between outdoor advertising and, for example, pin-ups which are prohibited in sites such as workplaces, suggests that both media should be critiqued in the exact same manner.

The fact that images bearing strong resemblance to pin-ups are permitted to be displayed outdoors in public space where the audience cannot avoid their exposure, reflects an interesting policy double standard. In the workplace for example, pin-ups are deemed problematic because employees are held "captive" to them in that their exposure is made unavoidable. This exact same situation is played out in the outdoors: A commuter cannot avoid seeing a sexist billboard.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, brand/product recognition can be improved by clear branding on the poster, leaving out other distracting content. Less is certainly more when it comes to outdoor advertising. Posters with a clear branding component are not necessarily less attractive; a product shot can even increase a poster's appeal. Compared to earlier studies of outdoor advertising (Hendon, 1972) as well as print media (Holbrook and Lehmann, 1980) and television (Stewart and Furse, 1986), the power of the regression models for outdoor advertising posters is considerable. The explained variance in the measures is so high that, in a competitive market environment, the explanatory advertising variables could make the difference between success and failure for an outdoor advertising poster. Nonetheless, the research results provide no guarantee for the success of an advertising campaign. There is no magic formula for the creation of an effective or appealing outdoor advertising poster. The producing of advertising remains a creative process, which turns on originality and the right combination of elements.

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