

Delving Into The Digital OOH Future

Digital formats are clearly the future for the out-of-home industry. But for that future to be fully realized the Canadian industry will need to go through further consolidation and its biggest players will need to do more to promote the unlimited creative opportunities digital OOH offers and to ensure that there is a consistent measurement standard.

Those were the top-line points raised by a panel of senior leaders of the big five Canadian media companies operating in the digital OOH space, held as part of the Out-of-Home Marketing Association of Canada's OOH Day in Toronto September 17.

Their precise words may have varied, but all five panelists at Toronto's Design Exchange stressed the essential appeals that are driving the growing popularity of digital OOH: full-motion content with greater consumer engagement potential, the ability to tailor messages to specific locations and the ability to adapt and change those messages almost instantly.

Paul Bolté, Toronto-based vice president sales, Canada for Captivate which operates in-elevator digital monitors with continuously updated live news feeds in office buildings in the top five Canadian markets said the key to successful digital OOH is "the P.V.C.: the pause, the view and the content." Installations in places where 24/7 consumers pause briefly in their hectic daily schedules will get viewed, and the content that engages those viewers will be retained, he said.

This is why the digital OOH sector is experiencing explosive growth. Kevin Golding, general manager, place-based media with Vancouver based Pattison Outdoor which has a variety of digital OOH formats in its national portfolio, including airport departure lounge screens, large outdoor video boards, in-elevator screens and a range of in-mall formats. He pointed out that the digital media industry in the U.S., which includes digital OOH, has grown 21.6% in the past five years, verses a modest 3.6% growth for traditional media. And the rates are similar here.

Andy Querin, president and COO of Montreal based Zoom Media opened the session by noting that although Zoom has only been operating in the digital space for about two years, "we're really in it now." He wasn't exaggerating; just the day before, on Sept. 16, the company announced a deal to buy ClubCom, a Pittsburgh-based company with 25,000 ad-supported digital screens in 1,600 fitness and bowling venues throughout the U.S., UK, Germany, Japan and Australia. The deal instantly turned Zoom into the world's leader in digital OOH in terms of total screens. Until the ClubCom purchase, valued in media reports at between \$20 and \$30 million, Zoom operated 1,200 networked digital LCD OOH screens in Canada and the U.S., 700 of them here.

Peter Irwin, in some respects the pioneering father of digital OOH in Canada having founded the Elevator News Network in 1987, later merging it into Captivate in 2001 predicted more of those kinds of mergers and acquisitions on both sides of the border. Irwin, now president of Toronto-based Outdoor Broadcast Network (OBN) which operates large format full motion LED video billboards nationally noted that while the costs of technology are going down, digital OOH is still an extremely capital intensive media that requires companies with heft and critical mass for the medium to become truly

viable. And that's happening, he said. In the large format niche, for instance, during the years immediately following the 2002 launch of OBN the segment was fragmented with a dozen or more smallish players. Now, OBN accounts for 75% of the Canadian large format video board inventory, with only Toronto still boasting a handful of independently operated digital boards.

Despite all the growth, however, Canada in some respects lags many other world markets. Michael Rhea, president of Montreal's NEWAD which has been involved in digital signage ventures since 1999, and currently has 500 young-adult targeted video ad screens at bars and restaurants coast-to-coast and will be adding another 300 in the near future said he'd recently been in Turkey and Kazakhstan and found those countries to have more and more sophisticated digital OOH signage than is found here. He acknowledged that that has much to do with the comparatively underdeveloped other mass media formats in those places (and he agreed with Zoom media's Querin's point that Canada is, however, currently more far developed in the space than the U.S.). But the challenge remains: convince advertisers and agencies who know and understand traditional dominant broadcast and outdoor channels in this country to try something that can in many ways be considered a little bit of both, and not really like either.

Panel moderator, OMD Toronto managing director Bruce Baumann got to the essence of the challenge when he probed the participants on which agency specialists they find themselves dealing with- out of home departments, TV, another? The answers varied, although in most cases it appears agency OOH specialist generally take the lead. That said, it is still often the case that advertisers will use their TV creative, with or without sound, on digital OOH with little adapting.

Rhea said, and most other panelists echoed the sentiment, that one of the biggest challenges to the development of the format is getting really good and relevant creative. But with the variety of formats ranging from huge mega-screens in public squares to small individual screen on stationary bikes, and use patterns ranging from mimicking TV to "active posters" no one niche serves as a model for the other. Audio with images whether created specifically for OOH or adapted from other broadcast material, for instance, can work in airport departure lounges and other quieter and more intimate settings, but should be avoided in crowded setting like malls where ambient noise will muffle any chance of it being properly audible. But, as Pattison's Golding pointed out, malls give rise to their own unique creative opportunities. For instance, Pattison recently created a musical floor ad for soft drink Fanta that featured dots that create musical notes when they are stepped on- a huge hit with young kids.

This diversity of creative and format options, also contributes to the other big challenge digital OOH faces: consistent measurement standards.

OBN's Irwin stressed that "the whole idea of metrics" is the single most important issue determining the success of the emerging sector in the next two to three years. Indeed, Irwin said one of the reasons OBN recently joined OMAC and the Canadian Out-of-Home Measurement Bureau (COMB) was to "accelerate" finding common ground on measurement standard. While most panelists agreed there is a will by the leading players to get something in place, all suggested it won't be easy because of the wide variety of creative formats they all offer.

"Ultimately what we're measuring is eyeballs," Zoom's Querin said. "The impact of the creative on eyeballs is not an influence on the measurement. I don't think we'll ever get, say, a standardized loop-length with four, five, six, however-many players. But if we can all agree on the way it is measured, ultimately that's what we want to work toward."

Seven Secrets to Successful Digital OOH Communications

Long-time Zoom Media Creative & Production Director Gabriel Landry offered attendees to the Out-of-Home Marketing Association of Canada's OOH Day in Toronto tips for creating effective digital out-of-home creative.

Even though the key to good digital OOH creative is common sense which is true of working in any medium— there's no question digital space is a "strange new beast" for advertisers, Landry said. And while it may look and feel like TV, it most definitely is not.

Highlights from his presentation, featuring seven essentials to creating effective digital OOH communications:

1. Capture attention in the first five seconds

Even though most digital OOH formats are in places where consumers are captive, they are busy and on the go, so you have to get their attention fast, within the first five seconds.

2. Simplify, simplify, simplify

Your digital OOH messages will generally run 10 or 15 seconds maximum. Keep them simple. No more 5 to 10 words per screen, and images are best kept simple, iconic and clean.

3. Get Emotional

As the Saatchi CEO Kevin Roberts has written, people are 80% emotional and 20% rationale. Especially in a world that is becoming more technologically complex, you need to speak to human emotions in order to connect with your target.

4. Be Brand Focused

You can never use your logo enough in a digital OOH ad. Consider that most messages will run in a loop of four or five or more messages. Logos at the beginning and end, and even if possible throughout, can help stand out in that flow.

5. Contrast and clean design

These should be the guiding principals for all commercial messages. But because digital OOH offers so many special effects possibilities, there's a real danger you can get lost in the fancy technology.

6. Keep things moving

Be Dynamic. The biggest strength of digital OOH is all about motion. Even text-heavy messages benefit from constant movement.

7. Context, context, context

Different digital ad networks use different spaces and different screen sizes and shapes, and the ambiance and atmosphere of the locations they are installed in vary widely. That makes digital OOH complex, but it also makes for opportunities for intimate connections. Remember where (and when) your audience is looking at your message, and speak to them in a way that is appropriate and relevant to their environment.

And an added reminder on context: Landry stresses you need to bear the technical specs and format of each digital OOH format in mind when creating your messages. The requirements do vary dramatically from size to size and format to format. A simple example, if a digital ad created for a small screen format is blown up for a super board the digital resolution of the file can be completely blurry and illegible. Always aim for a one to one resolution size for your digital files.

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Flexible New Transit R/F Tool Allows One Stop National Ad Planning

A robust new transit tool that will make it significantly easier for advertisers to plan transit ad campaigns nationally and locally will roll-out this fall after an unprecedented three-year collaboration by the four leading transit operators.

The new Transit Reach Frequency Model, unveiled at the Out-of-Home Marketing Association of Canada's OOH Days in Toronto and Vancouver, will give transit advertisers greater one-stop access to consumer demographics and, for the first time, tap into in-depth consumer product use information thanks to a new link to the BBM Return to Sample data base.

And because all four leading Canadian transit players –CBS Outdoor, Lamar Transit, Metromedia Plus and Pattison Outdoor– took part in the development, users can for the first time research and plan a national buy for the top 11 Canadian markets coast to coast with a single tool, said Michele Erskine, Marketing Director with CBS Outdoor at the September 17 Toronto OOH Day.

The tool represents the first significant advance in the transit ad buying process in more than 20 years, a period in which the major transit systems have experience increases in fleet sizes ranging from 5% to 55% and population growth ranging from 27% to 200%, said Mary Falbo, Vice President, Business Development, Pattison Outdoor.

The easy-to-use software platform that runs on PC and Mac was developed with optimal flexibility in mind. Planners can develop targeted multi-objective programs to reach desired combinations of specific market and location, demographic, and media and product preferences. Users can also plan for media flights in any combination of weeks, from 1 to 52.

All exterior, interior or platform ad formats offered by the four companies are included in the tool, except for digital signage, although Falbo said those formats will be added in the near future. Falbo added that to reduce complexity, all four players are committed to developing common naming for their similar offerings by the end of 2008.

The new Transit Reach Frequency Model will be available, with data from the fall 2007 and spring 2008 BBM studies, in October, with fall 08 BBM data to be added in December and future updates coinciding with the regular BBM reporting schedule.

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