



## **Outdoor Advertising: A Medium for All Seasons**

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Enormous interest has been focused this past year on the Internet and understandably so... like the wunderkind it is, its upbringing is commanding rapt attention as it jockeys for position in the media marketplace. Trade publications devote significant chunks of weekly editorial to its every move but even so, keeping current with the latest applications and interpretations can be overwhelming. All rules are thrown out the window as marketers frantically seek the one true model to yield results.

Interestingly, in more subtle and quiet ways, an advertising medium that predates them all has also been slowly and steadily building steam...so much so that predictions for its growth in the next five years outpace everything but the internet. What's that, you say?

Why, it's outdoor advertising. A fluke? Some inflated mathematical model? Hardly - if anything, the predictions are modest, and the potential barely tapped.

### **Outdoor Evolution**

How outdoor has developed into a success story in itself may seem magical but it's actually a result of some smart moves at the right time. What are these factors and how do they work for today's business?

Outdoor has been evolving its core product to suit a new society. The billboard has been around over 100 years and before the billboard, its diminutive cousin - the poster - for even longer. While locations have been limited by regulation, the creative applications have been endless.



Just look to the OBIE Awards photo gallery to see what's happening. As David Bernstein, an OBIE Judge and author of the book, *Advertising Outdoors, Watch This Space*, says, "Solve the brief in a poster and you have solved it for all other media". The discipline required by this (largely) one-dimensional space yields ads that perfectly suit today's fast paced society on the go. Billboards done well get attention - they grab you; they make you look, they brand! Add to that the newer technological enhancements and you have a veritable theater of the streets.

### **Outdoor - Billboards and a Lot More**

Beyond billboards, a whole new field of venues has emerged to reach consumers head-on during bridge the gap in urban centers, the "out of home" or "alternative" products as they came to be known have today grown into a sophisticated and viable billion dollar business. The beauty of these venues is the targeting they provide, and their synergy with micro markets: there are , mall posters, taxi tops, phone kiosks, truckside panels...the list goes on and on. Chances are if you've imagined it, there is a company out there doing it, or else one in development. Outdoor has become the people's space



There is no disputing the glamour and prestige of the million dollar TV spot - but that's the point: while fun to do and exciting to watch, it's here and gone in a flash - and so is your budget. Very few businesses can afford the long lead times and astronomical expense that television requires.

When you think about the pace of life today, advertisers must turn on a dime, react to changing markets, and speak to special interests. What outdoor provides is continuous coverage 'round the clock to an ever-changing audience ready to react... the "people's space" as another creative director calls it. Quick up, quick down, where it is most needed, at super efficiencies.

### **Worldwide Branding**

Many of the outdoor companies operating in the U.S. are international in scope. Not only do they have the networks to service the multi-national brand, but they have the experience of operating in these markets. Given its visual nature, outdoor is arguably the medium best adapted for branding products on a worldwide basis. We know this is so given the breath of international entries submitted into the OBIE Awards each year. And simply do the math: a single image, digitally adapted for local preferences, is enormously efficient.

One year after tobacco removed its last billboard, the outdoor industry is not just doing fine, it's doing better than ever. This is not coincidence, but rather the result of well thought out preparation with a clear goal in place: to adapt to its customers. Outdoor is the one and only medium with a single purpose: to deliver advertising. Its focus is not diverted by other concerns, like programming.

Peter Drucker, author of *Managing for Results*, has said: "We know only two things about the future: It cannot be known, and it will be different from what exists now and from what we now expect."

Outdoor has proven that adage and is continuing to adapt and evolve beyond expectation. It's time to get on board, wouldn't you say?

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