

Asking the Experts

Asking the Experts: Are Billboards Back to Being a Thing?

In an age of ever-shortening attention spans, it pays to be seen



Keith Loria

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The numbers are not in yet, but In 2018, billboard ad spending is expected to reach an all-time high of \$38 billion, which may seem surprising to those who have been touting the end of old school marketing methods.

Katie Driggs, director of media buying for the branding agency [Ferebeelane](#), noted that just because digital advertising is breaking records, doesn't mean that other outlets are ineffective or outdated.

"Billboards rival digital advertising in terms of CPMs, and allow for much bigger real estate to showcase a brand," she said. "Additionally, heavy users of one medium tend to be light users of another, making billboards an efficient outlet to increase reach to a target audience when combining it with other media."

With the decline in viewership of cable television and the increasing dominance of applications such as Netflix and DVR, television isn't as appealing as it once was to advertisers looking to reach consumers for a low cost per thousand viewers. Therefore, billboards are a less expensive option compared to other traditional forms of advertising like TV, newspaper, and radio, all of which are losing audiences.

"People do not live in channels, and they move between different media (digital and off-line) at will, throughout their customer journeys," said **Evan Berglund**, senior partner at the [Gonzberg Agency](#) in San Francisco. "The use of billboard ads is high, because billboards can still be very effective in initiating a customer journey, and help guide potential customers in the right direction."

Dan Salganik, managing partner at Commoot, feels the digital space has gotten too crowded - and we may have reached a point of “ad-blindness”, where consumers simply stop paying attention to online ads.

“As more companies eliminate overhead and other variable expenses, they can afford to diversify their marketing, and this means they can reach people online and in-person, such as a billboard,” he said. “Though tracking conversions on billboards is very tricky, what billboards do provide companies is strong awareness. Billboards can be a (relatively) low-cost solution to get thousands (if not millions) of eyes for a fairly competitive price.”

Transitioning to Digital

Despite its roots as one of the oldest forms of advertising, billboard marketing is going through something of a transformation, and over the last decade has become a part of the digital advertising infrastructure.

“Traditional bulletin billboards have been static; however, with the emergence of digital technology, overall revenue for OOH has increased because of the video capabilities this platform now offers,” said **Ashley E. Fons**, CEO & Founder of Happy Days Marketing. “Now OOH is not just offered on the side of roads but...on TV monitors in stores, restaurants, sports stadiums, at gas stations and more.”

Naturally, more locations for more advertisers to deliver more messages means additional ad revenue for OOH in both static and digital formats, which can reach people every time they leave their home. This exposure level been bolstered by the advent of digital billboards that cycle through ads from various companies.

Another huge improvement of today’s billboard advertising versus that of the past is that there’s exponentially more data available now than ever before – and while some billboard companies lag behind, many others have accrued valuable information about the demographics of the community.

“By creating a dynamic environment for billboards to thrive, billboard companies can earn more, charge less, and still create a high number of impressions for brands,” Salganik said. “Brands are able to update their ads quicker and less painfully than in the past, which is a great feature.”

Pros of Leveraging Billboard Advertising

One of the main reasons marketers turn to billboard ads is to achieve local recognition with community-oriented campaigns – especially for a brand or business tied to the community where the billboard is displayed.

“People who drive by the billboard who’ve heard of your organization before will tell someone they know if your message is particularly memorable,” Fons said. “Even if a consumer hasn’t heard of your brand or business before, when your advertisement catches their eye, you reap the benefits of 1x consumer impression. It’s likely that with a 4- to 8-week campaign, that same consumer will pass by your advertisement multiple times, thereby increasing brand recognition and awareness for your organization.”

According to The Guardian, several advertisers [dropped their campaigns](#) with Facebook and Google after their ads started popping up in unsavory places online. Billboard marketing companies feel confident that their way is a solution to such issues. The advertisers know exactly where their messages are going to appear, and customers can't just click away from them.

"When a billboard is posted in a high-traffic site, such as a busy road or major highway, the ad has a high potential of being seen by a vast audience in a short amount of time," said **Candice Simons**, CEO of [Brooklyn Outdoor](#), an outdoor advertising company. "This is especially effective when the displayed message is short and aesthetically pleasing so that drivers can absorb it as they quickly pass."

Overall, billboards are an easy and reliable method of messaging the masses. Rather than relying on potential audiences to look at a specific webpage or feed to see an ad, outdoor advertising reaches viewers in real life and real time. They can't be turned off like on TV or radio or clicked away like online advertising.

Looking Ahead

Bob Clary, director of marketing at [DeveloperAcademy](#), said that we are now in an age where billboards are starting to pop up in 3D and other formats that push the boundaries and create newsworthy and attention-grabbing stories for viewers.

Lyron Bentovim, CEO and president of [The Glimpse Group](#), believes that the future of billboard ads is augmented reality, and his company is currently working on two advanced innovations for AR billboards.

"One is by having companies be able to point their phones at a Times Square ad and see what their own ad would look like in the ad space in augmented reality," he said. "The other is enabling passers-by to point their phones at the screen and purchase directly from a company's ad."

Billboards are perhaps more effective than ever because unlike all other media, they're uninterrupted. And in an age of ever-shortening attention spans, it pays to be seen.



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