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## Ad Execs Begin Thinking Of Outdoor As TV Calls For New Metrics

by Joe Mandese, Tuesday, Nov 15, 2005 8:00 AM EST

**MADISON AVENUE'S HOT NEW DIGITAL**, interactive ad medium ironically may prove to be one of its oldest: out-of-home. That was the consensus of marketers, agencies and outdoor media vendors gathered in New York Monday for the Traffic Audit Bureau's Out-of-Home Advertising Forum. Just as other major media--online, cell phones, hand-held devices, and cinema--are emerging as new "screens" for distributing TV-like commercials, new digital billboards are making outdoor the next big screen--literally. "You really have a chance to think of it as a video medium just like television," said John Marson, senior manager-media planning at packaged goods giant Kraft Foods, reflecting a sentiment echoed throughout the conference. Asked how marketers like Kraft might feel about paying higher, more TV-like advertising rates for shorter interval digital outdoor ad messages, Marson said, "It will be compared to television. There will be the big challenge--getting the right metrics."

Getting the right metrics, in fact, was the undercurrent of the conference, hosted by the TAB, the out-of-home media industry's official bean counter, which in the past year has created new metrics for more accurately factoring out-of-home advertising impressions, and has recently issued requests for proposals to major audience measurement firms for what would amount to the first industry-owned ratings system in the U.S.

That movement was underscored by the release of a new survey of members of the Association of National Advertisers, which was unveiled Monday morning by Mark Kaline, global media manager at Ford Motor Co., who also chaired the conference.

The survey concluded that the three most important issues advertisers see for out-of-home media are: return on investment (ROI), performance metrics, and the frequency and timing of out-of-home advertising schedules.

Kaline said the new research initiatives should help with the first two issues, noting, "Obviously, there's some upside" from "more sophisticated means of projecting out what these broad audiences deliver."

Kaline added that the "future looks pretty strong" for outdoor media, which several speakers predicted could double its share of U.S ad spending from about 3 percent or 4 percent currently.

Another factor driving that growth would be the transition to digital, which also would aid in the third big issue for marketers: frequency and timing.

"We're able to change copy and creative in about 25 seconds," said Tommy Teepell, chief marketing officer of Lamar Advertising Co., referring to the outdoor media vendor's new digital billboards.

Andrea MacDonald, president of outdoor media specialist agency MacDonald Media, said

the shift was leading to a fundamental change in the way advertisers and agencies plan outdoor media buys, noting it is moving from "location buying to time buying."

While that might seem more analogous to television, Jack Sullivan, vice president-media director at Starcom Worldwide, warned against attempts to literally adapt TV to billboards.

"I think the biggest mistake we can make right now is to put a TV message on a billboard," he said, implying that advertisers, agencies and vendors need to think of the medium in a whole new way.

Lamar's Teepell noted that, "Legally you can't put TV spots on a digital screen," citing local laws forbidding outdoor media to "have motion."

"Digital outdoor is not television. It's changeable, static messages," added Rocky Sisson, global director of sales & marketing for outdoor giant Clear Channel Outdoor. However, he said that the digital nature of outdoor billboards would make it feasible for national advertisers to buy outdoor media as national, or even global networks, with ad copy and schedules adjusted by market or region. Clear Channel recently implemented what it called the world's first global media buy, a public service effort for AIDS.

The flexible and immediate nature of outdoor is changing the way the ad industry thinks of the medium, said Starcom's Sullivan, noting that it is introducing concepts such as "dayparting" and that the typical agency outdoor media specialist has shifted from "buyers to planners to idea people." He said that inside Starcom, the outdoor media group now spends only about 40 percent of its time on buying, and 60 percent on planning and creating ideas.

Ultimately, Sullivan said the big change would be the integration of wireless Bluetooth technology, which is making digital outdoor billboards interactive with cell phones and other handheld devices.

***Joe Mandese is Editor of MediaPost.***