

DIGITAL OUTDOOR

WHITEWASHED BY THE EXPLOSION OF ONLINE MEDIA, THE HUMBLE POSTER IS NOW RECEIVING A NEW LICK OF DIGITAL PAINT / BY WILL SANSON

Although the poster may well be one of the oldest advertising platforms, it is also one of the last analogue channels to be successfully adapted as part of the digital landscape in which brands and consumers now operate. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the duplicity required by any outdoor advertising campaign immediately creates logistical and financial hurdles. Printing a thousand posters is one thing, but paying for a thousand LCD screens? Only now is such technology finally becoming affordable.

More than this, however, a screen showing images or video is still too literal an interpretation of the original format and ultimately, too familiar to what we spend hours every day viewing on our computers or television screens. For the digital poster to stand out it needs an ace up its sleeve. One which plays to its inherent strength of engaging consumers in outdoor spaces; one which makes use of the gadget which, according to the United Nations, is now carried by over 60% of the world's population...



Russell Townsend, managing director at Clusta, a UK-based digital communications agency says: 'We have reached a stage of technology and knowledge saturation in the general public where people are no longer scared of their mobile phones and perhaps more importantly, of mobile internet. With this in mind, it seems logical to give the smart phone-wielding public something more to play with.'

Sweep, pinch and stretch

Clusta is responsible for developing a new API (Application Programming Interface) which does

just this – allowing any mobile phone to control any Flashbased application. The first incarnation of the technology was shown in June at the Media Playground Conference in London. Here, visitors could use their iPhones to connect via 3G or Wi-Fi to a 57" LCD screen and in doing so, then control and manipulate the display using the handset's infamously intuitive touch-screen interface. By sweeping a finger across the phone, the sample object can be rotated on the big screen; pinching or stretching movements provide simple zoom functions and can even change the colour of the contents.

'We have launched this technology with the iPhone simply because of how prolific it happens to be at the moment, but it is in no way limited just to this device – it can take an input from any smart phone, be it movement from an accelerometer or noise in a microphone', explains Townsend. 'Because it can be used to control any process involving Flash, the potential for also developing connected applications or mobile websites is phenomenal. **Imagine an app which you begin interacting with as soon as you wake up, but then connects and expands as you pass a poster or billboard before finally entering a retail environment. The complete route to purchase can be brought to life like never before.'**

CBS Outdoor is the first media owner to partner Clusta on the initiative and as a result, will soon start rolling out interactive adverts in London's 43-acre Westfield Shopping Centre – officially Europe's largest urban shopping mall. Although the first deals with brands are currently being

AS WELL AS PRODUCT EXPLORATION AND MANIPULATION, THE INTERACTIVITY COULD ALSO BE USED FOR PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT

finalised, Mike Hemmings, brand manager for CBS Outdoor explains how different practical applications may work.

'As well as product exploration and manipulation, the interactivity could also be used for promotional support. For example, a version of web retailer ASOS' (As Seen On Screen) "online catwalk functionality" could be created, with discounts and promotional codes captured on the user's camera. Once they have engaged with the functionality, the screens (and the supporting databases) could then suggest cosmetic colours and shades based on their skin tones. Whatever the application, the challenge will be to ensure that these ideas enhance the audience experience, whether of the advert itself or of the time spent in that location.'

Russell Townsend concludes: 'This is still early days, but given the flexibility of the technology, we believe that there is tremendous potential for almost every kind of brand. Ultimately we haven't been genre-specific, we have been technology specific.'

From me to Akoo

Focusing more on content than interface is the Akoo Network – a new digital outdoor platform which has launched in over 60 shopping malls in US markets. By December 2009, it will be implemented in over 150, greeting an estimated 1.4 billion annual shopper visits (according to Scarborough Research data).

The Akoo Network is comprised typically of 10 to 20 (46-inch) HD LCD TV screens; a professional sound system; servers; and WiFi connectivity in each location – most commonly in food court environments where 35-60 percent of shoppers spend in excess of 30 minutes during each visit (according to recent Arbitron studies in the mall sector). These screens then provide an exclusive blend of entertainment which users can control via SMS text messages or a free Akoo mobile app. Currently on offer is premium video content and music video libraries courtesy of licensing agreements struck with Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group, and EMI.

Furthermore, at the back end, Akoo provides brands and advertisers with a web-based Media Console offering realtime metrics and analytics – the live 'pulse' of the network, if you will. Here, partners can view the most requested artists and content selections; monitor interactivity by location, day-part, or demographic; manage mobile opt-in databases; segment users; and even execute mobile marketing campaigns.

Andy Stankiewicz is executive vice president and chief marketing officer of Akoo International: 'We believe that consumer-initiated activation of content provides for a deeper level of engagement,' he explains. 'Ultimately, advertisers want to associate their brands with premium content, so our ability to

offer high quality programming is critical. At its very simplest, the network enables a retailer to deliver targeted mobile offers or a call-to-action directly to consumers' handsets following every on-demand request. In addition to driving traffic into nearby stores, our partners can measure

marketing impact and ROI much more precisely.'

He continues: 'Major brands have been impacted by dramatic changes in the media landscape and the bottom line is that marketers need to drive media innovation. However, these developments are occurring outside

of TV and the real stimulus in this space has been mobile interactivity – particularly post-iPhone; the device that revolutionised the consumer mobile experience. For marketers, this kind of ubiquitous, consumer-empowering interactivity is the innovation catalyst and therefore no longer an option.'

www.akoo.com

www.clusta.com

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