

The Surprising Role of Out of Home Advertising

Like cultural guardians, billboards have long stood as silent beacons over bustling cities and meandering highways. Their messaging ranging from vibrant hillside reminders of upcoming retail opportunities to stoic digital displays reflecting social messages, they embody the resilience and spirit of people they represent and are communicating with.



It is clear billboards serve an important social function by displaying public service announcements that provide information about important issues, such as health notices and civic matters, the importance of safe driving or even a community's environmental and clean highway goals. These messages highlight the role billboards play to bring about community change, and

their constant presence strengthens both commerce and community, making them true servants of public good.

Out of home advertising, i.e., eye-catching billboards, touches a broad and diverse audience, especially in high traffic areas. Upgrades to digital billboards that feature LED screens, video playback and interactive features, further engage viewers.

BILLBOARDS THROUGH THE AGE

A look at the ancient roots of outdoor advertising shows that the evolution of visual storytelling dates back to human cave paintings, an age older than our modern written language. The cave paintings at Lascaux in France, for example, date back to around 15,000 BC, while today's written language has its beginnings in Samarian around 3200 BC. How's that for longevity?

In less ancient history, 1700 BC through 500 AD large public signage was used for a variety reasons. Large inscriptions announcing laws or public events were very popular. The Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian legal code, the Rosetta Stone, which enabled diverse people to understand the same message, and Roman triumphal arches bore inscriptions praising the victories of generals and emperors, are a few examples of the early usage.

In modern times, the early 1800s, as the U.S. built its railroad infrastructure, there was a pressing need to help travelers on their journey, marking a significant boom in the evolution of road signs. With projects like the transcontinental railroad, there were plenty of opportunists who used billboards to entice settlers to communities along the trail. These large-scale signs advertised the benefits of establishments, including some of the saltier saloons and taverns.

Later, with the advent of highways and automobile traffic in the 1900s, businesses realized the importance of reaching travelers with large-scale advertising. Large signage was erected along the highways and adorned the hills and dales to draw travelers' attention to products like Dapper Dan's hair pomade, Firestone tires, and tranquil family rest spots.

In short, the growth of travel by rail and road led to an increase in large-scale outdoor signage for commercial and utilitarian purposes.

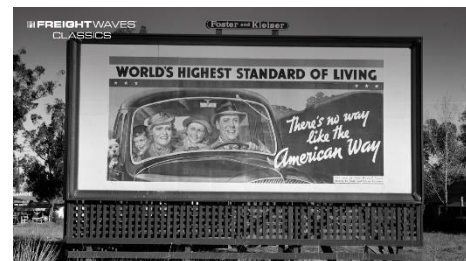
DIGITAL DISPLAYS

In the late 1900s and early 2000s, bustling cities such as Times Square in New York and the Shibuya district in Tokyo began using giant LED screens, which quickly spawned the growth of dynamic digital screens. Digital screens offered vivid animations, videos, and fast updates. During the launch of the iPhone, circa 2007, Apple used digital displays as a real-time countdown to the product launch, adding an element of excitement and engagement that was not possible with static billboards.

Some of the obvious benefits of digital billboards include:

- **Dynamic content:** Car dealers advertising their latest model can present new features depending on the time of day and weather conditions.
- **Sporting updates:** During sporting events, digital billboards can provide fresh and vibrant scores and highlights. Or a beverage company can highlight a cold drink on a hot day, and a warm drink on a cold day.
- **Interactive capabilities:** By using QR codes and augmented reality, advertising can be interactive. For example, a movie poster can display a code that allows you to watch the trailer on a smartphone.

The 20th and 21st centuries continued the shift from static printed billboards to dynamic digital ads. Digital billboards, with advances in technology infused with additional ability for real-time updates and multimedia presentations, revolutionized the landscape of outdoor advertising. In short, the transition to digital advertising offered flexibility, relevance, and unimaginable levels of engagement.



THE FUTURE IS NOW

Out of Home Advertising Association of America (OAAA) and Out of Home Advertising Association of the United Kingdom (Outsmart) recently announced a collaboration with IAB Tech Lab to set a global digital advertising system that supports standardized, real-time bidding for digital out-of-home placements. The three trade organizations, are bringing together global demand-side platforms, supply-side platforms and billboard owners to establish a common implementation of standards and methodologies.

What this means for the evolution of out of home advertising is frankly profound. Digital billboards and marquees can respond much more quickly to seasonal changes, public events, and national emergencies and even thrive in economically difficult times. According to Anna Bager, President and CEO of OAAA, *"Out of Home Advertising's resiliency continued in the first quarter despite a challenging ad marketplace. Our medium is well positioned to connect with consumers at the most critical moments to drive awareness and engagement, which is why OOH continues to thrive."*

Juan Colon, Vice President, Media Strategy and Planning at the NBA, highlighted another benefit of the advances in digital display saying, *"This forward-thinking approach to DOOH allowed the NBA to highlight pivotal moments throughout the Playoffs which helped build excitement and create a must-see factor. It was also a chance to connect with our fans in a way that was personalized, real-time and larger-than-life."*

The presence of digital billboards have become ubiquitous with sports and entertainment. Who among us have not chuckled while watching the melding of fan engagement and advertising, whether its kids showing off the latest dance moves or a cute peck from an elderly couple displayed on a large-scale ad carrier?

OPPORTUNITIES ARE US

The evolution of Out of Home advertising, whether static billboards or digital displays, is not without its challenges. Large billboards and displays in downtown areas can be a point of contention. While many see them as symbols of modernity and economic growth, others argue they can clutter the visual landscape and detract from the city's esthetics. Also among the concerns is the multisensory perception of urban spaces where billboards are located.

Working with municipalities locally and internationally is key. Associations such as OAAA and Outsmart are working with community partners to mitigate the negative impacts of these challenges. According to an OECD report, each city has its own rules, ranging from prohibitions in certain areas to restrictions on certain types of advertising, including size and brightness. Understanding and working with local leaders will help turn these concerns into opportunities.

CONCLUSION



Since prehistoric geoglyphs in caves humans have harnessed the power of visual storytelling, a practice brought forth with the presence of today's billboards. These icons of social evolution and commercial well-being serve a dual function: first, they are bastions of public good, as they disseminate public announcements, and they inform, encourage and support commercial enterprises, seamlessly connecting commerce and community.

With advances in technology and the inclusion of community preferences, out of home advertising is constantly evolving. The collaboration between international associations such as OAAA, Outsmart and IAB Tech Lab marks yet another milestone for outdoor advertising. As Anna Bager correctly notes, this adaptability cements OHSU's position as an indispensable tool for reaching and engaging audiences exactly when it matters the most.

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