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Wrap It Up: New Approach To Outdoor Ads

by Erik Sass, Tuesday, Aug 28, 2007 8:15 AM ET

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING IS HITTING THE road.

The new strategy, called vehicle "wraps," displays ad messages on the sides of trucks and even personal automobiles. The tactic does traditional billboards one better--it brings the message to the driver's level, in what is basically a captive environment--especially during traffic jams.

In Southern California, the Los Angeles Opera has contracted with an outdoor media firm, Media N Motion, to wrap tanker trucks with messages promoting the upcoming 2007-2008 season. The trucks ply specified routes along the LA freeways, and the fleet is deployed 16-20 hours a day, six to seven days a week, ensuring virtually constant visibility.

The tanker truck wraps cost about one-quarter as much as a billboard campaign. A typical "premiere" billboard ad costs \$40,000-\$50,000 a month in Los Angeles, which puts Media N Motion's displays at \$10,000 per month.

Each tanker truck records its position via GPS every 15 minutes, giving advertisers data on ad exposure. The GPS data indicates not only the route followed, but heavy traffic areas where the trucks slow down--thus increasing viewing likelihood.

Other Media N Motion clients have included the National Hockey League's Los Angeles Kings and KCAL-9, a local TV station which used the tankers to promote syndicated episodes of "South Park."

The LA freeways' well-known traffic paralysis makes them an ideal ad venue. More than 4 million cars are registered in Los Angeles, and on an average weekday, the traffic grid sees over 23 million car trips. According to the city government, in 2003 the average motorist experienced 93 hours of traffic delays.

While annoying--or infuriating--to the individual, traffic delays are good news for outdoor advertisers, which covet heavy commuting routes. In January, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America released a report which gleefully noted: "Americans are spending more time in their cars than ever before as commute times are significantly up, traffic is more congested and the Baby Boomer generation mainly moves via auto."

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Tanker trucks aren't the only option for reaching commuters. *The New York Times* on Monday reported the increasing popularity of personal automobiles as outdoor ad platforms, with advertisers paying \$500-\$800 to wrap a vehicle with their message. The truck and car wraps both use a vinyl material from 3M, which can be applied in just a few hours.

Los Angeles-based FreeCar Media, one of the main car advertising agencies, claims to have a database of 1 million car owners who are open to the idea of getting paid to advertise with car wraps.

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