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All Eyes On Billboards

New measurement standard aims to deliver more accurate outdoor ratings

FOR YEARS, billboards have been seen as a lesser form of promotion, largely because of their lack of accountability when compared to other media. Current measurements standards—cars passing billboards—remain crude at best.



Now a new standard of measurement seems likely to change all of that. Called Eyes On Ratings, it was developed by the New York-based Traffic Audit Bureau for Media Measurement (TAB) and is being backed by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America. Acclaimed as the biggest advance in accountability since Nielsen introduced the People Meter 20 years ago, by 2008 most outdoor and media buying agencies will have adopted it as the new standard.

Quite simply, Eyes On is a mathematical formula that will take existing traffic counts and segment them into demographic groups. By delivering such credible data on people who actually view the ads, it's a giant step forward from the current method that only reveals the passing traffic with no indication that anyone saw the ad. In addition, Eyes On can also be used as part of a multimedia schedule, allowing media buyers to better evaluate out-of-home campaigns against other forms of media.

According to Joseph Philport, president of TAB, "It's big because we had to think differently from traditional media researchers, and in order to build this system we had to leverage a variety of data sources."

Why only now, when such systems have been in place in countries like the UK for years? "The OOH industry has only just consolidated and now offers a more meaningful base that can support the transition to a more sophisticated measurement system," explained Philport. "More importantly, advertisers and agencies are more interested in multi-channel planning and leveraging OOH opportunities, but in the absence of good research it was difficult to assess OOH's contribution to a multi-media plan."

In some ways, it's long overdue. With technology making billboards more interactive and appealing to advertisers, the stakes are rising for the OOH industry. The billboard category, along with place-based ad spend, was reported by Jack Myers Media Business Report to be worth around \$7 billion in 2007. In addition, Wachovia Capital Markets forecasts that Eyes On Ratings will bring a potential \$7 billion increase in OOH advertising revenues, and that OOH will grow an additional 8.0 percent overall in 2008.

