

When in Doubt, Follow the Yellow Brick Road

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The classic fantasy Wizard of Oz features a common worry of today's real world: something new and strange can appear around every bend, which seems daunting.

The out of home (OOH) industry faces change at every turn. But the new characters in the OOH narrative turn out to be good. Data, mobile phones, and digital hardware will sustain us, not confound us.

Data is at the heart of proving value

Data lets us find groups, which is powerful today and will be more powerful tomorrow.

First, a little background on media ratings. For decades, TV measurement was the gold standard in the ad business. Now, the ad world is enamored by counting clicks, likes, and shares via online and mobile media. One click at a time, it's a bean-counter's dream, because it seems so precise.

While data precision is clearly valuable, it's important to realize there are distinct differences between online and OOH exposures. Most notably, OOH is a one-to-many media platform, not one-to-one like digital. Data links different groups to OOH locations.



OOH is unique within the media ecosystem because of proximity. The alignment of place and message is very powerful and a true differentiator of OOH. Knowing where and when to target specific audiences has always been one of the valued strengths of the medium. With more data available, OOH campaigns can be even better at connecting the right message to the right audience. This positive phenomenon applies equally in large and small markets.

As an industry, we are committed to respecting privacy. The use of aggregated, anonymous data collected from mobile phones will be an increasingly valuable tool in selling our inventory targeted to groups.

Mobile is a Way of Life

Yes, we are married to our mobile devices, and I don't see a divorce any time soon. We love our phones and miss them when they're gone.

Ad spend is pouring into mobile/online/social ("digital"), which will surpass TV ad spend this year.

We cannot and will not beat digital media. However, we can complement digital media and rise with it. Advertisers are figuring out OOH advertising makes digital ads stronger, more effective. Both OOH and mobile are wherever active consumers go.

Combining the broad reach of OOH with the connectivity of mobile drives people to engage with brands.

OOH has become part of the mobile conversation within agencies. As more ad dollars are funneled into digital and mobile plans, OOH should be part of the conversation. Agencies are recognizing how OOH drives people to engage online.

The current industry campaign Vote to Count illustrates the point. The national OOH campaign is intended to drive voter registration and turnout, reminding Americans that while all labels matter. The only one that counts on election day is “voter.”

Since the campaign launch in early September, over two-thirds of those visiting the website have typed the URL directly into a mobile device. Once on the site, they spend over four minutes navigating the content. The early results show how OOH messages motivate people to take action online.

Digital is Utility, not a Medium

Digital billboards and other OOH screens are a vital, growing part of our industry. Digital technology is fast, fluid, and flexible, making content changes quick and simple, allowing for nimble reaction to shifting market conditions.

There has been a tendency in our industry to view digital OOH as a new media channel. This is not true. While digital OOH provides exciting new and scalable benefits to advertisers, at its core digital OOH remains a fundamental component within the bigger and consolidated OOH industry. The audiences that see digital OOH ads are the same as those who view printed OOH ads. It’s that simple. Not surprising to anyone, digital hardware has not cannibalized printed formats.

Dorothy and her friends discovered the road ahead was less treacherous when they traveled together. As an industry, we are traveling together toward a bright future – one in which innovation is transformative.

Along the way, the industry will continue to encounter challenges. But, the OOH industry can succeed in embracing innovative change with brains, heart, and courage.