

Outdoor POP — A Key Ingredient in Measuring ROI

It is almost unavoidable to read an outdoor industry article today without the mention of proof-of-performance (POP) and updated methods to provide this important element of the OOH media buy. In a recent published report by the Traffic Audit Bureau, where members of the Association of National Advertisers were surveyed, POP was rated as the most important research tool advertisers wanted to see in the OOH industry. POP was more important than return on investment (ROI), multi-media planning, demographic ratings, and other research initiatives in the works by the outdoor industry.

While POP appears to be the buzz of the moment, OOH professionals are still concerned about the methodology and the appropriate metrics for determining ROI. Although mentions of the "R word" outnumber bad singers in an *American Idol* audition, advertising professionals around the globe struggle with the type of research available to arrive at a reportable ROI for their clients. Without a certified delivery of ad space as contracted, true ROI measurements will remain clouded -- regardless of methodology used.

Approximately two years ago, OAAA members and AAAA representatives designed and adopted a standard outdoor completion report that has provided more timely and useful data to advertisers regarding POP. Additional efforts to address this issue have resulted in the development of web-based and custom software applications that rely on field personnel to upload the information from a PDA in real time. Other enhancements include electronic POP reports and photos plus online sites for 24/7 report reviewing. These efforts should be applauded by the outdoor industry and have addressed some of the concerns advertisers have had in this area over the years. However, vendor-provided POP

alone will likely never suffice in accurately reporting a POP component for accountability purposes.

Each media format has a unique set of circumstances that defines the boundaries of determining POP. Some of the best selling points of OOH media are the same factors that make it more difficult to audit this medium and arrive at a plausible POP measure. Outdoor reaches our society in numerous locations without the ability to cut it off or fast-forward, thereby providing custom reach, a captive audience, and dramatic impact. Simultaneously, these widespread and "always on" locations have qualitative and performance variables in the field that are affected by a combination of environmental factors, manual operations, and technology.

Advertisers using all media -- including outdoor -- want more information and a third-party analysis to support delivery of POP and ROI. This increased scrutiny has much to do with overall corporate accountability standards in all transactions, not solely with potential flaws in media performance. Whether due to the Sarbanes-Oxley Act for public companies or other internal audit mandates, compliance, verification, and ROI are under the microscope. Thomas Bridge, CEO of Media Management Inc. writes, "Independent validation of a medium's performance on behalf of the advertiser is

critical to driving best practices within that medium. Self-reporting, as a rule, does not allow for the elevation of best practices, but rather a status quo, which is to no one's benefit. Advertisers are looking very

closely at all mediums and evaluating how they perform, not only on a cost basis, but on an ROI basis versus their contribution to driving sales, ease of use, transparency and the ability to manage against best practices for that medium."

How do those national advertisers who placed POP at the top of their wish list for outdoor research arrive at a satisfactory POP methodology, appease corporate best practices, and have tangible ingredients for ROI? The solution is to combine OAAA adopted standards, embrace new POP technology, and make sure programs are physically inspected. While field inspections/audits can add costs to OOH media programs -- whether conducted by the advertiser or through an independent third-party -- critical information affecting POP will go unnoticed if skipped. In addition to completion reports and photo affidavits by the vendors, outdoor advertisers want to know specific elements like demographic delivery, quality of each location (visibility impact), working illumination, and other service-related items -- all critical factors of a true POP index. ■

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