

DOOH: A reflection of the times

Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Digital out-of-home (DOOH) is the result of media evolution over the years. First came outdoor, before TV and PC. For hundreds of years, bill posting signs to advertise has been in our out of home experience. Think about the Barnum and Bailey or the Wild Bill Hickok show posters in the late 1800's. Even before that, in Egypt, papyrus was used to create wall posters for sales messages thousands of years ago. In a sense, out-of-home is the oldest form of advertising.

In the 1920's came the automobile, as did the roadside signs and the barn-side painted ads (Think "Mail Pouch Tobacco" and "Burma Shave"). This truly launched the out-of-home nomenclature among the industry.

Fast forward to the mid 1960s. Out-of-home advertising again became part of the advertising world's nomenclature simply to differentiate it from TV which was becoming more influential. OOH was used to describe everything from magazines at the dentist office to billboards.

In the 1970s, out-of-home media was used quite extensively by advertising agencies for billboards. In the late 70's the first Light Emitting Diode Television Screen was invented, which was the predecessor to LED Billboards. By the mid 1990s we entered the digital age of media and digital out-of-home was developed as a term used by agencies again to describe digital billboards and other screens such as those in point of transit (not necessarily networked).

Meanwhile, from 1995 through 2005, other types of advertising networks were being launched, like NGN and LED screens in Times Square and were sometimes called "animated and digital signs." This is where the technologists and entrepreneurs were building networks and calling it "digital signage," taking the technology approach to naming this new industry.

Another phase that needs to be thrown into the mix was narrowcasting. This was also used by many at the time to describe a new industry. And who could forget the launch of FRED, or Foto Realistic Electronic Displays in 1997?

Then the first Digital Signage Expo in San Francisco was launched in spring of 2004, cementing the name for the industry. Later in the fall of 2004 at a meeting in NYC, the name "digital signage" was still being discussed among leaders in the industry. Everyone was still looking to hang their hat on a name for the industry and many did not want digital signage. At the time, the industry was referring to itself as "digital signage" so the majority had made the decision to stick with the name digital signage simply because of technology companies that had marketing money invested in the name.

In the time frame from 2005-2008 most agencies were referring to it as digital out-of-home simply because it fit their historic nomenclature out-of-home advertising. Today most agencies think of it as DOOH and many in the industry are referring to it as digital out-of-home when it refers to ad-based networks. The agencies are driving this. More of the industry itself is referring to in-store placements and internal communications as digital signage. There is a distinct difference between ad based networks (DOOH) and non-ad based networks (digital signage).

In 2009 we are seeing the name DOOH starting to incorporate mobile or any DOOH strategy that ends up on a display. Today digital signage is commonly replaced with DOOH referring to it in context of the digital signage medium. In summary, digital out-of-home is anything that is digitally shown on any display. Mobile falls into this category as does digital signage, but all related to ad-based networks.

I predict that over time digital signage will be replaced by DOOH in relationship to ad-based networks, where as corporate communication and in-store networks will continue to refer to the industry as digital signage.

POSTED BY: Keith Kelsen AT 12:28 pm