

MARKETING

A digital billboard revolution

Liam Ward Proud looks at the top eight out-of-home advertising sites changing the face of the capital



DAVE TROTT

IN CREATIVE terms, advertising mediums can be split into "hot" and "cool" media. This distinction was first put forward by Canadian media critic Marshall McLuhan 50 years ago. The difference is that hot media grabs you, whereas people actively choose to get involved with cool media – the audience does the grabbing. Print, cinema, online and mobile are cool. TV and out-of-home are hot.

As a creative, when you're thinking about outdoor, you can safely assume that the audience will be doing something else when they see your ad. They are probably stuck in a traffic jam or waiting for a bus, which means you've got to be short and punchy with the words, using very powerful graphics. Outdoor is a potent media. Done well, it can be more commanding than any other channel.

We read about the explosive growth of online and mobile ads all the time. They're known as "conversion media"; outdoor, on the other hand, is "awareness media" – it has the power to open doors, get your brand noticed and, most importantly, get you into the public conversation. Everyone is exposed to your brand.

I watch ads on digital out-of-home screens the same way I watch a TV break. The channel's capabilities are well-understood by media agencies. They're thrilled with digital out-of-home because it's so effective, flexible and can reach a mass audience so quickly. But the problem is that the potential of digital outdoor hasn't permeated the creative departments of many ad agencies yet.

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Digital outdoor is the thinking client's choice. The channel has helped build awareness for some of the biggest brands, and it's interesting that it's often the choice of media companies – think of The Independent newspaper's famous "It is. Are you?" campaign, as well as Sky and ITV's huge presence on outdoor screens at the moment.

Interestingly, it seems to be the same for political parties. The right outdoor campaign can have as much of an impact as which way the newspapers swing ahead of a general election. Surely no one can forget the legendary "Labour isn't working" posters designed for the Conservatives by Saatchi & Saatchi in the run-up to the 1979 general election.

Digital outdoor's growth potential is huge. And the opportunity for creatives to do some of their best work on the platform is evident. With the right idea and a good public relations team on board, it's one of the quickest ways to get into the national conversation and make your brand famous.

Dave Trott was interviewed by City A.M. Trott is chairman of The Gate London, an integrated, full service advertising agency, and his latest book is *Predatory Thinking: A Masterclass in Out-Thinking the Competition*. He was the winner of the 2004 D&AD President's Award for outstanding contributions to creativity.



1. EUSTON ROAD UNDERPASS

Owner: Outdoor Plus (pictured above)
Near Warren Street station and where Tottenham Court Road meets the A501, the site targets over 150,000 car travellers every week with its two digital screens placed on both the east and west sides of the underpass. Advertisers prize the site due to its unmissable location for wealthy commuters heading to the City, while its digital connectivity allowed the Sound of Success campaign to promote Brit Award winners within minutes of the ceremony.
Famous campaigns: Huge Jaguar billboards told drivers to "F the meeting" in April this year.



2. PICCADILLY LIGHTS

Owner: Clear Channel
In the heart of London's West End, Piccadilly Lights reaches an estimated 2m people each week, many of them pedestrians. Because its audience includes a huge number of tourists, and the minimum tenure is five years, the site tends to appeal to large global brands with big advertising budgets, like Coca-Cola (which has long occupied the main strip along the top), McDonald's and the car company Hyundai.
Famous campaigns: The McDonald's Little Piccadilly campaign used an app to allow people to create characters that appeared on its screen.

3. OLD STREET ROUNDABOUT (ECT)

Owner: JCDecaux
Only fully digitised since April this year, this site sits at the heart of an area that has become synonymous with London's startup community and booming technology scene. The site comprises four large digital screens covering the major entrances to Silicon Roundabout, which are mounted onto a giant cube-like structure supported by two looping arches. It captures the passing traffic heading towards the City from the north, as well as Tube-goers using Old Street station.
Famous campaigns: So far, brands to use the site have been a reflection of the tech-focused area, with Google-owned YouTube buying initial space to promote some of its most popular subscriber channels, including Vice Media, Zoella and The Slow Mo Guys.



4. VAUXHALL CROSS

Owner: Outdoor Plus
This state of the art digital screen sits in the middle of the Vauxhall Cross gyratory, visible to drivers using Wandsworth Road and Nine Elms Lane (only just avoiding the start of the congestion charge zone to the east). Around 75,000 drivers approach the screen on a typical day, which is relatively unique in sitting close to eye-level when in a car.
Famous campaigns: It's been a favourite of musicians so far, with Calvin Harris (pictured) and Sam Smith using the high-quality screens to promote new albums.

5. CHISWICK TOWERS

Owner: Clear Channel UK
Situating on the M4 near Chiswick, these two screens catch commuters travelling towards the centre from relatively affluent areas of west London, as well as international business travellers making the same journey from Heathrow Airport. The towers are seen by roughly 2.3m road users each month.
Famous campaigns: The site is probably best known for the British Airways Look Up campaign last year, which many regard as the finest piece of out-of-home work in a decade. The digital screens were fed flight information from Heathrow, and every time a BA flight went across the sky, a child on the screen would look up, pointing and following it. The screens would also show the destination of the plane and a web URL to book a similar journey.

6. TWO TOWERS WEST

Owner: Ocean Outdoor
With a similar demographic to the Chiswick site, Two Towers West delivers one of the highest audience figures in the UK – 6.63m every two weeks. Ocean Outdoor claims that 46 per cent of the site's "impact" views come from UK travellers going to Heathrow Airport, which probably explains why some of the brands using the screens also have a heavy presence in the departure lounge, including Burberry, which advertised its Body fragrance at the site.
Famous campaigns: Bentley used the space to reach wealthy petrol-heads with the release of its fastest ever car, the GT Speed.



7. THE EYE, HOLBORN

Owner: Outdoor Plus
The Eye screen, not too far away from Holborn Station, is prized by advertisers because of its relative exclusivity and scale in an area previously devoid of any large-format out-of-home screens. Built across four lanes on Proctor Street, its 410,000 weekly audience is predominantly comprised of affluent urbanites with high disposable incomes. The site is near media agencies including WPP's Group M, and big-spending brands like Warner Bros.
Famous campaigns: Pepsi used the space to promote its Pepsi Max drink – "maximum taste, no sugar."

8. SOUTHERN GATEWAY DOMINATION

Owner: Primesight
These four screens in the middle of Elephant and Castle roundabout face all lanes of traffic heading north from the A3 towards Waterloo, the City and the West End. This site's LED screens are claimed to deliver an audience of around 1.7m every two weeks, acting as a gateway for anyone heading towards or from south London. The screens have a maximum of four ad slots on a 40-second loop.
Famous campaigns: Sky recently used the site for its "Your new movie store now in here" campaign promoting its film packages.