Outdoor

All wrapped up

Bigger is better, at least when it comes to outdoor advertising. Need proof? Take a look at the rising popularity of wraparound billboards.

By Lisa Witepski

There's no doubt that billboards are an eye-catching and highly visible medium. But consider that the average building wrap is significantly larger than even the highest billboard - sometimes stretching around three or four street blocks - and it's clear that, when it comes for sheer attention-grabbing power, there's no contest. "In terms of impact, no conventional billboard can compete with a fully wrapped skyscraper. Just think of Nedbank's ad on the Penmore Towers in downtown Johannesburg," says Caryn Cohen, director of Wideopen Platform.

Of course, there are many other factors contributing to the inescapable impact of building wraps. Max de Jong of Ad Outpost points out that the location of wraps in busy urban metropoles adds to their visibility, while Pete Piccione, managing director of Primedia Outdoor, adds that the scarcity of such sites contributes to the overall prestige of the medium.

Or, as Cohen puts it, "Building wraps have the ability to use common urban structures in exciting ways. This gives them a distinct advantage over conventional outdoor structures, which face the danger of fading into a background of advertising clutter."

"The use of building wraps, existing urban structures, scaffoldings and so forth is temporary and immediately striking, because it changes the environment consumers have become used to. This ability to create a public interruption in the urban landscape appeals to advertisers."

Yet a further plus is the fact that the lifespan of a building wrap is limited, usually to three months. "This makes the medium an extremely strategic one," De Jongh states.

All of which adds up to massive PR opportunities, as Piccione points out.

The advantages of using the medium are numerous, and impressive - but are there any disadvantages?

"Not really," is De Jong's answer. "Granted, there are operational issues - for example, it's difficult to illuminate building wraps at night - but these are easily sorted out and are countered by the medium's benefits."

For Piccione, most of the cons associated with the medium boil down to a question of price. "Naturally, production costs for ads of this size are rather high. This means that the medium is out of reach for many companies. Those that can afford it have to limit the number of sites they invest in."

Again, though, size and impact usually make up for lack of frequency. That's if the medium is done cor-
Cohen believes that the effectiveness of a building’s wrap is strongly dependent on its ‘wow’ factor. Poor creative can actually have an adverse effect, she opines.

So, how to make sure you get the most from your building wrap?

“The medium is not dissimilar from any other; you need to make sure that there’s cohesion between the brand, the brief and the environment in which the creative will appear,” says Piccione.

As such, most of the principles applying to billboards hold true for building wraps. “Before committing to a site, make sure that you understand it. What kind of traffic passes by it, who will see it, what income bracket are they part of?” asks De Jong.

Like Cohen, he feels that much of the wrap’s impact will be lost if you don’t get the creative right. “Keep it simple,” is his suggestion. “It’s tempting to use a quirky message, but people may not have time to digest it - and that means they’ll miss the point.”

Piccione echoes this sentiment. “If there’s too much fine print, the billboard starts to look busy.

You don’t have the time to tell a story, so rather focus on conveying a single, strong proposition.”

Cohen offers this advice: “The key is to work with beauty and simple, engaging concepts that are striking from a long distance, and that augment the surrounding environment. Too many agencies attempt to roll out print or other types of adverts over a building, and end up creating a massive eye sore.

Brands should also be on the lookout for opportunities where high impact outdoor can be leveraged to deliver much needed social infrastructure - the lighting attached to the Cell C for the City project in the Joburg CBD is a good example.”

Clever companies will take note: as the business environment becomes ever more competitive, the need to cut through the clutter grows. And what better way to make a statement than by going big?

The future of outdoor advertising

Cohen believes that building wraps will continue to be big news; not only do they create real public interest, but they’re also a solution to negative public perceptions of billboards.

But what else does the future hold for outdoor advertising? According to Piccione, key trends include increasing innovation, led by technology. “Soon, it won’t be unusual for consumers to receive a permission-based SMS about a product as they walk past a billboard advertising it,” he says. Large TV screens, instead of billboards, are also an increasing likelihood. At the same time, outdoor campaigns will become more flexible, avoiding the wallpaper syndrome by allowing advertisers to change the creative more frequently. Finally, new research tools, such as SAARF and Nielsen’s Planning and Audience Quantification research methodology, are providing increasingly accurate information about outdoor mediums.

And the lesson is: innovation is here to say. The bigger and bolder you make your message - not to mention the more eye-catching and creatively spectacular - the better.