



52% of 18-54-year-old women look at Smart Screens

High-Def Marketing

Dynamic in-mall **digital signage** reaches a captive and receptive audience

BY REBECCA LOGAN

Dave Wynkoop was killing time at an Annapolis, Md., mall. The kiosk he wanted to buy from was temporarily closed, so he walked around for awhile, doing his best to ignore all marketing campaigns. “I try to avoid looking at any ads,” he says. “I think our society is on ad overload.”

But somewhere between PacSun and a smoothie booth, Wynkoop found himself eyeballing advertising in spite of himself. He slowed his pace and snapped his head to the right to examine a vertical plasma screen on which animated characters were heralding the DVD release of “Arthur and the Invisibles.”

“I think there must have been something about their motion at the very moment I was walking by that just caught my eye,” he says.

Welcome to one of the selling points of in-mall digital network displays.

“Obviously there is a lot of clutter out there,” says Gerritt Smith, senior partnership marketing manager at Columbus, Ohio-based Glimcher Realty Trust. But technology such as Smart Screens (which is what nabbed Wynkoop’s attention) can help cut through that clutter.

“This type of format is new,” Smith says. “It’s fresh: there’s motion, there’s

sound. It’s attention grabbing — and that’s what we thrive on.”

Glimcher began installing Smart Screens after entering an agreement early this year with New York-based Adspace Networks, the company that deploys and manages those screens.

In May, Adspace announced a deal with Panasonic through which new plasma panels will be installed on 625 displays recently added to the Adspace Mall Network. Adspace says most of the new units will measure 65 inches di-

agonally and will have about 17 percent more viewing area than the older Smart Screen models.

The first Glimcher mall to get the Smart Screens was Lloyd Center in Portland, Ore., which was to be followed by five more properties within a few months. Eventually, about 20 Glimcher properties will be Smart Screen equipped, Smith says, and advertisers are coming to expect such an option.

“Technology is moving so rapidly, and more and more businesses are looking at malls,” Smith says. Operators are answering with digital venues — be it their own in-house systems or screens from a company like Adspace.

Strength in numbers

Adspace president Jeff Jensen says the network company is on track to have screens in 100 malls by November — doubling its presence inside of a year.

The company looks for strength in numbers, Smith says, and its expansion is being fueled in part by recent deals with companies like Glimcher and Chattanooga, Tenn.-based CBL & Associates Properties, which will be installing the screens in 12 locations in eight key designated market areas.

“We didn’t really push to have this mall done first and that mall done next,” Smith says. “Ad-



space wanted to go where they already had a strong footprint.”

General Growth Properties installed its first Smart Screen in January 2006 at Spring Hill Mall in its home market of Chicago. Since then, the screens have been added to about 14 other GGP malls, according to vice president of strategic partnerships Patrick Pechous.

“The Smart Screens can change content instantaneously to inform shoppers about pertinent information that will make their shopping experience more enjoyable,” Pechous says.

They also give advertisers a window to



a willing audience, Smith says. “The thing that really separates the mall is that you have a captive audience ready to spend money.” That’s of great interest to national advertisers of all varieties, but Smith stresses that retail promotion is the primary focus of Glimcher’s screen adoption.

“The most exciting part of this puzzle to us is that our retailers can use this platform free of charge to promote their product,” he says.

Each week, retailers submit their best sale items for consideration for inclusion in the “Today’s Top 10” program, which plays between paid ads and aims to give shoppers a quick look at the best deals currently available in a given mall.

If Wynkoop had been walking a little slower in the Westfield’s Annapolis

mall where he was shopping, he might have seen information about drastically reduced peppermint foot-care products at The Body Shop, a big sale at dELiAs, or one of the other deals Adspace chose to feature in the Top 10 based on breadth of interest and depth of price reduction.

Adspace actually selects the best 12 deals so that there are two ready backups in case it needs to make a quick switch. “We’ve actually run retailers out of stock and they’ll call and say, ‘Please take down this item,’” Jensen says. “When we started this two years ago we

were begging retailers to participate ... Now we have 250 retailers participating with us, more than 75 of them nationally.”

Picking a physical location that would best represent retailers participating in the Top 10 program is one of the factors weighed when deciding where to put the screens, Pechous says, along with size, design, layout and traffic patterns.

Adspace is on track to have screens in 100 malls by November

Smart Screens are equipped with a self-leveling audio equalizer that constantly checks the noise level near the screens and adjusts the volume accordingly, but mall operators say they still must be careful when installing the screens so that they don’t step on any retailer toes (or lease lines).

“If we can only get five units in, we only get five units,” Smith says. “We’re not going to crowd anybody or make things look unprofessional. We want things to be tasteful and spread out where they will be useful.”

The mix of messages on the Smart Screens is eclectic — ranging from

soothing spa-like sounds in a Goldtoe spot to a bobbing dog head and a hypnotic hip-hop beat in a Jeep Compass commercial. Out of the six-minute programming loop that Adspace runs on its screens, about 30 seconds are dedicated to promotions for events going on at the mall.

Rapid-fire message

Some advertisers have requested 30-second spots, but 15 seconds or less is what works best with shoppers on the go. “They’re not going to stand in a mall and watch television,” Jensen says. “They’re busy. They’re moving. They need that rapid-fire message.”

But fast doesn’t necessarily mean forgettable: A recent exit study found that 65 percent of teens remembered seeing a Nintendo commercial that played on Smart Screens. That response “was very high,” Jensen admits, “but to see numbers in the 35 or 45 percent [range] is very common.”

In a survey of 400 people conducted at a Connecticut mall, 46 percent of visitors remembered specifically looking at the Smart Screens. About 52 percent of women 18 to 54 years old looked at them — which fits with other data that show that Smart Screens appeal to women who aren’t at the mall to socialize. “They really are our sweet spot,” Jensen says. “They have a job to do and they say, ‘If you can help me do it and save five minutes or save \$50, that’s a win.’”

Prior to running Adspace, Jensen was senior vice president of sales for SmartSource iGroup, a division of News Corp., and a founder of Price Features Plus, a co-marketing program for consumer-packaged goods. He says the digital frontier is fertile for manufacturer and retailer cooperation.

“That’s where my businesses is going,” he says. “That’s what happened in the newspaper inserts at News Corp. and I know it’s what is going to happen here.”

STORES

Rebecca Logan is a freelance writer based in Harford County, Md.