

Billboards, the out-of-home winners during the pandemic, are evolving as budgets rebound

Article

Though out-of-home (OOH) spending plummeted during the pandemic as people rarely ventured out-of-home, the stalwart billboard ad saw its share of budgets leap.

“If you put in a billboard on the side of the road, even during a terrible part of COVID, you were probably still getting a similar number of eyeballs, whereas an office or video kiosk ad, or a cinema ad, was not being seen by nearly as many people,” said analyst Ross Benes [on a recent edition of The Daily podcast](#).

Pre-pandemic, billboards saw between 60% and 65% of OOH budget share, but that jumped closer to 80% during the pandemic, he said.

With OOH spending [set to near \\$8 billion again in 2022](#), billboard share is falling as mediums like transit ads return. But billboards remain central to advertiser OOH strategies. Here are a few things to know about these roadside attractions:

More than branding: Today’s billboards can influence consumers to take direct actions, including visiting websites or downloading apps. They also drive foot traffic.

“It’s about this specific store to go visit, or this specific concert to go visit. It drives you to take an action to go to that place,” Benes said.

Going digital: Some billboards are almost cinematic experiences. Benes noted a “spooky” interactive NYC billboard for the Netflix show “Resident Evil” that featured a zombie appearing to [climb up the building](#). While that represents the upper limits of how digital a billboard can be, everyday strategies such as adding QR codes to signage are more common, Benes said.

Google’s influence: The search giant’s DV 360 ads platform lets marketers [buy digital OOH ads](#) within the platform. “That’s pretty significant inclusion. It could bring a lot of potential advertiser demand for their inventory,” Benes said.

Top sectors: Benes, whose [report on OOH ad spending](#) just came out, said the following verticals are leveraging billboards the most.

- **Politics.** “That’s due to it being election year, but I feel like you’ve seen an unusual amount of that right now.”
- **Fintech and banking.** “They’re not among the largest categories per se, but they have seen tremendous increases over the recent year or two.”
- **Sports betting.** “I see so many Caesars outdoor ads.”
- **Crypto.** They were a big contributor last year, “but I think that money’s going to get pulled back.”

- **Travel.** “I still don't think it's quite where it was pre-COVID, but much better than it would have been 18 months ago.”

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