

Outdoor Advertising

By Roxanne Hawn

When you think about outdoor advertising, billboards probably pop into your mind first. “Out of home” advertising—as the industry is known more broadly—includes physical display ads that appear on benches and transit shelters, buses or trains, arenas and stadiums, mall kiosks and even at airports.

According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA), out-of-home advertising:

- Builds affinity at levels equal to television
- Presents ads that can't be delayed, skipped or turned off
- Combines reach and positive consumer emotion
- Reaches 99 percent of adults ages 18 to 64 each week
- Stimulates online activity better than other offline mediums

“We refer to it as an umbrella strategy to make other marketing more effective,” says Stewart Gandolf, MBA, CEO, of Healthcare Success, an agency specializing in marketing for medical businesses and healthcare organizations. “Online marketing and patient referrals are the grounds troops. Right? That’s the stuff you need. Billboards are the air war that supports what’s happening on the ground.”

That said, it is not a strategy for beginners. Gandolf warns, “I would not recommend outdoor for somebody who is trying to figure out how to spend \$20,000 this year on marketing. You should not go spend that money on a billboard. It does not make economic sense. That doesn’t mean it isn’t a good idea. It just makes more sense on a larger budget, in most cases.”

Even in smaller markets, a billboard can cost \$2,000–\$3,000 a month. In larger markets, that might jump to \$10,000 per month. However, if a practice includes two or more locations, it might be cost effective to place the outdoor ads between the locations and share the costs across all of the location budgets.

Tips for Success

Gandolf jokes that some of his biggest successes in veterinary consulting resulted in VCA purchasing the hospitals. He likes working in the veterinary space for a couple of reasons. One, veterinarians are such nice people.



Two, photos of pets draw immediate attention.

“Everybody who has a cat or a dog notices a cat or a dog on a billboard, so you immediately have their attention,” he says. “It’s a lot easier than working with an urologist. You can’t show things from urology. You can show a big cute kitty and a dog, and it’s very, very eye-catching.”

In addition to great pet photos, which are a must, Gandolf recommends:

- Keeping a billboard up for at least four months
- Including some sort of offer such as a new patient special (ask people to do something—call you, use a discount code, etc.)
- Using a vanity phone number that’s easy to remember and track (something like XXX-XXX-PETS)

In most cases, you want the billboard as close to your location as possible (no more than a couple of miles, especially if you’re only doing one placement). Of course, this is easier for veterinary hospitals that are right off major highways.

It also might make sense to plant your brand flag, so to speak, if you are the only AAHA-accredited hospital or Certified Cat Friendly Practice in many miles. If you’re in a saturated area, then you may need to tout other points of difference in your messaging. Examples might include:

- Open 24/7 for emergency care
- Regular vaccination or microchip events
- Same-day appointments available
- Discounts for newly adopted pets from local organizations
- Affordable annual wellness plans

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Mistakes to Avoid

Don't assume electronic billboards that rotate through ads from different companies are just as good as static billboards. Yes, they are less expensive, but your total exposure is much lower.

Don't let ego get in the way. "A lot of times, doctors do advertising like this that's self-gratifying," Gandolf explains, "so they want a big picture of themselves on the billboard."

Ask the Right Questions

Before you get bogged down in a big ad spend, the actual ad creative or location selection, Gandolf suggests asking foundational questions first. If you're working with an agency, they can help. If not, you want to settle on a few things before you call an outdoor advertising sales person.

"The question shouldn't be, 'What kind of billboard am I going to do?'" he says. "'What is my strategy, and how do billboards fit into that?'" is a better question."

Related Reading

The Value of Out-of-Home Advertising

<https://www.oaaa.org/OutOfHomeAdvertising/TheValueofOOH.aspx>

Outdoor Advertising Glossary

<https://www.oaaa.org/OutOfHomeAdvertising/OOHGlossaryofTerms.aspx>



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader's Digest, Natural Home, Bankrate.com, WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.

Q & A – Outdoor Advertising Basics

Lamar Advertising Company is one of the biggest outdoor ad placement companies. We asked Tommy Teepell, the company's chief marketing officer, to answer some questions about outdoor ads.

Q: How do you know if you're big enough to do outdoor ads (is it based on annual income, client base or geography)?

A: Out-of-home advertising is an excellent choice for businesses of all sizes, whether you're a new local business looking to get your name out there or a well-established brand. When determining your media mix, it depends on who you're trying to reach and what percentage of that target you need to reach.

Q: What are ballpark costs for different kinds of ads?

A: Depending on what market you're in, out-of-home advertising could be as low as \$20 per day.

To reach 1,000 people, outdoor ads deliver the same audience at a lower cost, compared to other competitive media such as TV, print and radio. The CPM (or cost to reach 1,000 people) is \$3–\$5 for out-of-home; \$7–\$25 for TV; \$13.50 for radio; \$14–\$32 for print; and \$10-plus for online.

Q: How long do ads typically stay up? For example, is 3–6 months long enough?

A: It depends on your campaign goals, but ads typically stay up for at least four weeks. For a branding campaign, a long-term, continuous presence in the marketplace will generate high consumer awareness and brand recognition—six to 12 months in the right location will work well. However, if you choose to saturate the market with multiple posters or transit ads, a shorter amount of time works well for promotional campaigns.

Q: How many placements are enough? For example, should you have X number of ads in an X-mile radius of the hospital?

A: That really depends on the audience that you are trying to reach. If you are targeting interstate drivers, one or two high-profile bulletins may suit your need. However, if you are targeting suburban areas where people live and play, a poster campaign (anywhere from 5–20 panels) may be more effective.

Q: Tips for success?

A: Know your audience and we can recommend the best locations to reach them. Our industry has invested in sophisticated audience measurement. Our data allows us to share with our clients how many people will see their ad and, more importantly, who they are (age, race, sex and income).