

Taking It To the Streets

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GoMobile's IKEA truck was outfitted with vinyl panels that made Seattle audiences believe there was a fleet of trucks advertising IKEA's catalog drop. At specific points the driver would drop the panels to reveal the hidden 3-D display inside. Photo courtesy of GoMobile Advertising.

Since its inception in the late 1990s, mobile advertising has driven away with the competition. Trucks, routes and campaigns are more customizable and creative than ever before.

You're at a stoplight. Out of your peripheral vision you see a stunning woman sitting on a luxurious sleek modern white couch surrounded by chic art deco items and upholstered furniture, reading an IKEA catalogue – in the back of a truck. No, you haven't lost your marbles. The next lane over just has the latest development in mobile outdoor advertising – 3-D displays inside a backlit transparent box.

IKEA chose to use GoMobile Advertising out of Seattle, Washington to advertise its 2007 catalogue release in a most unusual way. The mobile trucks were outfitted with a physical living room bolted to the box of the back-lit truck. Panels on three sides offered transparent views of the interior, which included everything from a couch to a lamp to artwork. Sometimes even a mannequin or an actual person was stationed on the sofa.



IKEA used this one-of-a-kind 3-D display inside a GoMobile Ad truck for its 2007 catalog launch. Photo courtesy of GoMobile Advertising.

"We actually had to make a raised subfloor to bolt and screw all the furniture into so that the display could be level with the window panels," explains Chris Schuler, president of

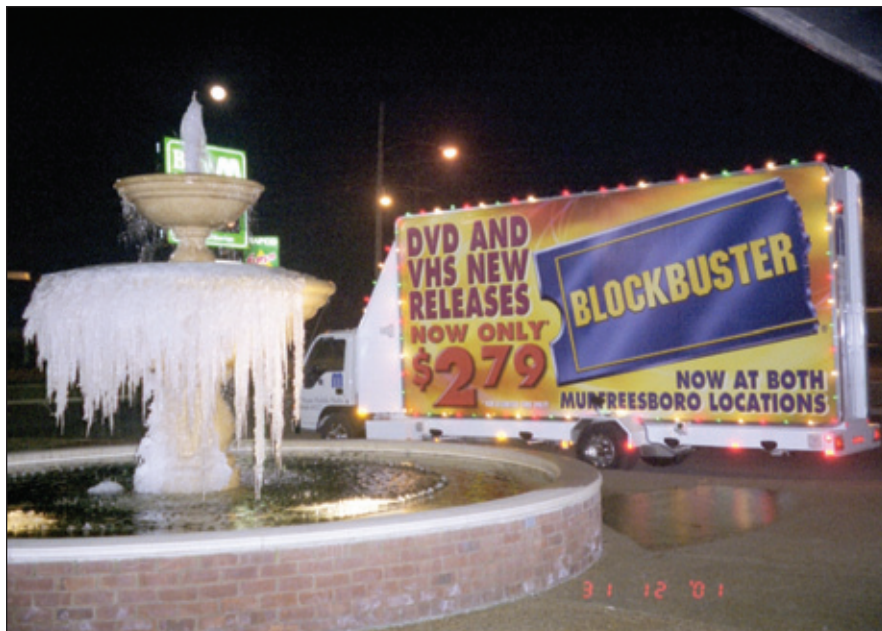
GoMobile Advertising. The trucks also were outfitted with vinyl advertisements that covered up the dramatic interior at times, leading viewers to believe a multitude of



Next to the Seattle sky line, this GoMobile truck wows drivers and passersby with its roving 3-D window display for IKEA. Photo courtesy of GoMobile Advertising.

trucks were hitting the road for IKEA. (In actuality, the company has just three trucks in its arsenal currently.) In addition, street teams were deployed with catalogues to disperse to passersby during scheduled stops along the route, and the trucks delivered a radio message for listeners who tuned in to a particular station. The radio spots used Ingemar, the heavily-accented spokesperson heard on the IKEA commercials. Those who heard the message and repeated the secret code at the IKEA store received a free gift. "We are always looking for unique ways to get our message across" noted IKEA owner Björn Bayley. "We are eager to see what kind of impact we can draw from such a unique medium."

GoMobile is already in the works on other 3-D campaigns, including a miniature drama stage to advertise Seattle's annual Nutcracker Ballet performances this holiday season and a mock climbing wall for an outdoor apparel company. "The IKEA campaign really created a feeding frenzy in our market," notes Schuler, adding that the "creative options are virtually limitless."



National advertisers can power up sales in a specific market with a customized route on a mobile unit. Photo courtesy of Metro Mobile Media.

The 3-D rear box concept by GoMobile Advertising is the latest innovation for the transit industry, which is now the second largest segment of outdoor advertising in terms of dollars spent, representing as much as 19% in 2003 according to the OAAA. Mobile advertising is seen by many as one of the hottest areas of

outdoor advertising for a variety of reasons:

1. No lease issues,
2. Fewer restrictions and regulations than with traditional billboards,
3. Portability of message to extremely targeted markets, and
4. Ability to create national campaigns with other mobile advertisers.

But who is really cut out for this industry? OAM highlights four burgeoning companies who are making their mark in this alternative advertising medium.

The Professor

With the buzz of the IKEA campaign, GoMobile Advertising is on fire. The company, which celebrated its one year anniversary this past September, began simply as a truck broker. The company became the exclusive distributor of a unique vehicle out of Kopec Creek, Florida. "We started selling these units, but we realized that none of us like to eat in a restaurant where the chef won't eat himself, so we felt we needed to be in the actual business ourselves,"



There is a plethora of potential local advertisers in the Las Vegas market for Big Traffic's 11-truck fleet. Photo courtesy of Big Traffic.



Big Traffic in Las Vegas uses patented external uplights for their displays rather than back-lit displays because of the high temperatures and the extended daylight hours in their market. Photo courtesy of Big Traffic.

recalls company president Schuler. Thus, GoMobile Advertising of Seattle was born.

Besides IKEA, innovative campaigns have included turning the vehicle into a cash-grabbing game for client Allied Cash. "Customers at the client's locations could go inside the truck and grab for money that was blowing around inside the vehicle. It was a tremendous branding campaign," says Schuler. Another campaign turned the vehicle into a transparent ambulance with a gurney and life support machines to promote an anti-smoking message.

On the brokering side, the company has sold 40-plus vehicles – at \$99,000 a unit – while managing advertising sales for three vehicles in their home market. The hand-crafted aluminum trucks take 12 weeks to build and have a 7-1/2 foot ceiling clearance in the back to provide ample space for living showrooms. The trucks also are equipped with GPS tracking, external audio capabilities, and solar-powered ceiling fans in the back to cut down on the excess heat buildup some markets face.

GoMobile makes sure they are careful about who enters this business. "We're excited as we bring more affiliates into the market, but we have an opportunity and a responsibility as to how this advertising medium is accepted by the public at large. We could screw that up with

we're not careful," cautions Schuler.

For its part, GoMobile seeks to educate potential affiliates as much as possible, although affiliates are not required to use any of their supplementary material and training. "We do for them, what no one did for us," explains Schuler. The company provides frequent marketing updates and profiles of successful campaigns, pre-written media and sales kits, driver training manuals, and a website that can be rebranded for each new affiliate. Additionally, each affiliate receives exclusivity in their county. Plus, they receive fair warning from Schuler himself. "It's not a money machine. The sales cycle is a good three to six months, and meanwhile you've got approximately \$5000 per month in costs for the truck lease, fuel, a driver, insurance, etc. We tell people they need at least \$50,000 to \$60,000 in working capital to get started."

The warnings haven't stopped some. Sam Assmann, of Mobile Billboards of San Diego, has four trucks (the most of any GoMobile affiliate) and says he has had tremen-



To generate excitement for the NBA Playoffs, Mobile Ad Group took this back-lit display of Shaquille O'Neal right next to America Airlines Stadium in Miami, Florida. Photo courtesy of Mobile Ad Group.

dous success with the product and its creative capabilities. "We couldn't ask for better support from those guys."

"Our goal was to sell 20 units to affiliates this year. I guess we under-projected that one," laughs Schuler. If he and his staff keep dreaming up ways to keep mobile advertising fresh and innovative, he'll be laughing for a long time.

The Maverick

Sam Kaplan got his start in outdoor advertising selling space on coffee carts around Manhattan. Since then he hasn't stopped churning his wheels in this business, and stirring up a few hornet's nests along the way.

As of press time, Kaplan's Mobile Ad Group was facing a court-ordered injunction in Brownsville/Harlingen, Texas where one of his trucks was running a hard-hitting politically charged campaign regarding the alleged negligence of a local health-care company in the death of a two-year-old child. "It's a true freedom of speech case," says Kaplan, "but what makes it a little different is the aspect of the mobility of the message. If this child's image and the questions the message raises was on a stationary billboard along the interstate, you would see it and register the comments. But because we're mobile, we can take the message right to the people to whom it matters most. We can route the truck right around the hospital so that the doctors and patients and hospital administrators had to be reminded of the case. That's what the problem is."

This isn't the first time Kaplan has taken on government restrictions and adversity. Following 9/11 he requested that the restrictions on mobile advertising within New York City be lifted briefly so that mobile trucks could travel with the Ready Set Go homeland security message that was posted on outdoor advertising around the country.

"As I was visiting with Congressman Nadler in his office, I had about five trucks circling outside so he could see them. During my visit, one got ticketed and towed. That's the way it is," Kaplan accedes.

To help in these legislative and courtroom efforts, Kaplan formed the Mobile Action Group, a political action committee for mobile billboard companies.

"Mobile outdoor is just amazing in its ability to affect people," he says, describing the campaign his company conducted in Texas for the opponent of Texas governor Rick Perry. "We followed his campaign bus with our ad that brought up the Enron scandal and the concerns about higher insurance rates, and it forced them to change their strategy. We spoiled their game plan. That's when you know advertising is working."

But Mobile Ad Group isn't always so politically charged. The company has conducted campaigns for brands including Perrier and Coca-Cola. This past spring the company took a back-lit truck directly into the parking lot of American Airlines Stadium in Miami during the NBA Play-offs. "That was pretty significant because up until that point Fox Sports had never done mobile outdoor, believing it was a little lower level than they wanted to be. But when they saw how charged the atmosphere got when we drove the truck right into the stadium lot, they were believers."

The Advocate

Las Vegas native Marla Letizia walked out of her television broadcast career at age 28 with the highest recognition in the marketplace at the time she left. Why? To be a full-time mom. "I just couldn't leave my baby alone with a nanny to go away and be a television star every day. It was a very spiritual decision for me. I had a talk with myself and God, made a



With its targetability, a mobile ad can go almost anywhere the advertiser wants, in order to get the message to the right group of people. Here a Metro Mobile Media unit drives through the parking lot of a stadium prior to a racing event in North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Metro Mobile Media.

promise to stay home and raise my children and had faith that when my youngest went off to college there'd be something fabulous waiting for

me," says Letizia, with just the right amount of pep and articulation to her story that you'd imagine from a former broadcaster.



Metro Mobile Media's full-color panels offer crisp, clean graphics wherever advertisers want to take them. Photo courtesy of Metro Mobile Media.

"What I didn't realize was that at the end of 18 years, I wouldn't be 28 anymore. For some reason, I thought I'd still be welcomed back into the on-air news industry. But you just can't make a reentry like that," she admits.

While she was trusting that the right second career would present itself, her husband Tom was managing the first election campaign for Oscar Goodman, Las Vegas' current mayor. When he came home and told her he'd just spent campaign money on a 10' x 20' mobile billboard advertisement, Letizia promptly responded, "Are you crazy? That's the worst idea I've ever heard. Oscar is going to be so mad when he hears how you're spending his advertising dollars. Clearly I ate my words."

In October 2000, following a challenge by her husband, Letizia decided mobile advertising was the path she should take. "In one night I really had seen into the future 20 years and had a plan for how to get there," says Letizia. She opened the business January 2, 2001 as Mobile Billboards of Las Vegas, and, according to

Letizia, everything outlined in her initial six-hour vision has really come to pass.

Starting with one truck, Letizia has grown the fleet to 11 and plans to have 25 in the Las Vegas market within the next few years. She also has a grassroots plan for going national and worldwide and is in discussions with representatives from South America currently. In response to the anticipated growth in her company outside the Las Vegas market, Letizia changed the company name to Big Traffic Mobile Billboards Worldwide.

Early on in the business, Letizia chose to market time slots, rather than space, and can accommodate up to three different clients on her trucks during different parts of a 24-hour cycle. "Any other company in this country would have to have 33 trucks to do what we do with 11," she says. Routes are customized to the client, and all four vinyl panels are dedicated to an individual client during their time slot.

While she has great respect for others in the business who run their

company with respect and integrity, she doesn't mince words when it comes to operators she feels have less than ethical operations and intentions. "We have one goal, and that is to raise the bar of the industry as a whole.

"I think people who associate with others throughout the industry fear their own capital investment. It takes a lot of guts and fortitude to step up to the plate everyday, employ over 30 people, make payments on 11 trucks, and to have the facility we have. The unethical brokers in the industry are really destroying it."

And rather than facing regulation difficulties in her community, Letizia is actually leading the charge for the first county regulation regarding mobile advertising. "There's just so much riff-raff out there," she says, advocating for a licensing regulation to keep out-of-state trucks from driving into the city to advertise for a few days during a particular convention. "A couple of companies come in for three days, take \$30,000 to \$50,000 out of the marketplace, and then leave. They don't have a business license; they don't have any right to really be in this community. They're not giving back, and that's not right."

The Sergeant

"I'd always been in love with billboards," says Don McMahon. "When I saw the billboard you can take home with you I fell in love with it."

After a career in traditional outdoor that took him from Adams Outdoor to Lamar Advertising of Nashville, McMahon took the plunge and decided to start his own business while in his early 50s. He sensed mobile billboards – with the power of a billboard combined with greater targetability and mobility – was the future. McMahon gave birth to Metro Mobile Media of Nashville, Tennessee in 2001, just in time to be hit by the economic plunge with 9/11.

"But I kept at it because I really thought it was a sound business plan," he explains. Five years later, and now relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina, Metro Mobile Media is a leader in its market and deploys 12 vehicles throughout the country, "wherever clients tell us they need to be."

McMahon says he had to get used to the idea of mobility. "The surprise to me is that we really do go everywhere," he says. "We're literally billboards without borders."

He has sent trucks to Florida, Wisconsin, Texas, Missouri – all sent out from his home base of Charlotte. "In a moment's notice we can be deployed, like a military unit."

McMahon uses Formetco's truck, a 30-sheet poster display mounted on a flat-bed chassis of an Isuzu NPR cab-over vehicle. He's seen a host of advertising on his trucks, a real mixed-bag. "We've advertised for the circus and advertised for PETA against the circus, the United Way, political campaigns, everything. What's nice is that I will sell them a week. They may pay a little more for



When back-lit trucks light up the night, they draw attention wherever they travel, which encourages advertisers -- like the new CW -- to turn to them in their media mix. Photo courtesy of GoMobile Advertising.

five days or seven days but it can be precisely what the advertiser needs and they don't feel like they're wasting any of their advertising dollars," he notes -- although he admits his training background in traditional sales makes him want to work harder for longer-term contracts.

Is he worried about the increase in competitive businesses? Not really. McMahon says he has strong working relationships with larger companies like Fairway Outdoor and Lamar who are dipping their toes into the mobile billboard arena. "I only hope there's not too many bad operators going into the business. Otherwise, I think it's a big swimming pool with a lot of room for everybody. Competition is generally good because it puts more salespeople out there telling the story of mobile advertising," says McMahon. "There's always opportunity for spillover. What is it that they say? A rising tide raises all ships. My fleet is clean and I'm doing a good job, so I feel secure."

What is the funniest aspect of the business for him? "The first thing I have to teach every driver is that we always slow down at caution lights. The intersection is our money shot."



GoMobile's open-box units are outfitted with panels that raise and lower to extend the creativity and punch of each 3-D campaign. Courtesy of GoMobile Advertising.