

HOW TO USE DIGITAL BILLBOARDS EFFECTIVELY

Get Attention, Drive Sales,
and Make Your Marketing Dollars Work Harder



Chapter 1

Brand-Focused Advertising in a Performance-First Marketing World

- **Mention "billboards" to most small and medium business owners and marketers and you'll get a look of confusion.**

Many people assume billboards are outdated. Or only for the big corporations running national advertising campaigns. They're believed to be costly - not the most efficient use of sparse marketing dollars. Besides, everyone's online today, right? So why bother with an offline medium?

Fortunately for you, if your competitors buy into these assumptions, digital billboards can become your secret weapon.

In this ebook, we'll lay out the argument for billboards; describe how they impact your sales, brand awareness, and digital marketing performance; and show you how to deploy digital billboards easily and cost-effectively.

So let's jump in...

Online marketing is losing effectiveness – while getting more costly

In 2020, US advertisers spent \$121 billion on internet advertising. To test the effectiveness of online advertising, one group of researchers from the Advertising Research Foundation decided to try an experiment: they created a blank ad, and ran it against standard banner and social media ads online.

Their findings? The blank ad had a click-through rate that was 60% better than Facebook ads and double that of banner ads. The team concluded that 44% of all banner ad clicks are mistakes. Meanwhile, only 14% of banner ads are actually noticed - meaning that \$51.6 billion of the \$60 billion spent in 2019 was effectively wasted!¹

In another example, a team working with Ebay convinced executives to turn off all Google keyword advertising (branded and unbranded) to see what effect it would have on sales. The result? A drop of only 0.5%. Where they thought they were spending a dollar to make \$1.50, instead, they were losing \$0.60. Ebay proceeded to turn off \$100 million in annual ad spend.²

As if this weren't enough, online ad costs have skyrocketed. Check out these stats:

- **Meta's (Facebook's) cost-per-thousand-impressions (CPMs) increased by 61% year-over-year - reaching an average CPM of \$17.60**
- **TikTok's CPMs jumped 185%, peaking at \$9.40**
- **Google's programmatic display CPMs increased by 75% in that same time, while search ad cost-per-clicks (CPCs) are up 14%**
- **Amazon's sponsored products CPCs are up 14% as well³**



¹Andrew Davis, "Does Advertising Really Work? The curious case of the blank ad! (Part 1)," [YouTube](#), 2021.

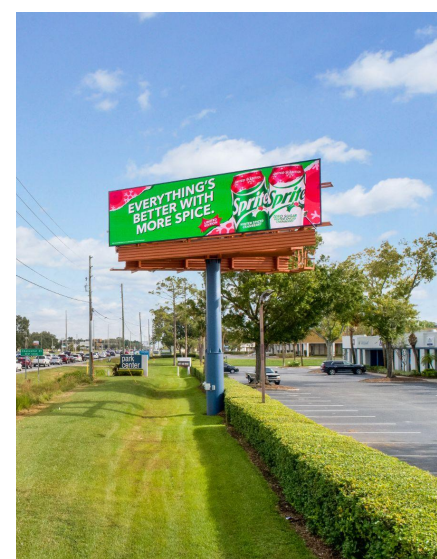
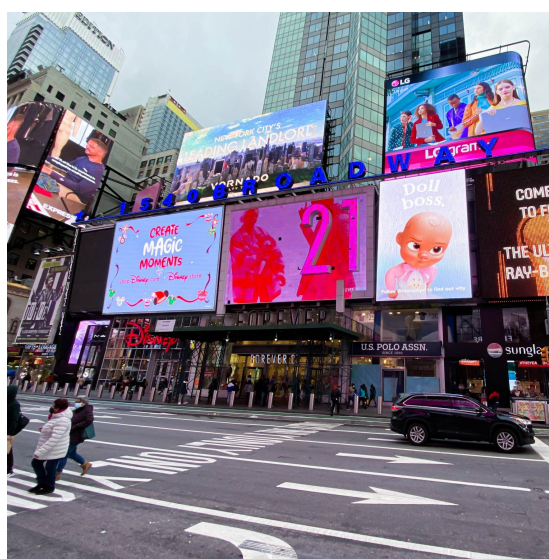
²Andrew Davis, "Does Advertising Really Work? How one company saved \$100 MM dollars on keyword ads! (Part 2)," [YouTube](#), 2021.

³Toby Codrington, "The price of digital ads have skyrocketed - here's how to counteract it," [The Drum](#), 2022.

Organic social media isn't much help in alleviating this cost pressure. It's widely recognized that organic reach has dropped significantly in recent years as platforms have prioritized a pay-for-play model. The average reach for an organic post on a Facebook Page, for example, is only about 5.2%.⁴

Part of what's driving these increasing costs are shifts in privacy policies. Apple's iOS 14 updates give consumers the option to opt out of being tracked. Many people have turned to ad blocking applications to minimize the ads they're exposed to online. And even though Google's threat to remove 3rd-party cookies has been delayed until at least 2024, marketers know it's coming and are scrambling to find alternative ways to manage data.

Don't take all this data the wrong way - of course you need to be online, investing in digital channels to get in front of your target audience in as many ways as you can. But as online alarm bells ring, it's also time to step back and consider the most effective way to allocate your marketing budget to boost your online performance.



⁴Katie Sehl, "Organic Reach is in Decline - Here's What You Can Do About It," Hootsuite, 2021.

Consumer behavior is shifting

Shifting consumer behavior is only facilitating the complications of online marketing. After years of being locked down during the pandemic, people are out and about, and are being intentional about that.

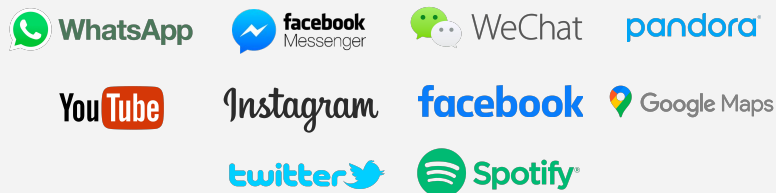
Here are some common trends researchers have found:

- **74% of people are concerned with data privacy and use of personal information for online ad targeting**
- **62% frequently skip online ads due to digital device burnout**
- **39% are actively trying to spend less time on their phones, computers, TVs, and other digital devices⁵**

How people spend their time online is also telling.

Americans average 7 hours a day online - half via computer and half via mobile device. Of that time spent online, 92% of people stream TV, 81% play video games (averaging 01:27 per day), 45% stream music (another 01:56 a day), and 24% listen to podcasts (0:58 a day). Another 02:14 is spent on social media.⁶

Of their 3.5 hours a day on their phones, 90% of that time is spent in apps versus only 10% in internet browsers.⁷ Social, photo, and video apps dominated that time, accounting for 7 out of every 10 minutes spent on mobile devices.⁸ The 2018 top-ten list of apps by time spent (globally) includes:



For comparison, in the most-viewed gaming app (over the same period), users spent only 5% of the time spent in WhatsApp.⁹ While the mainstream argument is that "this is where the people are, so we should advertise there," there's a counterpoint.

⁵"2022 Trends in OOH," OAAA/The Harris Poll, 2021.

⁶Rebecca Moody, "Screen Time Statistics: Average Screen Time in US vs. the Rest of the World," Comparitech, 2022.

⁷Yoram Wurmser, "The Majority of Americans' Mobile Time Spent Takes Place in Apps," eMarketer, 2020.

⁸Robert Hart, "Record 3.8 Trillion Hours Spent On Mobile Apps in 2021 In Another Blockbuster Year for Digital Economy," Forbes, 2022.

⁹Jeff Desjardins, "These are the apps we spend the most time using," World Economic Forum/Visual Capitalist, 2018. Despite the lower time spent, gaming apps (along with a select few other high performing apps) attracted 68% of all dollars spent in-app (see previous citation).

The trends are clear: people spend most of their time online for entertainment purposes.

And when they're being entertained, they don't like to be interrupted. From skipping to ignoring to opting out, they're intentionally dodging advertising when they're online. (Audio/podcasts might be the only silver lining here: ads can't be skipped or opted out of, and the medium is growing in popularity.)

So what's the answer to an increasingly hostile online advertising world?

The answer to digital frustration: meeting **consumers in the real world**

If many consumers are burned out online, the clearest answer is to show up where people are both happier and trying to stay present: the real world.

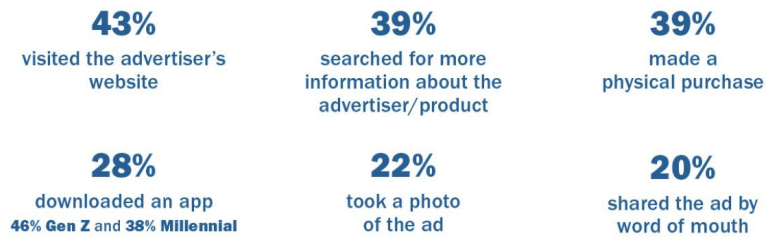
Digital billboards let you do this in shockingly effective ways:

- **Amongst adult consumers in cities with a population of over 1 million, 64% of people report noticing out-of-home (OOH) ads more than before the pandemic**
- **67% of Gen Z and Millennials have seen OOH ads posted on social media**
- **77% recently engaged with OOH ads**
- **50% of OOH ad viewers made a physical purchase following ad exposure¹⁰**

Other common reactions to billboards include visiting an advertiser's physical store or website, downloading an app, and researching more information about the advertiser.

¹⁰"Top 2022 OOH Trends Report," OAAA/The Harris Poll, 2021.

Among those **who engaged**:



Source: The Harris Poll

Digital billboards can positively impact your business in two broad ways: first, as a bottom-of-the-funnel medium that drives sales (recent advances in technology, including more sophistication in targeting and tracking, brings digital billboards nearly to the level of online media in terms of measuring performance).

And second, as a top-of-the-funnel brand awareness medium. Why care about brand awareness in a world obsessed with online performance marketing?

In a quote from Nielsen, the data and analytics Company, researchers had this to say:

"Brands that ignore upper-funnel marketing often see failure.... Building your brand drives direct sales impact and improves the efficacy of your activation efforts."¹¹

Translation: if all you're doing is focusing on performance marketing online, you're trapped in a perpetual cycle of spending to get more sales. Mix in some brand awareness advertising, and you secure your future. And, it just so happens that digital billboards are an excellent way to generate brand awareness.

They reach people when they're on the move. They can't be skipped, blocked, or ignored. And they're high impact - making a splash and grabbing attention. But, as with all media, they work best when integrated into an omnichannel marketing campaign. We'll spend the rest of this ebook talking about how to do just that.

¹¹"Brand Resonance Report," Nielsen, 2021.

Chapter 2

Omnichannel Marketing Doesn't Have to Be Complicated or Costly

"Omnichannel" **sounds complex**, but it doesn't have to be. It's simply about showing up wherever your audience is and getting in front of them in multiple ways to catch their attention. With that out of the way, let's jump in.

Why do you need **multiple channels** in your marketing?

The general rule of thumb is that consumers need to see your messaging at least 7 times before they're ready to buy from you. Don't worry about the exact number; what's more important is that people see you show up in multiple contexts throughout their day.

The human brain is very good at tuning out information it decides is not a high priority. But subliminal messaging can still impact a person over time. Meaning that multiple exposures to your message will increase the chance that a consumer will recall your brand when they have a need for your product.

In addition to recall, showing up over and over again gives your prospects the impression that you're everywhere - and if you're everywhere, you must be very successful at delivering the solution they are looking for. This subtle leadership play is powerful social proof for your brand.

All of these advantages are great - but they only work if you get this one thing right...



Consistent messaging is **everything**

If someone sees two of your messages - in any media, online or off - and can't immediately tell that they're both from you, you lose any value you might have gotten from having multiple media formats all running at the same time. There's a subtle line to pay attention to here - you don't necessarily want every single message to look exactly the same. Different styles, formats, and creative work better in different media. And by switching things up, you keep your creative fresh and avoid advertising fatigue.

But given that caveat, you do want your overarching message to be the same (along with branded components, like colors and fonts). This consistency will reinforce your communications and familiarize your audience with your brand.

And yes - this consistency needs to exist even between your online and offline media.

The power of mixing **offline** and **online**

Remember when we said earlier that online advertising is a pretty rough space to perform well in right now? Well, you should definitely keep doing what you're doing online. Consumers may be burned out online, but that's still where they're spending their time. What you need to do, though, is tie in offline media, like digital billboards, with your online efforts.

What Type of Information Are US Internet Users More Likely to Look for on Their Smartphones Instead of Speaking to a Store Associate?

% of respondents, March 2019



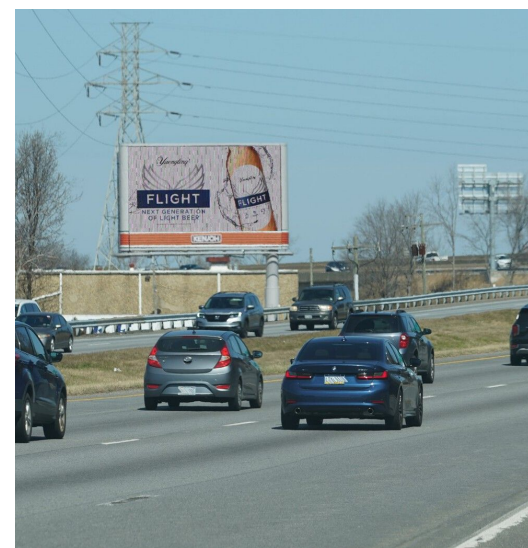
Note: ages 18+

Source: RetailMeNot survey conducted by Kelton Global, April 30, 2019

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While most of consumers' time spent online is entertainment-related (making advertising to them during that time largely a waste), certain behaviors around online shopping are picking up steam. **Customers are increasingly using their phones while shopping in-store:** 69% of shoppers report that they would look at online reviews before approaching a store associate. Another 58% would compare other products or services online to what they're shopping for in-store.



A further **74% of shoppers** reported using the retailer's app while in-store - primarily to check for discounts or deals or to research prices.¹²

In another trend, social shopping, **where the entire research and purchasing process is completed through a social media channel, is growing rapidly.** The practice, worth some \$475 billion in 2020, is expected to grow at nearly 30% per year through the rest of the decade - hitting \$3.37 trillion by 2028. Social shopping allows users to buy straight from their feeds. It also provides user-generated social proof. It brings together the worlds of ecommerce, social media, and interactive content.¹³

What Actions Do US Digital Buyers Take When Using a Retailer's Mobile App While in Its Store? May 2018

% of respondents

Every time I shop

3%

Most of the time

15%

Never

27%

Sometimes

56%

Frequency of using retailer's mobile app

Actions taken

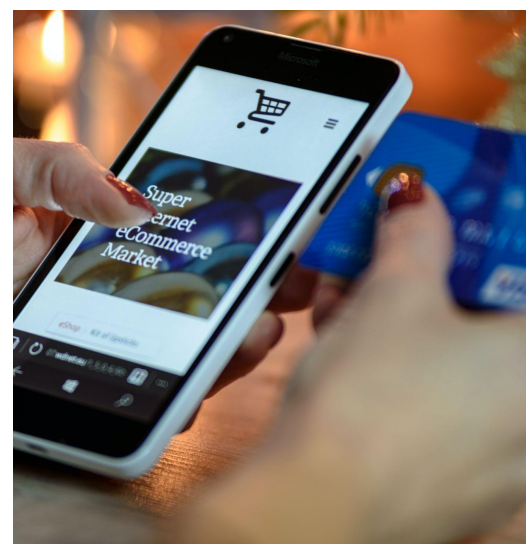
Check promotional offers/ discounts offered just to me	66%
Check sales and promotions available to everyone	61%
Check prices	57%
Research products	36%
Navigate the store	15%
Order and pay for a product	14%

Note: ages 15-74; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: RIS News, "Retail 2025 Shopper Study: The Future of Retail Is Already Here" sponsored by Infosys, LG and Radial, Aug 30, 2018

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www.eMarketer.com

Whether your business is at the stage of implementing these exact digital tactics or not, the point is that there are still precise online experiences shoppers are seeking with brands. Adding digital billboards to your marketing mix doesn't seek to replace your online presence: it complements and amplifies what you're doing online. In our next chapter, we'll look at just how it does that.



¹²Lucy Koch, "Two-Thirds of Shoppers Check Phones In-Store for Product Information, Skipping Store Associates," eMarketer, 2019.

¹³Geri Mileva, "The State of Social Shopping in 2023," Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022.

Chapter 3

How Billboards Impact Your Digital Marketing

- Billboards can have a range of positive impacts on your online marketing efforts, from boosting engagement and recall to increasing conversions and lowering advertising costs.

Deployed correctly, digital billboards will help compensate for weaker online advertising performance. Together, online and offline efforts will work synergistically to improve brand recognition and grow sales.

Billboards and Search Engine Optimization

Billboards boost online searches for your products and services, website, and news about your brand.

As touched on earlier, amongst those who engaged with billboards, 43% visited the advertiser's website, 39% searched online for more information, and 28% downloaded an app (rising to 46% and 38% of Gen Z and Millennials, respectively).¹⁴

Besides the direct traffic to websites and apps, this research implies a significant correlation between billboards and branded or product-based online searches. Because these types of searches show a high intent to purchase, they are the most valuable kind for directly making sales or establishing long term relationships with prospects through your content.

In a study of how 6 different advertising platforms drive people to take online actions, researchers found that billboards generate more search engine activity than all of the other platforms, except for TV (yet TV has vastly higher costs and a steadily shrinking viewership). It also tied TV as the leading medium to drive searches on both social media and video networks (like YouTube and Tiktok).¹⁵



¹⁴"2022 Trends in OOH," OAAA/The Harris Poll, 2021.

¹⁵"Consumer Insights: OOH and Online Activation," OAAA/Comscore, 2022.

There are a couple of ways you can tie your SEO strategy and billboards together:

Make sure your branding is front and center on your boards, and that when someone searches for your name they can actually find your website within the top few rankings on the main search engines. That way, you'll see an increase in branded search terms. (And a higher click-through rate on those terms.)

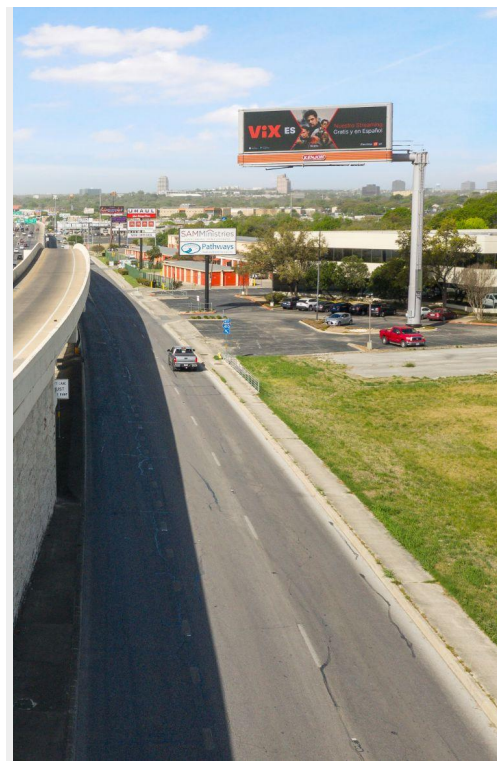
If you have some keywords you rank well for that competitors don't, consider using them in your billboard messaging along with your branding. If someone doesn't remember your name but does recall your messaging, they can search for that phrase and find you. Just make sure you're not accidentally pointing them to a competitor!

In a related tactic, if you beat out competitors in a "(category) near me" style search (for example, "plumbers near me," "car wash near me," etc.), let your billboard creative state your category loud and clear - try something like "Colorado's #1 emergency plumber" (once again, only if you accurately fit that description and rank for that phrase!).

If you have a unique advantage that none of your competitors have, whether that's an idea or approach to doing something, or a unique product feature, and can call that out with a phrase that currently has no search traffic for either you or your competitors, try using that phrase on your billboards. To do this effectively, you'll need to create some content on your website that will rank for that phrase. If your branding is clear on your boards, then you're effectively telling people to search for this new, un-looked for search term, with your brand name. You'll create a new search category on the search engines for something that you alone specialize in.

(To read more about these ideas, visit our blog post about billboards and SEO at this link:

<https://www.blipbillboards.com/blog/how-digital-billboard-advertising-can-help-boost-your-seo-efforts/>.)



Billboards and Social Media

Just like billboards get people to look for you online, they also stimulate conversations on social media. Amongst younger generations, 67% report having seen a billboard ad re-posted on social media, and over 80% of them would reshare an ad that gets their attention.¹⁶

In the OAAA/Comcast study cited above, billboards beat every other media platform (including TV) for driving people to post on social media and video network sites.

Another study found that billboards increase reach on social media by up to 203%¹⁷

Here are some ideas to integrate social media and billboards:

- **Similar to the SEO tactics described above, choose a hashtag phrase that is unique to your brand. Create social media content using the hashtag, then promote the hashtag on billboards to drive traffic online.**
- **Launch a contest on social media to stimulate user-generated content. Promote the contest on your billboards. Make sure your branding is clear so people can find you online.**
- **Cross-post between your social and outdoor media. Encourage your followers near your billboard locations to take pictures of your billboard and post it online, tagging you. This gets your content in front of close families and friends of your most engaged audience, creating a clear path to new, warm leads. Your appearance on billboards will also lend you credibility to social media users, who will perceive your brand as being successful, established, and a leader in your industry (all things associated with advertisers in most forms of broadcast media, like billboards).**
- **For both integrating with social media and search engine optimization, make sure you use creative on your billboards that inspires curiosity and grabs attention. Curiosity will be the leading factor that motivates someone to go online to look for your website, product reviews, or social media accounts.**

¹⁶"2022 Trends in OOH," OAAA/The Harris Poll, 2021.

¹⁷"Why OOH Digital Billboard Advertising Study," OAAA/USA TouchPoints, 2012.

Billboards and Online Paid Advertising

The primary advantage of combining billboards with paid ads online is greater recall at a lower cost. This goes back to our earlier point about the need to show up in front of your audience multiple times to drive actions. When someone has seen your billboard recently, even if they didn't look closely or go online to find out more, it increases the chances that they'll notice your online ads - the same ones that, without the exposure to your billboard, they would have ignored. Seeing your ads for the second or third time might be what it takes to trigger a click.

That's exactly what one company did when they wanted to test a campaign of just Facebook ads versus a blended campaign of billboards and Facebook ads.

To promote free downloads of their ebook, they launched two campaigns on the opposite side of the country (to avoid any chance of the control audience seeing the billboards for the test audience). They spent \$2,213.79 on their blended campaign and \$480.96 on their Facebook-only campaign (for a grand total of less than \$2,700 - an incredibly affordable campaign budget).

The results blew them away:

First, they found that it was 72.2% LESS expensive to reach the audience on Facebook and Instagram who saw billboards first. Once they adjusted this to include the cost of the billboards, they found their blended CPM (the merged cost-per-thousand impressions for the billboards-and-Facebook campaign) was \$2.32; comparatively, the CPMs of the Facebook ads alone was \$15.82. Put another way, this meant that to get the same number of impressions from a Facebook-only campaign, they would have had to spend \$15,095 - a whopping 6.81x more than they actually did!

They determined that splitting your ad budget 50% Facebook/Instagram and 50% billboards would unlock an increased 30-55% Return On Ad Spend (ROAS). Basically, your ad dollars will work 30-55% harder for you without increasing your budget. In a measure of how well a user recalled their ad, the blended campaign was twice as memorable as the Facebook-only campaign. When comparing cost-per-click, those who were not exposed to billboards clicked on the Facebook ads more, but the cost-per-click (CPC) was more than twice as high. Meaning that, once again, the blended campaign made the ad dollars work harder.

Finally, the Facebook ads were videos, so the team wanted to check whether people were actually getting something from engaging with the ads (i.e., that they were watching the video). The audience exposed to billboards was 17% more likely to complete the video than those who weren't, meaning they got more value from the ad campaign.¹⁸

¹⁸"How to Beat Facebook with Billboards: The Playbook," Onescreen.ai, 2021.

To test out a similar strategy for yourself, here's what you'll need to do:

Pick two locations with similarly sized populations (to get accurate results).
The control location should be far enough away from the test location so that there's no overlap. Pick some billboards in one of those locations and advertise an offer that requires an action (a download, signup, etcetera).

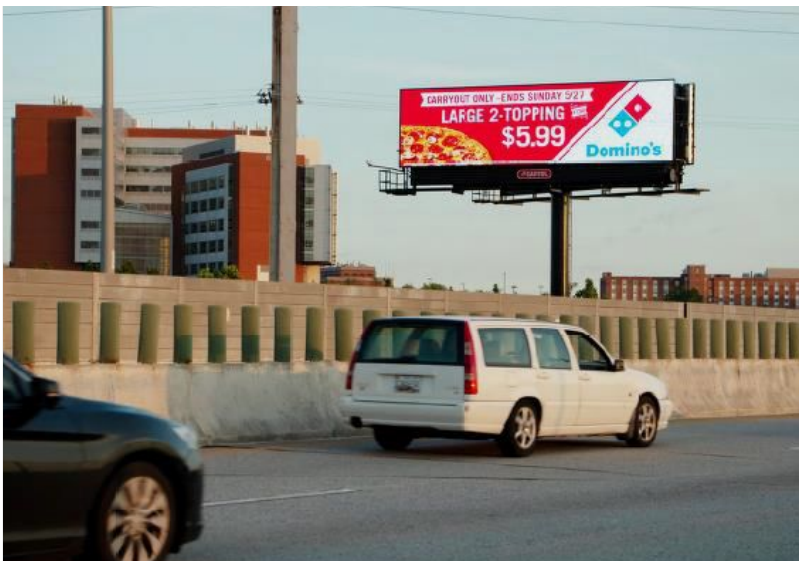
Set up a geofencing campaign within Facebook for the locations of your billboards. Facebook will collect Mobile Ad IDs (MAIDs) from people who drive past the billboard and target them with an ad.

Take the audience generated by this geofencing campaign and plug it into your Facebook Ads Manager to deploy your ads. Optimize for the Estimated Ad Recall Lift campaign goal to tell Facebook to show the ads to people most likely to remember seeing them. If you can update your audience every 24 hours, it ensures the campaign is as close to real time as possible.

Create a Lookalike audience from your first audience in the location where you're running your control campaign.

Send the same creative to both audiences (your Facebook-only control audience and the blended test audience), then start measuring for differences in response rates and overall performance.

Good luck on your campaign!



Chapter 4

Tying It All Together

Digital billboards offer tremendous power to grow your brand, increase sales, and amplify the rest of your marketing - if used correctly.

To do so, forget about the standard, stale, boring billboard advertising that is both common and disconnected from the rest of the marketing mix. Instead, using this guide as a roadmap, get creative. Have some fun with designing a campaign that is attention-getting and arouses curiosity, then tie that into everything else you're doing online.

Blip helps you do this by making the process of creating, deploying, and buying digital billboards easy, affordable, and low-risk. Once you join our platform, it's as simple as choosing your locations, picking a daily budget, optimizing for time of day, and uploading your creative (or asking us to help you design your board!).

And if you have questions about how to make billboards work with the rest of your marketing, feel free to reach out. We'd be happy to help brainstorm some ideas.

Reach out to us here: <https://www.blipbillboards.com/contact/>.

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