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Your client chatting at the gas pump

Audio messages when you yank out the nozzle

By Kathy Prentice

A computer chip embedded in gasoline pump handles delivers a new avenue for advertisers to reach consumers as they fill 'em up.

Audio ads are looped with trivia and information on gas-giveaways. The whole thing is triggered when the pump handle is tipped into the fueling position.

To find out how to get your client's message delivered directly to consumers while they wait at the pump, read on.

This is one in a Media Life series on buying the new out-of-home venues. They appear weekly.

Fast Facts

What

Audio ads broadcast to consumers as they fill their gas tanks.

Who

DirectCast Network, headquartered in Midland, Mich.



How it works

Audio ads are installed on gas station pump nozzles and play when customers place the nozzles in their fuel tanks. DirectCast delivers the Fueling Talker through its PumpRadio Network.

Fueling Talker is a control panel that fits any fuel nozzle, says executive vice president and inventor Jim Ferguson. The audio message is a mix of advertisements, information and entertainment, says Stacy Pastein, vice president of business development.

The audio presentation is two minutes long. Each message is 15 to 20 seconds, interspersed with trivia games and other content. The average fill-up takes three minutes. There are six 15- or 20-second ad spots on each installation. The first and last spot are provided to the gas station operators to advertise their point-of-purchase merchandise. A sample loop looks like this:

- Convenience store/gas station promo lasting 10 seconds
- Ad No. 1 at 15 seconds
- Entertainment for 10 seconds
- Ad No. 2 at 20 seconds
- Entertainment for 10 seconds
- Ad No.3 at 15 seconds
- Ad No. 4 at 20 seconds
- Entertainment for 10 seconds
- Convenience store/gas station promo lasting 10 seconds

Advertisers include both large companies seeking to brand their products and smaller local businesses targeting local consumers. "Like any advertising it's only going to be as effective as it is in value to the consumer," Pastein says. "Trying to get the consumer to go someplace or try something." "For example, a restaurant has offered a free appetizer and auto dealers have had special incentives for test drives," Ferguson says. "And for bigger-ticket items, just try and keep the name out in front of them."

Messages can be specific to the location. Creative for local advertisers can be directional. Messages can be updated. "We recommend a change every month," Ferguson says. Creative is provided by advertiser, but PumpRadio will work with small businesses that don't have an agency. Entertainment and information filler includes trivia programs and the audio serial "Chicken Man."

A gas give-away program is tied to the gas station/convenience store's ads. Five to 10 winners are randomly selected at each gas station monthly. A total of \$100 worth of gas is awarded each month.

Customers have options for language selection, Ferguson says. For instance, in Spanish or Arabic speaking neighborhoods, consumers will have a choice of English or the locale's second language. Volume control can lower the sound level, but not completely mute it.

Advertisers can cherry pick locations. National and regional companies can buy entire markets or networks while local advertisers can target their demographic by neighborhood, Ferguson says.

Markets

Trials were in Detroit, Lansing, West Palm Beach and Dallas. A spring rollout is planned in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco and additional markets in Florida, Texas and California.

How measured?

A device attached to the nozzle provides a count of impressions. Gas receipts are also used to confirm figures. An average of 11,640 impressions are delivered per location monthly, according to PumpRadio Network studies.

Research

Gas stations' in-store product sales of PumpRadio advertised items have increased 15 to 400 percent, according to a study conducted by DirectCast at stations in Michigan markets. Specifically, Total Petroleum in Midland reported a 23 percent increase in Coca-Cola sold in two liter bottles tied to a PumpRadio promotion. A 16 percent increase in Gatorade sales in conjunction with an ad campaign was also reported. Bread sales at a chain of 39 convenience stores increased 245 percent, according to statistics supplied by DirectCast. Cappuccino sales increased 300 percent over a two-month trial period.

Americans fill their gas tanks an average of 5.1 times monthly, according to the New York-based marketing research firm NPD Group, Inc.

What product categories do well?

Automotive, health-care services, credit cards, banks and other financial services as well as anything advertised on radio or television, Ferguson says. Point-of-purchase items like soft drinks, lottery tickets, candy and other convenience store products have done very well in test campaigns, Pastein says. Product launches, especially of items available on site, also are a good fit.

Demographics

Demographic groups can be geographically targeted.

Making the buy

Lead time is a month for new advertisers and a week for regional advertisers with creative in hand who want to place ads in existing locations. A minimum three-month campaign is recommended.

Four 15-second audio ads are available in network blocks that can be placed in one station or the entire network. Factors that affect pricing include station location as well as numbers. Prices range from \$400 per ad, per station, per month based on placement at four nozzles per station.

Who's already on.talking gas pumps?

The test program advertisers included Mercedes-Benz Smart Car, Nestlé's Kit-Kat bar and Dalton's Weekly travel magazine. Other advertisers include Dairy Queen, Budget Tire Center, Buy Rite, Children's Leukemia Foundation, Davenport University, The Flint Journal, Global Phone Cards, U.S. Army, MTA Travel, Papa John's Pizza, Pepsi, Burger King and RE/MAX .

What they're saying

"The thing that caught my eye was going to the larger gas stations and seeing the frequency of people visiting them. It's a chance to get my name in front of hundreds of people a day. I can really target what market I want to go in, including in my competitor's backyard, and get my message out in front of a captive audience. When they're pumping their gas, they have to listen to me." – Casey Cabana, general manager of Mark Chevrolet in Wayne, Mich.

Web site info

DirectCast Network at www.directcastnetwork.com

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