

Outdoor advertising battles for recognition



By [Bylssa Sikiti da Silva](#)

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Operators in the sector see themselves as a legitimate form of advertising, but according to Out of Home Media South Africa the medium faces an uphill battle for recognition thanks to 'uncooperative' municipalities that hamper outdoor advertising's growth.



Cape Town's Athlone power station cooling towers as they could be... or not.

Out of Home Media South Africa (OHMSA) has accused some municipalities, especially Cape Town and Durban, of being uncooperative and unreasonable by enacting 'ridiculous' by-laws seen as hampering the growth of outdoor advertising, a 'legitimate' industry creating jobs and contributing approximately R150 million annually in VAT alone to state coffers.

"We spent the last 10 years trying to consult and negotiate with them, but they would not listen, so we believe the last resort will be to take them to court to fight for our constitutional rights," OHMSA CEO Les Holley said yesterday in Randburg, Johannesburg.

While Johannesburg is 'friendly' and tolerant towards the industry, Durban city manager Mike Sutcliffe allegedly resents any form of outdoor advertising, and Cape Town has allegedly been objecting to what it calls a third party sign, which consists of erecting a billboard on a property where the client does not trade in (for example putting up a Vodacom ad on a residential building).

Polluting the environment?

Most municipalities are tolerant of first party sign - a sign erected in a property where the client trades, although it is unclear what the second party sign really means.

Despite outdoor advertising constituting 4.4% of the total media annual adspend (R1.07 billion in 2009), and becoming some sort of fashion in SA cities, schools, highways and neighbourhoods, some conservative minds believe this medium of

advertising is cluttering the environment and polluting communities' space.

"Some municipalities believe we are raping their cities and hijacking their buildings, and see us as a group of misfits and gangsters," Holley said.

"But the reality is that OHMSA wants to promote responsible advertising in the outdoor realm, not only through formal regulations, but also through the self-governing OHMSA constitution," he explained.

"But this is being constantly hampered by the negative attitude towards our industry."

Offended? Use the correct channels to complain

Asked about some controversial billboards seen as containing 'offensive' material such as half-naked women and explicit sex, and slammed by some conservatives as immoral and perverted, Primedia Outdoor CEO Skhumbuzo Nkosi told Bizcommunity.com: "It is not our competency to judge if a material is offensive or not.

"Anyone who feels offended by an ad has the right to contact the regulator, ASA, and voice their objections."

OHMSA, established in 2002, comprises of 23 members out of about 130 industry operators.

Few members out of total in sector

Asked why so few members have joined OHMSA out of so many in the industry, Nkosi said: "We are trying to recruit more members but it is difficult because some of them say our association is not that representative, and we can't force them [to join]."

Furthermore, Holley said the outdoor industry has for many years endeavouring to place billboards and outdoor signs in the very locations that the Cape Town City Council is offering to FIFA and its sponsors.

"But we were unable to do so as these sites would have contravened the city's by-laws."

Meanwhile, OHMSA is gearing up and calling for creative entries in the 2009 OHMSA Awards, which will take place in February 2010.

The awards' categories include best of show (overall winner), billboards, internally illuminated billboards, electronic billboards, airport billboards, retail/street furniture, mobile media, ambient media, Africa's voice Award (outside SA) and the Student Award (new category).

Go to www.ohmsa.co.za for more information.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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