

It's not about digital. It's not about mobile. It's certainly not about billboards

 By [Alasdair Muller](#)

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So what is digital out of home (DOOH) advertising really all about? It's about connecting brands and communities in context. It's about connecting brands and people through content. And it's about connecting brands and consumers with commerce...

When reflecting on the scope of this article, one is struck by the similarities that the current DOOH market had with the early days of radio and television. "Really?" you ask. Well let's expound. In the early days of radio, the medium was so new that people had no idea how to use it to communicate effectively. Advertisers and broadcasters were only learning the strengths of the medium that we are so fully aware of today, so much so that many early radio programs comprised simply of people reading out newspaper articles.

As the medium has evolved we have seen a complete turnaround in how communication is directed and how content is delivered and consumed. We now know how it works and how to make it work for us. Likewise, the first TV advertising wasn't even recorded, it was live. Live reads and live enactments and at first simply a form of audio-visual radio. One is struck by the conclusion that this is exactly what could happen with DOOH.

On reflection, it seems that the benefits of DOOH are largely not being effectively harnessed, and the majority of DOOH is being treated as traditional static outdoor. In this way we all fail to take advantage of the benefits that a connected digital channel can bring to the party.

Recent statistics from the UK suggest that two out of every three DOOH campaigns are conceived and created in the same manner as traditional outdoor campaigns. No moving artwork, no real-time changing of content. For all intents and purposes, little more than a traditional OOH campaign on a digital screen. If we look at the current DOOH market in South Africa we can discern a similar pattern. Perhaps an even higher level of incidence.

As an industry, we run the risk of not embracing the full potential of the DOOH landscape and the ability to really drive consumer engagement and sales. As advertisers we all want mediums that are flexible and able to deliver content to audiences in a way that we were never able to deliver content before. So with this in mind, what does DOOH offer us, and how could we optimise our use of this medium?

The first opportunity that DOOH gives to brands is the ability to connect with communities in context. Contextual awareness changes the way we perceive and experience information.

After all, as we all know "If content is king, then context is Emperor".

What is being alluded to is that when it comes to content, context refers to the time and place that you have decided to publish, distribute and promote your content. Also known as "decision interval relevance" or "thematic relevance". If you're trying to connect with consumers in the wrong context, it doesn't matter how good or bad your content is. It's not going to be read, shared or discussed. Even the world's best content placed in the wrong context will fail, and the real key to quality, relevance and profit is making sure your context is right.

Traditionally out of home (OOH) has always been a great context medium and has enabled us to get close to consumers throughout the day, and at various touch points, but DOOH has truly amplified this opportunity.

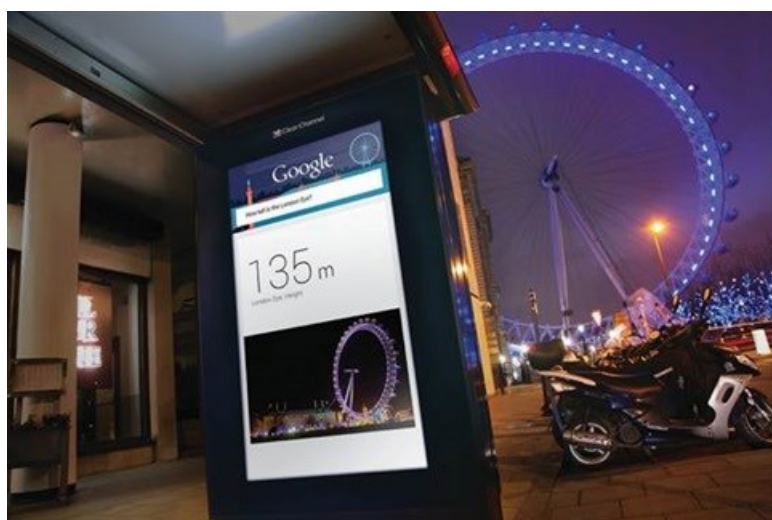
Not only does DOOH allow brands to connect with consumers in the context of space and place, but it is allowing us real

flexibility to target consumers more effectively through the all-important day-part. Meeting consumers in the context of time allows advertisers to communicate with consumers when they are in the right frame of mind to buy your products. Changing content for morning, afternoon and evening mood states and even weekend exclusive advertising.

How many advertisers would acknowledge that they are using specially tailored artwork in these day parts effectively, if at all? If we all had the chance, why wouldn't we want to tailor our creative messaging to fit the context the DOOH was found in, and why wouldn't you evolve your content to take advantage of the dayparts parts offered?

Google Outside is a great example of contextual awareness. Google's concept was "Contextual Stories any location, any time, any screen" and to do this Google created over 100 unique story templates and used them across 200 unique locations around London.

All information was unique to that location point, the information was relevant to the environment, context and people targeted at that location. The information was actually useful, usable in real-time and inspiring to people. The campaign allowed Google to connect with both tourists and residents of London in a meaningful and relevant way by providing them with utility when they need it most.



On reflection it would seem that advertising agencies and advertisers in South Africa still have some way to go in recognising and commercially exploiting the power of context in DOOH and the flexibility of context in day part advertising.

So is it just context that counts? No, DOOH is also driving innovation and creativity through the channel's convergence with mobile and social platforms. DOOH connects brands and people through content.

Land Rover's award winning "#Hibernot" campaign is one of many great examples of this synergy with mobile, social and DOOH platforms. The idea: Hibernate? No chance. #Hibernot". Land Rover fans were encouraged to send tweets with pictures of their winter adventures to be loaded as content across the UK. Further to this, to engage customers and specifically encourage them to embrace #Hibernot, Land Rover created a webpage providing suggestions of activities and ways they could go out and enjoy the winter. The best pictures and winter activities were loaded on the website and the #Hibernot book for distribution at Land Rover dealerships across the country. The best pictures were also uploaded to DOOH billboards across the UK.



So it's clear that DOOH can connect with consumers in the context that matters most to them and with content that is engaging, but can it help me sell products?

Yes! DOOH allows us to connect brands and consumers through commerce.

Firstly, digital OOH now allows advertisers to change content regularly and quickly, so for once OOH is able to offer solutions to the fast-paced FMCG industry. Prices can be updated weekly or even in real-time in line with in-store offerings.

McDonalds, themselves leaders in the DOOH space, have developed a great concept where consumers who interact with the DOOH screens are given a coupon for their favourite meal. This not only raises awareness but also drives feet through the store and a measurable increase in sales.



Tesco's in South Korea found a way to encourage commuters to buy products using their smartphones while waiting for their trains, they did this by building virtual aisles on the platforms.

Home Plus created enormous, rich images of food items and laid them out in the same way as they would be in-store. Every item has a corresponding QR code, so that consumers waiting on the platform can check out the items on the huge billboard and scan the QR code of the relevant item using their mobile. This immediately adds it to their Home Plus shopping basket.



Deliveries of the goods can be arranged to arrive within hours of the order. DOOH allows us to update these prices and products in real-time.

It is crystal clear that technology is changing the landscape of OOH. DOOH is now not simply digital screens and digital content - it is a highly flexible and effective communication tool that is in a context that can facilitate commercial exchange, content

interchange and real connections with consumers through space. DOOH is leading the way in consumer interaction and engagement, and it will take insight, courage and willingness on behalf of advertisers and agencies alike to really take advantage of the opportunities this creates.

ABOUT ALASDAIR MULLER

Alasdair and his team are responsible for the sales and marketing of various Out Of Home (OOH) products across 13 markets in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as working closely with Ad Agencies and clients in developing viable and successful OOH advertising campaigns.

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