

Companies Get on 3D Bandwagon With Focus on Ads

By Mark R. Madler August 4, 2008

The days of the one sheet are numbered.

For decades the standard advertising format in movie theater lobbies, the paper and cardboard one sheet poster is being supplanted by a high tech method.

A static display just won't cut it anymore to catch a viewer's eye.

Advertising follows the same path taken by music when analog recordings switched to digital and in feature films as 35mm films gradually are supplanted by versions distributed to theaters on a disk or through a satellite.

"We see the digital realm coming to theater lobbies in a big way," said Greg Agostinelli, head of the digital signage lab at Stereoscope Studios, a Burbank company adding a 3D twist to film promotion.

The Valley region is rich in companies developing methods to bring 3D content to the big and small screens but for right now Stereoscope and Provision Interactive Technologies in Chatsworth are the ones using the technology for the next generation of advertising although approaching it from different directions.

The Provision method involves 3D holograms in which images of products project out from a kiosk in a retail store. Stereoscope builds on existing digital signage, a growth industry reaching its first level of maturity as networks get established and business models get settled.

"Now that digital signage networks are in place they can take the premier spots and take it a step further by adding 3D," said Bernie Laramie, of Stereoscope.

The Digital Signage Association puts global industry revenues at \$1.1 billion.

Last year, Clear Channel Outdoor made Los Angeles part of its digital billboard network. Signs throughout the city run a continuous loop of eight second advertisements that play to passersby a thousand times a day. In May, Metro unveiled a digital strip inside the northbound Red Line subway tunnel between the Hollywood/Highland stop and the Universal City stop to advertise retailers, films and television shows.

Laramie himself saw the prevalence of this high tech signage when at the food court of a Century City movie theater. All the menus, he noticed, were digital.

China, however, emerged as the world's leader in digital signage.

Three Chinese companies are on the NASDAQ and combined have more than 100,000 screens on buses, in airports, lobbies and other public areas.

Even with the fewer number of screens in the U.S., consumers are bombarded with hundreds of

advertising images per day and are bound to tune out.

Stereoscope and Provision want consumers to tune back in.

“Anyway that somebody can break out of the clutter is a way to get your message across,” said Marty Shindler, a consultant from Encino with clients in the entertainment industry.

By placing kiosks in retail locations, Provision can create images for advertisers that get to shoppers to where they make most of their shopping decisions, said Curt Thornton, president and CEO of Provision.

The first roll out of the kiosks is in Fred Meyer stores in Portland, Ore., a grocery store part of the Kroger chain. In Southern California, Provision will locate the kiosks in 47 Hispanic grocery stores belonging to four different chains.

The kiosks, however, are more than just about the holographic images.

They are, said Thornton, a new way to get coupons into the hands of shoppers and more importantly to get them redeemed. Most coupons sent through the mail, inserted into newspapers or printed on the back of a grocery store receipt go unused.

The kiosks have a touch screen from which a shopper can press a product icon and the machine prints a coupon on the spot. When done this way, Thornton said, the store wins because a purchase is made; the manufacturer wins because their product is sold; and Provision wins for displaying the advertising.

“That’s the power of the 3D kiosk,” Thornton said.

The interactive feature appears prominently in a kiosk Provision is developing for a major national banking chain. When a holographic car appears from the screen, a bank customer waves their hand through it and the kiosk dispenses a ticket directing them who to see for an auto loan.

Stereoscope also has in development a personal kiosk with interactive features in which a shopper can touch the screen to twist and turn a cell phone to view it from multiple angles.

For now, Stereoscope is developing its technology for promotional purposes with the long-term view of using it for entertainment purposes.

Once people see in movie theaters, retail stores and other places how good 3D can look without having to use glasses to view the images they will be more inclined to want to see it in the home environment.

“That’s where we see it going in time – 3D in the home without glasses,” Laramie said.