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Technology in Sports

Advertising / Sponsor Signage

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Target marketing

Bleacher bums long have mocked the upper crust of society perched inches from the field at sporting events. The riffraff drink swill and eat hot dogs from the rafters, while the privileged sip reserve stock and dine on caviar. Everyone, however, stares at the same sign in center field — until recently, that is.

New digital technology such as **Cisco's StadiumVision** lets teams and facilities sprinkle an entire suite of a company's brands through a stadium while targeting specific demographics. Cisco calls it the "ultimate platform for segmentation within a venue."

Under a single deal with MillerCoors, for example, TVs lining the concourse to field seats could show ads for imported Italian beer Peroni, while Keystone Light ads could line the tunnels to the upper deck.

"We're trying to give properties the opportunity to have a much different conversation with sponsors, provide a new level of value for a brand, and a different type of fan engagement," said Mike Caponigro, manager for Cisco Sports & Entertainment.

For teams that share a stadium, the technology allows different sales staffs to sell different ad inventories. Cisco is bidding on the new stadium for the New York Jets and Giants. For a team like the Dallas Cowboys, their new Cowboys Stadium can host a Friday night high school football game, a Saturday college game, a Sunday NFL game, a U2 concert (on site last month) and the NBA All-Star Game (scheduled for February) without having to cover up a single sign.

Cisco would not reveal the costs to install the full StadiumVision system but says it strives for clients like the Yankees, Cowboys, MLB Royals and NFL Dolphins to break even on the investment in 18 months.

The network of hundreds of 40-plus-inch LCD screens is operated with a mouse click from a single control center installed in the stadium.



BUD FORCE (2)

Cisco's StadiumVision allows for targeting of ads among the game action on monitors around Cowboys Stadium.

— Jon Show

New field of display

The United Football League took the field in Las Vegas for its inaugural game on Oct. 8, offering the same game with the same rules staged each week in high school, college and professional stadiums nationwide. The most obvious difference immediately seen on screen for the league's TV coverage? Field-level video boards on the sideline and behind the end zones, rolling ads for Motorola, Men's Warehouse, Riddell and others.

LED field- and court-level video boards, like most advanced technology, have been used for years in Europe and Asia. The boards now are being used by the UFL and the Seattle Sounders FC of Major League Soccer, as well, and they're moving into the NBA under a partnership between **ANC Sports** and **Mitsubishi Electric**. Madison Square Garden tested the boards this past season for WNBA Liberty games and is installing them this season for the Knicks.

Issues related to player safety, resolution and on-court glare have been mitigated by installing spring-loaded boards and recessed bulbs to reduce the risk of injury, and by putting more bulbs closer together.



MSG SPORTS

Court-level video boards, tested in Liberty games at Madison Square Garden, are being put in for the Knicks.

Glare issues were fixed by adjusting the brightness and contrast of ads.

Rear-projection DLP is still the choice of most NBA teams for court-sign signage, but Dave Bialek, president of ANC Sports Marketing, expects LED to quickly replace the 20-year-old technology developed by Texas Instruments in the late 1980s.

"The LED boards are the newest technology trend in the team sports marketplace," Bialek said.

— Jon Show

Added dimension

"If it has numbers," the saying goes, "it's math. If it doesn't work, it's technology."

ANC Sports, through an exclusive patent-sharing arrangement with IMG, has found a way to make sure the math creates the *illusion* of a new technology.

Three-D-Signs takes traditional on-field signage and gives it a third dimension by skewing the angle of the logo, making it appear to stand straight up on your TV. The mechanism applies to both common floor decals or logos that are weaved into the turf or painted onto grass. A series of mathematical equations is applied to skew the logos at just the right angle to give the illusion of a vertical dimension.

It's a signage technique that's been in place for European soccer matches for several years but is now making its way to the United States.

"It's a way to put a vertical sign in a place where you normally wouldn't be able to place one," said Dave Bialek, president of ANC Sports Marketing. "This



ANC SPORTS

Three-D-Signs gives traditional on-court and on-field signs a new dimension for TV viewers.

takes a flat surface and makes it a usable piece of advertising inventory by making the logo appear to stand up when the camera hits it at a specific angle.”

The ads are relatively cheap compared to digital solutions and are generally sold on a multigame or seasonlong basis, Bialek said. Costs can range from a few thousand dollars for a static floor mat to tens of thousands of dollars to weave the logo into the turf. There are additional costs to cover royalty payments pertaining to the patent.



ANC SPORTS (2)

The signs have been used for soccer and the World Baseball Classic at Dodger Stadium.

Three-D-Signs have appeared at Dodger Stadium for this year's World Baseball Classic and at college basketball events run by The Gazelle Group. Bialek is in talks with the NBA about providing the signage but said mass implementation will depend on finding an advertiser willing to embrace the concept.

Similar to other forms of static signage, Three-D-Signs are limited by the inability to rotate different advertisers. Creating a digital mat that rotates the ads is not feasible because the angle of the mat changes depending on the logo.

— Jon Show

Virtual reality

Sportvision and **PVI** separately began providing the technology for the first down line in football in the late 1990s, eventually realizing the same system could be used to put digital ads on backstops during nationally televised MLB games.

Ten years later, the applications of the technology are relatively the same, but its use has been expanded. In addition to baseball games, digital ads have been inserted on the glass for NHL games and on the field during college football games.

In Europe, Asia and South America, where digital insertion of ads is more broadly accepted, PVI is creating virtual images of branded blimps flying over stadiums, cruise ships sailing onto a field that appears to be flooded, and flipping the center circle of a soccer field upside down to reveal a gas station.

The company is also using designs similar to the skewed field mat pushed by ANC Sports, but the digital technology allows PVI to flash the ad at any time in order to increase the likelihood of an impression.

In addition, PVI is able to match advertisers with individual markets, so fans in Asia watching the American League Championships Series on Fox will see different backstop ads than fans watching in Europe. Eventually, the company will be able to sell ads in individual television markets, so viewers in Cleveland could see a Home Depot ad in English while viewers in Miami could see the same ad in Spanish.



Digital ads aren't new, but are being seen in more places, such as the glass at hockey games.

“Eventually you'll be able to get hyper-local,” such as targeting individual demographics within a certain market, said Sam McCleery, senior vice president of sales and marketing for PVI Virtual Media Services.

The main barrier to growth of the technology in the United States is gaining acceptance among leagues, teams and fans. McCleery expects virtual advertising will continue to affect the international market more than the domestic market.

"It will grow earlier overseas," he said. "Will it grow bigger? I don't know. But you will be allowed to do it over there before you will be allowed to do it here."

— *Jon Show*