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Marketing/Sponsorship

Technology, flexibility signal booming biz for sign providers

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THE LEFTON
REPORT
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Sitting in this seat, we've grown relatively inured to the hyperbole that's endemic in marketing circles, but when every firm in a particular industry segment tells us they are having their best year ever, we begin to pay attention. Such is the case in what may be the oldest business within sports marketing: signage. Camera visibility at a time when brand integration is increasingly imperative, the **TiVo**-proof nature of the medium, the addition of new technology and flexibility to change messaging quickly are some of the more popular reasons offered by sign providers to explain their elevation into the nouveau riche of sports advertising providers.

"There was probably signage at the Roman Coliseum — it's just the right time for us," said **Tom Kiernan**, whose four-year-old **Arena Media Networks** offers content and ads on high-definition screens for advertisers including **Geico** and **MasterCard** in the hallways of more than 30 sports venues, including more than 20 MLB parks. "Regular TV ads are missing a lot of people, especially those 18-49 men, and for anyone inside the bowl, we're a great addition."

Added **Tom McGovern**, **OMD/Optimum Sports'** director of sports media: "Obviously, this isn't the solution for any advertiser, but it is a great and flexible complement. It allows you to target geographically, and since the teams, buildings and telecasts are now often owned or controlled by the same entities, they've done a better job of ensuring TV visibility."

"Every advertiser wants to keep from being zapped, and more companies and agencies have sports marketing expertise now, so we don't have to explain the basics anymore," said **Jerry Cifarelli**, president of **ANC Sports**, who says revenue has more than doubled this year, so that he's eyeing expansion into related business.

"Any in-game branding has grown in value," said **Cliff Kaplan**, president of **Van Wagner Sports**, which sells rotational venue signage and who pioneered branding on goalpost nets for **Allstate**, now at 55 schools. "Typically, camera-visible signage has better recall than TV ads, and you get the bonus of being in news photos and 'SportsCenter' highlights. As a result, there's not much [advertiser] attrition once they sign on."

It's just another example of "below-the-line" advertising siphoning money that once went to traditional media, a situation that can lead to some fundamental questions. "Sometimes, our biggest problem is finding out what budgets this comes out of: TV, sponsorship or out-of-home," Kaplan said.

As one agency type explained, that can be quite arbitrary. "One client told me that if there's tickets included, that's sponsorship, so since we were talking to that department, tickets became part of the deal," he said with a laugh.

Coming next: We see an expansion of advertising football nets, and camera-visible signage at golf tournaments, which is already in use in Europe.

► **RISING STAR:** As Dallas has re-emerged as one of the NFL's glam teams, quarterback **Tony Romo** has gone from a symbol of

embarrassment when botching the hold in the playoff loss that ended last season for the team, to the player with the top-selling jersey on NFLshop.com for April through October. He's appearing in six national ads, on behalf of **Pepsi Max**, **AT&T**, **Fox** and NFL Network, along with two "SportsCenter" **ESPN** promos.

He's also got a deal with **Reebok**. Romo's latest endorsement deal is with **Rawlings**, which does not have NFL rights and so badly needs an NFL quarterback to add credibility to its football product line. Sources put the three-year deal at about \$750,000. Rawlings is expected to use Romo's image on packaging and in print and point-of-sale advertising, but likely not until next year. Romo replaces the disgraced **Michael Vick** as a Rawlings endorser. **R.J. Gonser** at **CAA Football**, St. Louis, represents Romo for marketing.



Fans buying the World Series highlights DVD on MLB.com can earn a discount by using MasterCard.



Tony Romo's Cowboys jersey was the top seller on NFLshop.com through October.

► **PRICELESS PREMIERE:** MasterCard is augmenting its baseball marketing inventory by sponsoring the annual World Series highlights DVD from MLB Productions and **Shout! Factory**. MasterCard also will sponsor the film's premiere in Boston next week and will offer a discount on DVDs purchased on MLB.com with a MasterCard, an offer that will be promoted via a coupon in the 300,000 DVD packages, an e-mail blast to MLB's Red Sox database of about 770,000 fans, radio promotions and branding at the premiere, including an ad before the film.

► **COMINGS & GOINGS:** Former **Fila** and Reebok marketer **Howe Burch** is returning to his Baltimore agency roots, joining **TBC Advertising**, the city's largest ad shop, as executive vice president, integrated marketing. Burch says he'll establish a sports and event marketing practice at the agency. ... **Todd Sermersheim**, NLL senior vice president of business affairs, moves to **SME Branding**, New York, as SVP. The former Reebok marketer will head business development for SME, which is trying to increase its reach into consumer products. ... **Mary Griswold** has been named general manager of **Edelman's** sports and sponsorship practice. The former NFLer has been with Edelman for nine years and her promotion follows the departure of **Peter Land**, who held the same title, in July. ... **Bill Schoonmaker** is leaving **LeadDog Marketing**, New York, where he's been vice president, client partnerships, for about a year. He'll continue in a consulting capacity through the end of the year.



Burch

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