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## Online Ads Find Their Way Into The Offline World

By Susan Kuchinskas  
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SAN FRANCISCO -- Being in the right place at the right time can power up the impact of an advertising message.

Startups demonstrated innovative ways to ensure that happens by reaching consumers when they're out and about -- and ideally, receptive to marketing -- here at this year's ad:tech San Francisco interactive marketing conference.

Radio frequency identification technology, or RFID, uses tiny transponders to signal receivers at short distances. MTI Interactive has adapted this technology, now being used by retailers to track inventory, to provide information on digital screens that's related to an item a shopper picks up.

Pep Boys, the auto accessories retailer, offers MTI's RFID-enabled key fobs to its best customers. As they walk through the store, promotions are tailored to that person. For example, the customer database may show the customer regularly buys motor oil every six months -- and she's due to buy more. So, in-store digital signage might change to highlight a special on oil.

MTI also creates "smart" kiosks for Verizon Wireless displays. When someone picks up a phone, information on the screen above the display may show available plans or service upgrades.

Besides providing highly targeted information and offers to shoppers, the smart displays also provide valuable information to merchants, according to Jason Goldberg, vice president of marketing and creative services for MTI.

"Retailers understand that the in-store experience is a very important part of purchase decision," he told a session audience. "For the first time, they know how many people walked into a store, how many walked by the display, how many picked up a product, which one they picked, and ultimately, which product did they buy."

Alan Schulman, executive creative director for interactive agency imc2, said the popularity of GPS for autos has likewise opened up new opportunities for marketers. For example, some 14,000 New York taxis now are outfitted with a touchscreen entertainment system from eTAXI. The screen displays information including a map showing current location, entertainment and news.

Adding the ability to include local businesses on the maps could provide an edge for

businesses in "battleground" markets thick with competitors, Schulman said.

"Applications like this are real advantage to tilt brand share," he said.

Placecast, launching today at the show, lets advertisers deliver targeted ads to mobile devices like laptops and mobile phones, based on the user's location and what's happening nearby.

The service cross-references Internet connection locations with information relevant to the locale. For example, Placecast could tailor the ads it delivers in an airport to business travelers on weekdays and consumers on the weekend.

Bruno Uzzan, CEO of Total Immersion, showed kiosks that provided "augmented reality" for product displays, combining real-world and computer-generated data. Thanks to an unobtrusive video camera mounted above a kiosk, shoppers can hold a box up to a screen and see a 3D model of its contents.

"You can see what's inside the box without opening it up, in real time," Uzzan said. "It's a way for the guest to interact with the 3D digital brand."

Total Immersion customers include Leggo, Infiniti and Toyota.

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