# THE SEVEN CORE OOH ATTRIBUTES

OOH

Take another look.

After conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups with nearly 100 executives from 75 national and local advertisers and agencies, the OOH industry launched a new brand that is more relevant in today's media world.

The industry explored and validated seven core equities that lay the foundation for the OOH brand: innovation, ubiquity, creative impact, professionalism, accountability, audience-driven, and well-maintained. All of these brand equities are important, but the spike attributes at the top of the brand pyramid (innovation, ubiquity, and creative impact) are the lead ideas that uniquely define and differentiate OOH.

OOH Attributes Pyramid

SPIKE ATTRIBUTES

QUALIFYING ATTRIBUTES

ENTRYSTAKE ATTRIBUTES

INNOVATION
UBIQUITY
CREATIVE IMPACT

PROFESSIONALISM
ACCOUNTABILITY

AUDIENCE-DRIVEN
HIGH QUALITY/WELL-MAINTAINED

BRAND POSITIONING
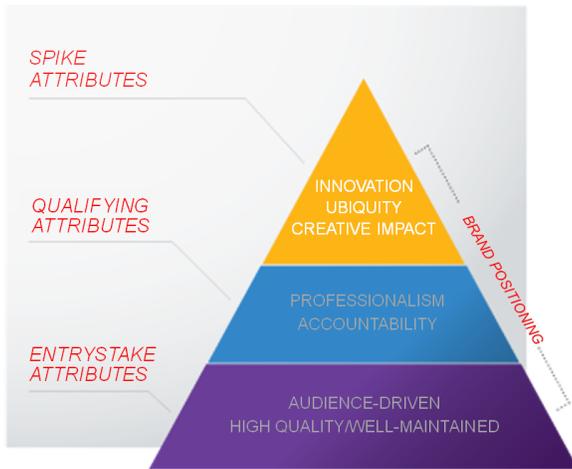
Embracing Innovation

Innovation is defined by Merriam-Webster as "the creation of better or more effective products, processes, services, technologies, and ideas." While OOH companies have been innovating for some time, the industry certainly has not been getting credit for it. By calling out innovation as the OOH industry's core brand vision, research shows advertisers and agencies will see OOH differently and acknowledge the industry is keeping pace with where advertising and consumers are headed.

Innovation (in all its many forms) is the right direction for the OOH industry. This concept goes the furthest in addressing the negative perceptions that some advertisers and agencies have about OOH, it gets them interested in the industry's current and future potential, and puts OOH on a more equal footing with other media options, especially cable and digital.

Market research shows that industry innovation is the most relevant, compelling, and sustainable positioning to adopt. Embracing innovation is what the market wants and what OOH companies are poised to deliver: digital billboards and other digital OOH formats, applications that connect with consumers in new ways, new Traffic Audit Bureau (TAB) OOH Ratings, more professional business practices, high impact creative campaigns, and new substrates and lighting that lead to better graphics and shorter lead times, to name just a few.

A Sound Reason for Ubiquity

Walt Disney first experimented with surround sound technology while making the film Fantasia. Disney dreamed his audience would hear splashing throughout the theater as Sorcerer Mickey lapped-up pails of water during the Sorcerer's Apprentice segment.

Using surround sound makes a theatrical experience different, exciting, and perhaps frightening at times – as it brings a movie to life in a modulated way. Rather than hearing sound from left, center, and right, sound is perceived from up, down, on all sides, and even from behind.

What the movie industry had long known was that it couldn't hit all frequencies on the main front channels. The only way to truly bring sound to life was to add multiple, discrete channels, and in doing so it could surround the viewer. In most cases, these new discrete channels were not the primary sound channels – they were used for effect and were considered ambient channels. What they added was the excitement and realism that took you from a "facing-forward" experience to a totally surrounded experience. Effect channels created the thunder, the explosions, and the sense of speed that brought to life the full power of the film genre.

The movie industry also discovered these ambient channels required a fraction of the bandwidth of the main channels – but their presence is what brought the entire movie experience to life.

It has long been known that adding OOH to any campaign takes the advertiser from a fixed-forward arc of messaging to a ubiquitous surrounding experience. While OOH is powerful by itself, using the many OOH formats as a strategic complement to other media adds channels at relatively low cost that amplify the messaging in other media.

Like surround sound for movies, including an array of OOH products produces a true 360-degree advertising field. Unlike the fixed-forward fields of TV, radio, print, online, or mobile, where consumers need to opt in and focus on the medium in front of them, OOH formats surround consumers to ensure the full impact of a campaign is experienced.

Customers don't want flat campaigns. They want powerful messaging that makes people notice. This is what ubiquity does, and this is what OOH delivers.

Customers who include OOH as a critical component of every campaign will experience the leverage and spark that comes from the surrounding immersion OOH creates.

The Genius of Awesomely Simple Creative

Charles Mingus, one of the most important figures in 20th century American music, said it best:

"Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can play weird; that's easy. What's hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple awesomely simple -- that's creativity."

Every year, there are a lot of "weird" and "different" OOH designs on the streets. Was the work eye-catching? Sometimes. Did it create a lasting impression that made consumers stop, notice, and act? Not often enough, especially if compared to some of the "awesomely simple" work that has really moved consumers over the years. Apple iPod's colorful dancing silhouettes. Chick-fil-A's mischievous cows. McDonald's growing salad greens on a billboard. A zooming MINI Cooper leaving palm trees bent in its wake.

In the new OOH positioning strategy, "creative impact" lands in our top tier of spike brand attributes – the characteristics that really define and differentiate the OOH medium. Creative impact is truly what makes OOH stand out from other media. Every campaign begins with a blank canvas, with the opportunity to design engaging and immersive advertising that literally moves consumers.

And yet the industry often falls short on this all-important spike attribute.

Critics cite many reasons for a lack of focus on OOH creativity. It has been suggested that creatives at big agencies would rather work on other forms of advertising because OOH isn't as desirable for their portfolios. It's been said OOH is sometimes treated as an afterthought, with print creative being reformatted to work for OOH. It's been said operators don't have enough top-tier creative staff on hand to design really good creative for clients.

This must change. In some parts of the world, there is a much richer creative tradition for OOH. One top European executive has commented that the connection between visual art and OOH, dating back to Toulouse-Lautrec and Cassandre, has created much higher expectations in Europe for striking creative.

OOH designers must commit to creating work that causes buzz and gets results because of its stopping power. The industry needs to create awesomely simple jazz. Not because it is – to quote Mingus – "weird" – but because it is great visual storytelling. Think of jazz greats Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Chick Corea, and John Coltrane all playing together.

Now is the time for breakthrough. For improvisation. For the unexpected. Imagine the music the OOH industry is trying to create.

Professionalism: What our Clients Expect and Deserve

OOH executives are professionals. However, the selection of professionalism as a core OOH brand attribute was based on a perceived gap between behavior and clients' expectations.

Specifically, here's what clients want:

- OOH professionals should know a customer's business and needs. This means being experts in the advertising world, not just in OOH media. This means understanding how planners conceive campaigns across all forms of media, knowing how each medium is used and measured, and knowing the best way to apply OOH to a campaign. This is quite different from selling locations, weight, and showings. It is entirely reasonable for advertisers and general planners to expect this expertise from OOH professionals.

- Customers expect OOH professionals to interact with them using up-to-date and user-friendly business systems and processes. The way OOH companies conduct business should be as good as or better than other media competitors: demonstrating the creative power of OOH via mobile devices, preparing proposals on the spot, making contracting and billing easy, and fully meeting proof of performance needs.

- Clients also have every right to know that OOH professionals will honor commitments. This sense of integrity is the oxygen of professionals. Inventory proposed should be available and appropriate. Postings should be done on the days committed. Pricing should be honored once offered.

These traits of professionalism are reasonable for clients to expect. Fixing these legacy and current gaps requires each OOH executive to look in the mirror and ask how he or she can personally improve and do even better work for clients. Can the OOH industry learn more about other media? Can proposals be based on audience measurements that are comparable to other media? Can OOH companies "wow" clients with knowledge about their business and advertising needs? Can OOH companies provide customer-friendly, efficient tools?

Professionalism should be a given; it's fundamental.

A Culture of Accountability

To customers making a choice among different media types when allocating advertising dollars, how the OOH industry does what it does is just as important as what it does. Enhanced levels of accountability and professionalism, more than any other single brand attribute this industry is working on, will arguably have the biggest impact on the industry's future success.

The dictionary defines accountability as being "responsible and answerable for actions." OOH customers define accountability as the ability to help them measure the impact and results of OOH advertising, providing data to calculate a return on investment, providing high quality photographs of postings and proof of performance, running their campaigns exactly when they're expected, and most importantly, delivering on promises.

In all of these areas, the OOH industry has made tremendous progress in developing more customer-friendly business processes to address customer demands for greater accountability, from implementation of TAB OOH Ratings to common RFP templates to enhanced photography, proof of performance, and posting time standards and practices.

But establishing these practices is quite different from actually implementing them across a company and an industry – and making them stick. That's where culture and leadership come in.

One of the world's greatest comedians, George Burns, put it best when he quipped, "No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels like it's his fault!" So how does the OOH industry create organizations in which every employee feels responsible for delivering a highly professional, transparent, and accountable customer experience that exceeds expectations? It comes down to leadership and corporate culture.

Whether he or she is a CEO or a sales manager, every company executive must be willing to send a powerful and brand-consistent message to employees. It is equally important to create an environment and culture that reinforces a sense of accountability.

In the sales area, for example, advertisers want account executives to have cross-media knowledge and professionalism that mirrors other media. They want the OOH industry to be accountable for meeting audience delivery goals and providing TAB OOH Ratings in every proposal. Do OOH companies create a culture and environment in which these expectations have been clearly communicated and where people feel both accountable and empowered to deliver against them instinctively? Or is it okay to compromise if crunched for time?

In the operations area, this industry needs to be more transparent in how it operates and more accountable for achieving posting timelines and quality. The industry should be accountable for timely proof of performance and for having well-maintained structures. Are these expectations clear in every company's culture? On the service side of the business, the OOH industry should have contracting, billing, and payment processes that are timely and accurate. And if there's a problem with a display, the operator should be accountable for repair within a very short window of time. Does OOH culture send the right signals in this area, or is it okay to repair a display the next time a crew is in the area?

The path to success for the very important brand attribute of accountability is the environment companies create – the culture – which each employee must influence to drive ever higher levels of responsibility for performance.

Audience Driven

Peter Ducker, one of the most respected and celebrated business gurus of the 20th century, once noted, "The purpose of business is to create a customer."

The very purpose of advertising is to stimulate interest, generate trial, and convert consumers into customers. OOH professionals may know this intuitively and demonstrably, but to compete for available marketing dollars, customers need evidence that OOH is the smart choice and proof that it delivers on its promise.

From time immemorial, marketers have viewed advertising investments with skepticism, necessary to drive sales, though lacking tangible evidence of its efficacy. John Wanamaker, considered by some to be the father of modern advertising, once quipped, "I know half of my advertising works - I just don't know which half."

Advertising in general has come a long way since that statement was made. Media research companies such as Arbitron, Nielsen, Kantar, Rentrak, and many others track audience, develop qualitative studies, and produce reports that provide evidence to support media investment.

OOH may be late to the party with a comparable media measurement system, but the OOH industry is collectively embracing it to leverage competitive advantages. Five years after developing and testing TAB OOH Ratings for billboards and posters, the industry formally agreed to phase out traffic circulation counts (DECs) and commit to the use of a common currency – TRPs, GRPs, reach and frequency -- to place OOH on the same playing field as other measured media.

Yet there is still some resistance, a belief that selling location alone is good enough and all that advertisers really care about. At best, this is foolhardy; at worst, self-defeating. Location is important in every media: brands want to be in certain shows on radio or television and positioned next to certain editorial in magazines, newspapers, and online. But it's equally important to understand which audience yields the best results and the old

(DEC) counts just don't cut it anymore.

Not long ago, an OOH account executive met with a local retailer with six stores whose RFP asked for bill-boards within a set distance from these stores, as he was accustomed to doing in the past. Armed now with the new metrics, the account executive thought he'd provide two options - one as asked for, and another that maximized target audience demographics. As it turned out, the second proposal cost less money than what was requested while delivering significantly higher TRPs and also meeting location constraints. The advertiser was so impressed that he ended up allocating more ad dollars to OOH, choosing a hybrid campaign with excellent results.

These stories are becoming common, and TAB's proposal standards provide the templates needed to specify campaign, audience, and location objectives. Undoubtedly, this is a win/ win - an opportunity to help convince more customers to consider OOH media, as well as a platform to build a greater market share for OOH advertising.

A Systematic Approach to Total Quality

A recent Google search for the definition of "quality" turned up a variety of interesting results; in particular one read, "a standard of excellence as measured against other things of a similar kind." The operative word here is "measured." How can OOH operators know if companies are delivering "quality" to customers? The progress must be benchmarked and measured.

Quality, and especially "high quality," can be a vague concept. A person often knows it when they see it, but it can be hard to define and even harder to deliver. One way to truly define and deliver high quality as an industry is to carefully define what the standards of high quality are for customers and then measure progress toward achieving it. To do this, it's important to understand how to define quality, build the business processes to reliably deliver it, and then relentlessly measure it so that improvement will continue.

When the OOH brand positioning strategy was created, "quality" was identified as one of the seven most important brand attributes in recognition of how every OOH business must anticipate, understand, and meet or exceed customer expectations. It is difficult to deliver high quality to every customer in every situation, because customers' definition of quality can differ dramatically. Sometimes, quality is about maintenance or operations. Other times, quality may be about proposals, ratings, or audience delivery. At still other times, it may be about on-time posting or proof of performance reporting.

The challenge as an industry is to deliver high quality to every customer every time, based on how they define it. This takes a dramatic shift in how OOH professionals often think and act about quality.

Every day, it seems there is a new management theory offering a different solution for improving quality. But the one thing that all quality programs have in common is measurement. The best companies in the world determine what their specific customer-focused quality indicators are, then they relentlessly measure these indicators, and they continuously work to improve their performance against quality every single day.

As an industry, the OOH business needs to focus on total quality management and attack it with urgency. The industry needs to deconstruct and map out the entire customer experience to understand the most important touch points where customers judge the most on quality. Each OOH company must define what a high quality or total quality standard would be for each touch point that has been identified and create strategies and tactics to address each one.

Finally, OOH companies need to measure each of these touch points and indicators to benchmark progress in improving for the future. Only this kind of systematic approach will work.

This leads to three very important priorities:

The OOH industry must be in close touch with customers. Leading companies focused on total quality survey their customers, formally and informally, relentlessly. They understand and value the "voice of the customer" and incorporate customer views and expectations in corporate business planning. The OOH industry could see big results if it were closer to customers, had more frequent daily interaction, and incorporated customer feedback more consistently.

- The OOH industry must be laser-focused on maintenance. Nothing offers more potential to make a positive or a negative impression about the entire OOH industry than the maintenance and appearance of structures and displays. Every aspect of physical displays is important. If a light bulb is out, if a vinyl is sagging, or if a structure is rusted, it calls into question the integrity and value of the entire medium.

- The OOH industry must focus on improving industry business processes. Like all other businesses, OOH companies have a wide range of processes for conducting work. There are processes for marketing, proposals, photos, managing avails and hold times, posting, contracting, billing, and many other things. Each OOH company must carefully map out how to deliver against each one of these processes and how customers perceive the quality of each. The important question is whether OOH companies are consistently measuring customers' satisfaction against these processes.

Quality is "entry-stake," meaning it is something the OOH industry must deliver just as a cost of doing business. Customers won't even bother to think about all the other benefits of OOH, like innovation, creative impact, or professionalism, unless OOH companies can deliver a consistently high-quality customer experience. The OOH industry can make great progress by getting closer to customers, mapping out how to deliver quality, and then measure progress.