



Erwin Ephron

Founder, Ephron, Papazian & Ephron, Inc. – USA

Erwin Ephron founded Ephron, Papazian & Ephron, Inc., now a paramount media consultancy with clients in the USA and across the world. His career has also involved roles with BBDO, Carl Ally and his own Ephron, Raboy & Tsao.

Erwin has been described as one of the fathers of modern media planning. His website archive, *Ephron on Media* has hits of 20,000 per month and his writing is published in the USA, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, India, Latin America and Japan.

In 2008 he was honoured with the Advertising Research Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award. He has been named as "One of the Five Most Influential Media People of the Last 25-Years" by *American Demographics* magazine, and MediaPost's register of Influential Media People described Erwin in six words: "The Guru. Need we say more?"

Eye Reporter asked "the Guru" to pen a few words on Out-of-Home (OOH) media's place in today's advertising-heavy world.

The Uninvited

Commercial avoidance and the media

The Uninvited. Great name for a ghost story. But this tale isn't about ghosts. This is about intrusive advertising like TV, radio and the internet and the price advertisers pay for that intrusion. It is also about better mannered media like OOH, and how it escapes the problem.

Ad avoidance isn't universal

At a recent private meeting, the research head of a TV network tried to make ad avoidance universal. He claimed the percentage of audience lost to ad avoidance and inattention was pretty similar across the different media. His convenient conclusion was commercial avoidance doesn't change relative media value. As goes TV, so goes the world. That's not true, and that's what this article is about. Growing commercial avoidance does not threaten mass media. It threatens intrusive mass media. OOH and print get a pass from most consumers.

Trapped by advertising

Research shows the majority of prime-time TV viewers often switch channels to avoid being trapped by

advertising. This has put the question to all media: How do you compare? How much of your audience pays attention to the advertising you carry? I think the obvious answer is some media do better than others. Now let's look at why.

TV is intrusive

We call TV intrusive for two reasons. Its commercials interrupt the program, and the medium, not the consumer, controls the duration of exposure. A typical USA commercial pod is eight commercials long plus program promos. Viewers feel arrested (the perfect word) and many respond by trying to escape. Talking, eating, reading, going on line or going elsewhere. Print is different. Ads still interrupt content, but consumers control the length of exposure. They actively screen content (including ads) to fix on items of interest for more thorough reading. When confronted by ads they don't want to look at, readers turn the page.

Attracting attention

For OOH the concern isn't averting avoidance. It's attracting attention. An OOH display is not the consumer's centre of attention the way a TV screen or an open magazine is, so the message design has to convert peripheral screening into eyes-on seeing. This extra step is balanced by OOH's singularity. Intrusion is crossing the line between medium and message. With OOH, there is no line. The medium is the message.

Total, selective, non-existent

To sum up:

- Commercial avoidance in print is usually *selective*. When content is interrupted by advertising, readers skip ads not of interest.
- Commercial avoidance in TV is often *total*. When a program is interrupted by advertising, viewers turn to something else.
- Commercial avoidance in OOH is *non-existent*. The advertising attracts the attention so there's nothing to interrupt.

People don't dislike advertising. They dislike intrusive, protracted advertising. They hate the invasion and they hate being held captive waiting for something they want to view or read.

As the old song says, "Time waits for no one". And today it seems no one has the time to wait. ■