

Cabvision eyes captive audience

A multi-channel, in-taxi TV service may sound attractive to advertisers, but will it be effective, asks Colin Grimshaw

For some London taxi passengers, stuck in traffic jams and being assailed by their driver's trenchant views on everything from the state of the economy to the decline of Spurs, relief is at hand. From 28 March, they will be able to blot them out by tuning into an in-cab TV service.

Cabvision is the latest entrant to the booming out-of-home screen media sector. It will offer passengers a choice of seven channels: CNBC news; comedy clips from BBC shows such as *The Office*; FMTV, a fashion and music channel debuting on Sky in July; a Lonely Planet travel channel; London TV – the mayor's channel devoted to highlighting what is on in the capital; Extreme Sports Channel clips; and rolling teletext-type news bulletins. Of course, there will also be advertising, with five to six minutes of 30-second ads in each 40-minute programme cycle.

It is not the first taxi TV service, but whereas the others are based on DVDs that typically show a 12-minute loop of content with no offer of choice, Cabvision will 'broadcast' the content to an on-board computer, using digital audio broadcast airwaves.

This will enable the service to refresh content and advertising, so that different executions can be played out over an advertiser's monthly contract, or at specific times of day. Furthermore, passengers will interact with the channels through a remote control in the seat arm, which will provide measured commercial impact for the ads, countering a major criticism of ambient and outdoor media; that they lack accountability.

Business reach

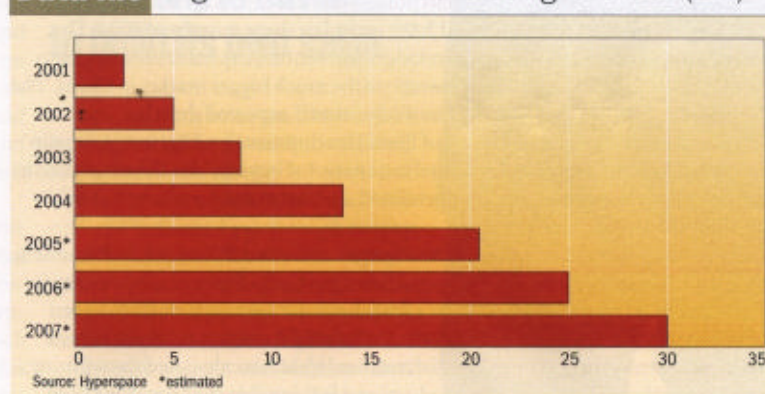
At launch, the service will run in 1000 black cabs, providing access to 1.4m pairs of eyes a month, based on the average daily number of passengers per cab. The cabs cover the City and West End, so the vast proportion of viewers are expected to be business people, offering advertisers in sectors such as mobile phones, computers and financial services, the chance to reach a highly targeted captive audience. The inaugural advertiser will be an unspecified international airline.

On the face of it, Cabvision sounds like a winner, but there are sceptics who say that, compared with other outdoor options, the average audience of 45 people a day is tiny, making the aforementioned 1.4m a theoretical figure. Although the screens cannot be switched



Cabvision: service will initially roll out to 1000 cabs covering the City and West End of London, offering access to 1.4m people per month

Data file Digital out-of-home advertising revenues (£m)



off, the sound can, and observers point out that business people on short taxi rides around the City are more likely to be preparing for a meeting, than watching TV, while those sharing taxis, are liable to be chatting over the top of it.

Lloyd Keisner, managing director of ambient outfit, Tabletalk Media, spent 10 years in taxi advertising at Clear Channel. He says the medium is expensive for the audience reach. 'The investment in installing the screens is sizeable, which doesn't allow for ads to be given away cheaply,' says Keisner. 'It has been around for several years and has yet to take off – you have to ask why. That said, Cabvision is using much-improved technology, so maybe it now will.'

The rate card for advertising is £43,000 a month for the 1000-taxi fleet, which Tom Paton, Cabvision's sales and

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James Davies
Hyperspace

marketing director, claims is half the price of TV for an equivalent number of commercial impacts. The £1m-plus investment in the service, he says, will realise a profit in year two. At this point, it will be rolled out to 4000 cabs, representing a third of all central London taxis and increasing monthly commercial impacts to more than 5m.

Return on investment

James Davies, director of Posterscope's creative and new media division, Hyperspace, is enthusiastic about Cabvision. He says the rate card, which equates to £30 per 1000 impacts for a 30-second ad, is what he expected. 'You would expect to pay a premium over digital posters, as it offers a much stronger way of engaging with consumers,' adds Davies. 'If only half of passengers watch the service, it still provides a valuable audience of half a million hard-to-reach businesspeople.'

The choice of channels, providing opportunities to advertise in complementary content is a plus factor, says Davies, and he expects more opportunities as the service develops. 'We could see advertisers creating programmes, or channels.'

Connecting with a captive audience of busy, affluent people is a compelling marketing proposition. However, if Cabvision's content is not sufficiently engaging, then passengers may find their drivers' 'oi guv, you'll never guess who I had in the back of my cab' revelations, rather more entertaining. ■