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Precision pays off in advertising strategy

If you believe the statistic that American consumers are exposed to 2,500 to 3,500 ad messages daily, it makes you wonder if all available surfaces are currently used up. Eighteenth century astronomers stubbornly refused to believe that stones fell from the sky. In that case, we could project in the future that asteroids will have ads on them. Everything seems to have ads on them.

Ad professionals are split on the value of constantly exposing consumers to marketing messages, from ads imprinted on eggshells and digital displays on elevators to visuals projected on floors and sidewalks. While some believe in advertising everywhere, others feel today's level of saturation is like being stung by a thousand jellyfish, nothing penetrates when everything is over-stimulated.

I have compiled an assortment of more than 250 unconventional marketing vehicles to present to my clients and students. From the ever-present "swoosh" logo on sports hero wardrobes to the everyman's surfaces like tattoos, banana peels, umbrellas, cows, beach sand, space ships, urinals, and more, it is quite evident that media is everywhere.

It has been reported that the Mach 4 Baptist Church in Lemon Grove, Washington, sold bathroom wall space to Burger King, the rims of their collection plates to Hewlett-Packard, and the backs of pews to Jolly Time popcorn. A pastor in Austin, Texas, is reportedly paid \$500 a week to wear Tommy Hilfiger at the lectern. Colgate-Palmolive has reportedly offered \$150 for a single reference to any of their products by clergy, requiring only a videotape showing the remarks being made to a group of 100 or more people.

From pulpit to cockpit, US Airways was reportedly talking to several companies regarding placing ads on airsickness bags. Airlines face less revenue and more costs, resulting in monetizing every inch of available space – watch for ads on blankets, pillows and the backs of tray tables. Travelers in the Indianapolis International Airport seeking to juice up their laptop or cell phone have discovered Chase's logo and message: "This outlet works. Now you can too."

So, does avant-garde advertising work? One never knows without tracking. Today's ad environment is all accelerator and no brakes; I challenge my own clients and students to develop more discipline and more precision in order to take the most critical step: track responses. That's when you know if your investment paid off.