

FEPE feedback

BEIRUT, LEBANON: 170 delegates from 29 countries, who operate in the out of home (OOH) space, converged in Lebanon for the 51st FEPE Conference, which has been described as the most successful to date. Delegates were able to hear the insights of the industry's most knowledgeable thought leaders from around the world. The conference identified and shared information on future trends, and also discussed new ways to becoming a more engaging as a medium.



Watts Wacker, a well known futurist from FirstMatter (USA), provided a key-note presentation with a review on how technology has affected OOH and what impact this has had on the environment. Looking ahead, Wacker indicated that there are positive signs for OOH if the medium embraces digital solutions and green elements. Currently, digital formats presently account for just 1.5% of sales so there is substantial room for growth.

Going green, but...

Abroad, many agencies are taking on green technology in order to institute eco-friendly building and business practices; members of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) are building green plants, and some are using solar and wind energy to power billboards and/or using bio-diesel fuel in their vehicle fleets. However, certain difficulties arise in trying to implement eco-friendly practices.

One issue arises in recycling products... the OAAA realised that recycling products like polypropylene (PP), polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polyethylene (PE) aren't the same as recycling aluminium cans. There was also the question, "What is recycling?" was raised, and it is clear that for some people, recycling is little more than giving a product a second use.

These issues and others led the OAAA to establish a set of business practices for recycling based on certain criteria that will help members to choose the best recycling company... New LED technology is replacing traditional high-intensity lighting, which is not only eco-friendly but also a means of cost-cutting. Moreover, LED technology provides lighting that lasts 20 times longer than incandescent lamps and cuts power consumption by 80%. The OAAA also recommends the following practices that will help create an eco-friendly OOH environment:

- Maintain a strict recycling programme as opposed to the re-use programme for PE and PP substrates,
- For PVC substrates authorise a responsible re-use programme;
- It is also important to include an indemnification clause;
- Billboard companies should demand accountability for responsible disposal of used material.

The co-ordination of pick up and transporting of used materials is challenging for most recycling companies; therefore minimum pick-up quantities may be required by the recycling companies in order to ensure this process is more efficient and cost-friendly.

South African 'green' initiatives are underway

The need to expand into new technologies was echoed by Rachel Bristow of Unilever (UK & Ireland) and Stuart Williams of Sony Pictures (UK), who pointed out that one critical area for improvement is for OOH to become more progressive in terms of new technologies.

Barry Sayer, CEO of Continental Outdoor (South Africa), provided food for thought with his speech entitled *Is the billboard dead?*

Happily it was established that billboards are very much alive, particularly with advancements being made in digital and green awareness.

In a speech given by Francois de Gaspe Beaubien from ZOOM Media (Canada), it was concluded that OOH is presently in a very good position. According to De Gaspe, traditional press and TV audiences are on the decline, whereas OOH is the second-fastest growing medium to the Internet.

This was further substantiated by Edouard Monin of Ipsos (Middle East and North Africa) and Eli Khoury of M+ C Saatchi (Middle East), who highlighted that OOH in the Middle East and North Africa region is establishing itself as a lucrative medium and is proving to be valuable channel of communication.

Support was given to Annie Rickard from Posterscope (Global), who commented on how the medium is developing and how OOH needs to work with other media channels to grow. Rickard pointed out that OOH is now about selling the audience - not just panels.

Luigi Errico an OOH specialist from Fosbury (Italy) continued this thought by stressing that the industry needs to continually strive to improve the quality of displays for clients.

Quantity is no longer the answer

FEPE president, Christian Kauter, summed up the 51st Congress by commenting that the OOH industry is entering a golden age.

Now more than ever, OOH owners, planners and sellers need to increase co-operation with clients, promote the medium by selling audience (not panels) and embrace new technologies such as digital.

His most critical point was that as an industry, OOH owners need to produce guidelines for operators and authorities to indicate what is acceptable and unacceptable.