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Need a Skywriter? Or Napkin Campaign? Call DoMedia

Ohio-Based Firm Pulls Alternative Media Buys Under One Roof

By Jack Neff

The long tail of alternative media has been dogged by a big problem: The market for such things as skywriters, street teams or health-club TV is so fragmented that assembling a media plan by them is daunting.

Now, Columbus, Ohio-based DoMedia is looking to solve the problem by creating a single online marketplace that pulls together offerings that include mobile, truck ads, building projections, truck and car wraps, digital out-of-home and pizza-box ads into a single searchable website, DoMedia.com.

The goal is to create a sort of online bazaar from what so far has become a dizzying array of more than 20,000 individual media offerings from 400 vendors representing as much as \$20 billion in potential billings — including much of the conventional outdoor advertising industry but also more unconventional alternatives such as napkin ads.

DoMedia also serves as a clearinghouse for creative and production services in some media verticals, but it's not a broker and doesn't offer any agency or production services itself. Instead, DoMedia is looking to make money from display and search advertising, much in the way search engines do, but focused entirely on alternative media.

Free listings

Eventually, the company plans to offer paid subscription services to extend the site's capabilities for buyers and sellers, said Laura Brooks, director-marketing and public relations. But listings and searches

on DoMedia will remain free, she said.

DoMedia grew out of the frustrations of its chairman and co-founder Rich Langdale, who's also managing partner of venture capital firm NCT Venture Group. NCT backs a truck-side advertising company in Columbus, which was having a hard time getting noticed by larger buyers.

Ms. Brooks, a former brand manager for Scotts Miracle-Gro, had experienced similar problems on the buy side.

"As a brand person, you get cold calls all of the time," she said. "There is no way to keep track of who does what where. And then when you really do need it, it's impossible to go back and figure out who you talked to."

Alternative media's rise

Despite the difficulty of buying it, alternative media has grown fast. PQMedia pegged the total market at \$73.4 billion in 2007, up 22% from a year earlier, though that number included a vast amount of online display and search advertising not covered by DoMedia and excluded some of the harder-to-quantify niches it does encompass, including street teams and skywriters.

Regardless of how it's sliced, alternative media could be growing much faster because of DoMedia, said Doug Spak, VP-media director at Northlich, Cincinnati. He has been using the site for a month and said he sees huge potential in it.

Mr. Spak, who's also a veteran of Grey Global Group's J. Brown/LMC Group, has experienced the problems of lining up local and alternative-media campaigns first-

hand for more than a decade.

"I think [DoMedia will] have a tremendous impact, because it was just so time consuming and arduous to track the information down that you'd either do these programs sub-optimally or you just wouldn't do them at all," he said.

He's already used the site to develop a test program in Dayton for a client who didn't want to use broadcast media. "Within a day, I had four vendors back to me with terrific information, cost proposals, creative examples of what could be done," he said. "That would have taken a week to two weeks before."

Creating opportunities

Mr. Spak believes the system will entice marketers and agencies that had given up on doing nontraditional media campaigns to "fully explore these alternatives." He sees health-club networks and street teams — fragmented but effective media, according to him — among beneficiaries of the new marketplace.

And he believes DoMedia presents an opportunity to large national advertisers to at least fill in media plans with alternative media to reach local markets where even national package-goods brands have pockets of strength or gaps to address.

"It may be strategically more interesting to do 25 markets of grassroots stuff, but it's a heck of a lot easier to make 25 spot TV buys," he said. "I would argue [DoMedia] opens up the opportunity for me to execute things that will reach a whole different group of people than my TV."

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274 Marconi Blvd, Suite 400 | Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 866-939-3663 | www.DOmedia.com