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Ripple Effect: CBS Extends Reach Of 'Outernet' From Borders To Jiffy Lube

by Joe Mandese

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CBS Thursday unveiled a major expansion of its digital out-of-home video unit, CBS Outernet, striking a deal with local community video operator Ripple that will extend its reach in an array of retail locations from Borders book stores to Jack-in-the-Box restaurants, and even Jiffy Lube auto service centers. The deal comes a day after rival NBC unveiled a major out-of-home video initiative (MediaDailyNews Jan. 16 & 17), and comes as major media companies are turning their eyes to the fast-growing out-of-home video marketplace, which in many ways is akin to the rapid growth of online video.

In fact, when CBS got really serious about the business, acquiring Fairfield, CT-based super-market video network SignStorey in October, it re-branded the unit and its focus as the Outernet. Now it's thinking outside the box, extending the reach of its content and advertising into a broader array of out-of-home locations.

Terms of the deal with Ripple were not disclosed, but the companies described it as a "partnership" that would create a combined out-of-home advertising network reaching more than 100 million viewers each month. CBS Outernet will control national advertising, while Ripple will continue to oversee more than 1,500 specialty retail locations.

In a related move, Ripple announced an agreement with SeeSaw Networks, a leading aggregator of digital out-of-home video advertising reach that operates an online system for buying and planning out-of-home video buys in a way that's akin to online ad exchanges such as Google's AdWords. The agreement adds Ripple's local retail screens to SeeSaw's out-of-home inventory. Terms of

this deal also were not disclosed, and it was not clear what inventory would be controlled by SeeSaw vs. CBS Outernet, but the companies said SeeSaw would have access to "millions of weekly impressions" from Ripple's network.

The addition of Ripple's inventory brings SeeSaw's advertising reach to more than 20,000 venues nationwide. So much so, that SeeSaw is making a claim that might make Ripple partner CBS cringe – "reaching more Americans than many primetime TV programs at a fraction of the cost."

That no doubt is a significant factor motivating CBS, NBC and other big network-based companies to accelerate their expansion into the digital out-of-home marketplace. CBS chief Leslie Moonves is believed to have taken a personal interest in overseeing the out-of-home strategy, and the major networks are looking to out-of-home as strategic a move as their online and cable video-on-demand plays.

The deal also is a boon for SeeSaw, which has gradually been accruing critical mass in the burgeoning marketplace, and has created simple, easy-to-use buying and planning systems enabling advertisers and agencies to define and order highly targeted reach across its array of out-of-home video affiliates.

SeeSaw chief Peter Bowen dubs the planning approach "life pattern marketing," and suggests it is every bit as important a breakthrough for advertisers and agencies as behavioral targeting has been online. It is "an effective way to intercept people in their daily routines where they work, play and socialize," he says, noting that the system enables a marketer to target a consumer based on the locations they travel throughout their business and personal lifestyle day.