



Need to make an ad impact? The sky's the limit ...

An old idea is proving to be effective in the modern age

BRENDAN SEERY

IN THIS age of electronic technology – where things digital are considered cutting edge – the DAd turned to an advertising medium that is at least 80 years old when it launched its election manifesto.

As intrigued Gauteng gazed skyward, a small, slow-moving Piper Super Cub aircraft towed a massive DA banner through the clear skies.

It worked because it was unusual and, in a world of information overload, it cut through the clutter.

A Cape Town-headquartered company, which also operates in Joburg and Durban, has a number of regular clients (and some ad hoc users) who have recognised there is good value in having your message in the sky.

Sky Messaging's managing director, Thomas Kritzer, says research has shown aerial messages can capture the attention of a consumer for 17 seconds – the sort of dwell time which is almost unheard of in these days of fragmented channels and even more fragmented attention spans.

"It is something different, something adventurous and entertaining – people cannot resist looking up," says Kritzer, adding "they can't but help absorb your marketing message".

The best thing about this sort of advertising channel, argues Sky Messaging, is that it "cannot be turned off or thrown away".

Kritzer says aerial advertising is not a stand-alone channel – although for some clients, it comprises a major part of their spend in localised promotions.

"Sky messaging is highly effective as part of a multi-channel campaign to

reinforce specific themes from a broader campaign or to specific target areas or user groups to back up executions in other media."

He says that, based on CPM numbers (that is the Cost Per Thousand people reached), aerial advertising is one of the most cost-effective channels around, with an average rate of R4 per thousand.

"So you can add a targeted, low-cost channel to your campaign to boost your return on investment."

“**People still want surprise and entertainment**”

Sky Messaging operates a number of Piper Super Cub aircraft in Cape Town, Joburg and Durban – because they are very reliable, comparatively inexpensive to run and, most importantly, can fly at low speeds, to ensure that banners have maximum exposure.

Flights (normally of around two hours' duration) are precisely targeted, according to demographics and to campaign objectives.

Many are done around rush hours, when many cars are stuck in traffic or travelling slowly along highways.

The aircraft are also deployed at special events when there is a captive audience.

Pilots at the Sky Messaging control centre constantly monitor things like

traffic, so that a plane can overfly an area of traffic jams and target more people.

Clients have access to a computer "dashboard" where the flight can be tracked while it is in progress, contributing to what Kritzer calls "maximum transparency".

Sky Messaging advises clients and media planners about the specifications for banners so that they will be safe and reusable – with most having a service life of 200 flight hours.

In creative terms, advertisers have to learn how to communicate in the sky: big, bold and simple is the way to go, in terms of words, images and colour.

Kritzer says the company has done a number of case studies which confirm the marketing effectiveness of the concept.

The first study was performed on its own, Sky Messaging, brand.

After just 50 hours of flight time, a survey showed that 28 percent of people sampled recalled the brand; that of those people, 92 percent remembered the plane passing; 82 percent agreed that the banner was readable and clear and 58 percent had discussed the banner with friends and family after seeing it.

For a campaign done for Cape Town entertainment venue Mavericks, and which measured the recall rate and consumer engagement in Twitter 89 percent recalled seeing the brand; of those 96 percent remembered the banner passing and 59 percent discussed it with others.

A banner for Montecasino was flown in Joburg for 12.5 hours to support the "Follow the Leader" campaign and showed an increase of Twitter followers



FLYING HIGH: Sky Messaging in the skies above Cape Town – a banner pulled by a slow-moving aircraft.

of 13.2 percent during the messaging and still 5.2 percent afterwards.

Kritzer, who is trained in marketing and has a private pilot's licence (but does not do the flying himself – it is done by a team of commercially-qualified pilots) believes Sky Messaging shows that "people still want surprise

and entertainment and they still want to interact, in an old-fashioned way, with a medium".

When they do, they pay attention. And when they pay attention, they've already taken the first steps on the path to purchase.

LETTERS

A FEW weeks ago you reviewed a new television campaign that looked just a little bit too familiar, and this time it's the turn of Outsurance's "Talking Wallets".

Now where the heck had I seen talking wallets and purses just like that before, and a voiceover say-