

A Media Buy That Works, Literally

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AN UNASSUMING FIRM THAT PARTNERS with employers to distribute coupons and promotional samples to employees, WorkPlace Media, has been racking up impressive response rates over the last year.

The reasons for WorkPlace's success--including psychological motivations that make employees especially receptive in their working environments--suggest that the workplace is indeed a hot spot for ad dollars, for reasons that are only now being explored.

Just as interesting, WorkPlace is reaching employees through an old-fashioned medium--print--that's often neglected in ad industry plans for reaching consumers where they work.

"The typical U.S. worker spends over 60 percent of their waking hours in the workplace," said Dan Wheeler, the company's vice president of ad sales, who claims to reach 65 million Americans at a million companies nationwide during this hard-to-reach time.

Wheeler touted the advantages of ads in the workplace: "More and more purchases are made on their way to work, or the way from work. People are fond of saying what we're a time-starved society, and so we try to fit these activities in this sort of logical time slot during the day."

WorkPlace has a number of nationwide campaigns for "commercial hub" services including Ace Hardware, LensCrafters, and restaurant chains like Subway, McDonald's, and Blimpie, and "the response rate that we get is five to 10 times with traditional print media," according to Wheeler.

In WorkPlace's system, bosses and human resources workers "agree to distribute our client's special offers, and they do so in person or by inserting it with the paycheck," Wheeler explained. With its highly local distribution and partnership with members of the immediate social community (authority figures, in fact), Wheeler says WorkPlace's approach "takes a classic, old-fashioned neighborhood marketing concept, systematizes it, and provides it with scale and reach."

But how does this marketing technique differ from direct mail? For one thing, partnership with employers gives the coupons the gloss of a "reward," Wheeler said. "We put the advertisers in a different environment--at work, these offers are perceived as a reward, and are presented as such to the employee. That's a huge benefit for the advertisers."

Not coincidentally, "our host employers actually see the program as an added benefit for their employees," according to Wheeler. "Many of our host employers have told us that the offers we provide are actually an opportunity to reestablish personal contact with their employees. And typically, the offers we have are exclusive--and therefore 'special' in that sense as well."