Programmatic out-of-home advertising: a quick-start guide

What programmatic digital billboards and screens are, how Australian businesses can buy them, how audiences are measured, and how to judge whether they worked.

Out-of-home advertising means ads people see outside the home: billboards, bus shelters, shopping centre screens, airports and train stations. Many of these are now digital screens, and a growing share can be bought "programmatically", meaning through software, by time, place and audience, rather than by booking a site for weeks at a time.

For a business, that means you can show ads on screens near your stores, only at the times that matter, with budgets far smaller than a traditional billboard campaign.

How it works

- **Media owners** run the screens. In Australia, these include large outdoor companies and smaller networks in shopping centres, gyms, venues and transport.
- **Buying platforms** let advertisers or agencies buy screen time across many media owners in one place. You choose locations, days, times and budget, and the platform buys the ad slots.
- **Audience measurement** estimates how many people are likely to see each screen. In Australia, the Outdoor Media Association's measurement system, MOVE, describes itself as representing "nearly 100% of Australian media owners and all OOH environments". Ask any seller whether their audience numbers come from MOVE.

Most small and medium businesses buy programmatic out-of-home through an agency or a specialist, because the buying platforms are usually set up for professional buyers. Some platforms offer self-serve access for smaller advertisers. It's worth asking around.

Before you start

- **Be clear what the ads are for.** Out-of-home is best at building awareness and reminding people you exist, especially near where they can buy from you. It's not a direct-response channel like search ads.
- **Pick locations that matter.** Screens near your stores, in your delivery areas, or where your customers spend time.
- **Pick times that matter.** A café might want weekday mornings; a bottle shop might want Friday afternoons. Programmatic buying lets you choose.

- **Prepare simple creative.** People see a screen for a few seconds. Use one message, a strong image, your brand and, at most, a short web address.

How to judge whether it worked

This is the hard part, because people don't click a billboard. Some practical approaches:

- **Compare areas.** Run ads in some areas and not others, then compare sales, store visits or website visits from those areas over the same period.
- **Compare time periods.** Look at results before, during and after the campaign, allowing for seasonality.
- **Watch branded search.** If more people search for your business by name in the areas where ads ran, that's a useful signal.
- **Use a simple offer or web address** that only appears on the screens, so you can count responses.

Be cautious of reports that claim precise sales from a screen campaign. Ask how the figure was worked out.

Common mistakes

- Spreading a small budget too thinly across too many locations.
- Too many words on the creative.
- Expecting immediate online sales.
- Not planning how to measure the effect before the campaign starts.

Where Blend can help

We can help you design the before-and-after comparison so you can tell whether a screen campaign moved the numbers that matter. Get in touch, or see how we measure ad results against real sales.

This guide is general information, not professional advice for your situation. Read it online and find more free guides at www.blend-datastrategy.com/tools.