

Billboards fight back as ad choice in new media age

By **Jesse Noyes**

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Bank of America is creating a smaller version of the Green Monster to tower over the Mass Pike.

Taking a cue from the historic Fenway Park feature, the bank is emulating the scoreboard on a billboard to be unveiled Monday.

Like the scoreboard at Fenway, slots on the billboard can be updated, allowing the bank to continually throw new pitches to passing pedestrians and vehicles.

“It’s a really great way to keep it fresh and to keep customers looking at it,” said Cary Rubinstein, enterprise media executive for BofA.

Advertisers, big and small, are finding ways to keep traditional outdoor marketing relevant as the popularity of online and mobile media surges. Far from killing billboards, new media is breathing new life into the aged medium, said Stephen Freitas, chief marketing officer for the Outdoor Advertising Association of America.

“Out of home, though it is the oldest forms of advertising, is going through a renaissance,” Freitas said.

The outdoor ad industry took in more than \$6 billion last year - an 8 percent increase over 2004. And the industry saw another 7.7 percent increase in revenue in the first quarter of 2006, Freitas said.

“We haven’t figured out a way to e-mail ourselves to work yet, so they have a captive audience,” said George Tannenbaum, executive vice president of Digitas - the big Boston marketing firm specializing in new media.

“Old” billboards are being used to drive people to Web sites, and digital signs give advertisers a way to interact with consumers’ cell phones.

Of course, just having a topical theme can get you a lot of attention, said Glenn Kelley, president and CEO of Kelley & Co. & Etc.

Kelley created a billboard using Whitey Bulger’s elusiveness as a theme for Gosling’s Rum of Bermuda and caught the interest of the local and national media, giving his client further exposure.

The rum-maker recently posted a new sign on the Southeast Expressway that reads: “Almost As Hard To Find As Cheap Gas” - a message likely to ring true with passing motorists.



WALL BALL: The Bank of America will unveil a billboard over the Pike that looks like Fenway Park’s scoreboard.