

The Future of Advertising

By Richard Yonck

The average American is bombarded with 3,000 ads every day.¹ Assuming a waking day of 17 hours that amounts to three ads every minute! And guess what? It won't be very long before we'll look back on these as halcyon days, a simpler time when we had to contend with a mere three kilo-ads daily.

Do you think 3,000 sounds ridiculously high? Let's break it down. The number comprises all the print ads we view in newspapers and magazines and all those we hear and see on radio and television. It also includes the many product placements that are slipped surreptitiously into every program from prime time dramas to so-called reality shows. Now add all of the billboards and signs we see during every drive and public transport commute. Then there are the ever-present logos that embellish every manufactured object from credit cards to sneakers to haute couture. Of course, don't forget the ads that permeate nearly all of the Web pages we browse.

It hasn't always been like this. Newspaper advertising didn't begin until the mid-1600s, centuries after the invention of the printing press. The first radio broadcast was

¹ Brower, M, Leon W. *The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices: Practical Advice from the Union of Concerned Scientists*. Three Rivers Press; 1999

made in 1906, but radio advertising didn't begin until 1923. Broadcast television premiered in 1936, but we had to wait five years for the first TV commercial in 1941. 1994 saw the beginning of Web ads, three years after the first Web servers were built. Beginning to see a few patterns? New mediums for distributing information are being created ever more rapidly and the marketing departments are jumping on board just that much more quickly. In short, if you build the medium, the advertisers will come.

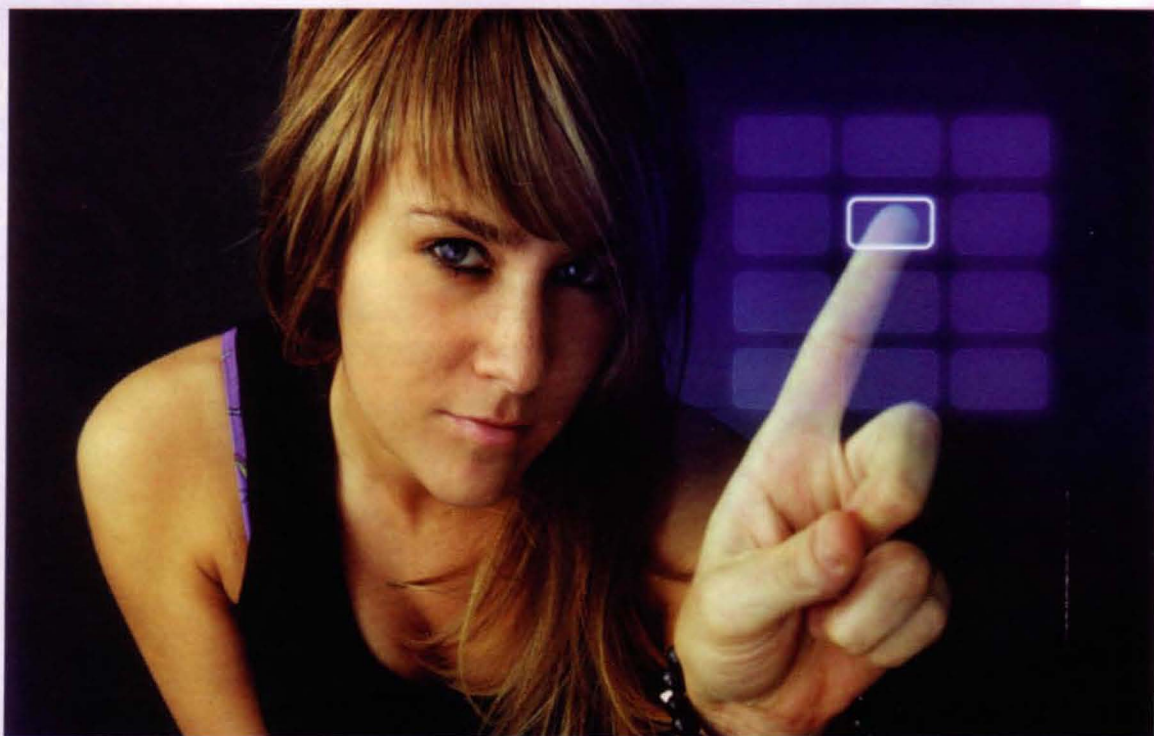
So what do you suppose advertising will look like a decade from now?

We are on the cusp of some tremendous technological and societal changes due to the convergence of an array of new technologies. Information technology, material sciences, biotechnology, nanotechnology and robotics are all going to play huge roles in shaping the world we'll live in. Processing power that used to be exclusive to supercomputers is now found in everyday smart phones and game consoles. This trend of building more memory and processing power into increasingly smaller packages can be expected to continue for several more decades.

One likely result of this will be something called *augmented reality*, the overlaying of computer-generated data onto our personal environment. A pilot viewing a heads-up display on a windshield or visor is a current-day example. Listening to a guided art tour on a headset might be consid-

See us
at
InfoS
**Think
advertisers
aren't
looking for
more access
to your
purchasing
data?**

Guess again!



g — and You



ered another early implementation. Now shrink the audio-visual processing components involved, connect them to the Internet with wireless and wear it routinely because it gives you access to so many more levels of information so much more quickly. Think the advertisers will want a piece of that? You bet they will.

Take a walk down augmented Main Street.

A clothing store registers the RFID tags embedded in your clothing (which were originally put there to make the inventory process more efficient.) The store matches your ensemble to a series of database models which gauge your demographic and economic status. Based on this, (and possibly other personal data which you may or may not have chosen to broadcast) the servers generate a tailor-made ad which is transmitted for your eyes and ears only. It beckons you to come inside and try on their latest line of jackets (in a style assessed as having a 93.4 percent likelihood of appealing to you.)

Or you're an architecture major, visiting Chicago for the first time. You spot a building you recognize as being of the Chicago School but aren't sure of the architect. You bring up an informational overlay and read that it was built by William Le Baron Jenney in 1889. Upping the data level, you see a three-dimensional floor plan. You toggle off the "space for lease" offers and a solicitation for a donation to the local

historical preservation society so that you can focus on the structural elements and some recent renovation work. After a few minutes of admiring the innovations of the period, you switch off the overlay and continue on your way.

The possibilities for augmented reality are endless, but all this functionality will come with a price. Inevitably, advertisers of every ilk are going to want access to you. Overt banner ads, sophisticated e-fantasies, viral pyramid schemes, subtle whisperings — they're all going to be vying for your attention. Constantly. Left unchecked, you would potentially be open to such a continual stream of unwanted offers and banter that it would be impossible to function. This will make it vital that we create personal filters which allow only the data you want to get through. These would be similar to the spam and virus filters of today, but far more intelligent and user modifiable.

Augmented reality is just one example of a coming medium the influence peddlers will seek to use for their own ends. Virtual reality, telepresence, directed audio systems, scent generators and e-textiles are but a few of the developing technologies they'll undoubtedly want to exploit. No doubt there will be many others based on mediums that haven't even been conceived yet. Only one thing's for certain: The world's going to be seeing and hearing and smelling and feeling a lot more advertising in the years to come.