

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.