

# Text messaging tops the Billboards charts

## Giant signs along border with Mexico inform and entertain

BY LAURA CARROLL  
LAS VEGAS BUSINESS PRESS

**LAS VEGAS, NV – April 5, 2006** – Billboards, those 1950s advertising staples so ubiquitous and entertaining while motoring along the interstate highways, today have become high-tech along stretches of very congested traffic.

In 2004, Border Billboards erected a 50-foot billboard on the Mexico side of Tijuana-San Diego border crossing and this year it added one at the Laredo, Texas-Nuevo Laredo entry point.

While the size of the billboards is comparable to the ones seen in Times Square, the ability to receive personal text messages on the billboards from cell phones is unprecedented -- and is a certifiable hit with those in a flirtatious mood.

Behind this venture is Las Vegas resident Jennifer Stefano, co-owner of Border Billboards along with Jerome Snyder and Mark Stout. "The more senses you engage, the better the advertising," Stefano said. "The outdoor digital world has changed substantially. It's new to the industry as a whole."



A giant billboard allows this captive audience at the U.S.-Mexico border to relieve their boredom by text messaging.

The billboards have three components to them: audio (transmitted through a low-frequency radio station), video, and interactivity, which are both controlled via satellite. "There is no other advertising medium that truly holds people captive," Stefano said.

### 'WAVE OF FUTURE'

"New York is doing it now," said Rob Dondero, executive vice president of Las Vegas-based R&R Partners. "It's the wave of the future."

To make sure that Border Billboards' clients, who pay \$10,000 a month for 144 play times a day, get the optimum "face time," Stefano said that the billboards are placed where "cars are funneled to a position where you can't even make a U-turn at the borders."

Besides the advertising from such companies as Saturn, Coca-Cola, Circuit City and Best Buy, there are segments broadcast from CNN Headline News, the weather forecast, and music videos, along with the frequent, "Hey, you in the pink Cadillac, let's meet at Starbucks ..." message.

As for the future of the four-year-old company, Stefano intends to bring her billboards onto U.S. soil, but because of current highway regulations, the text messaging feature probably won't be allowed. But if and when the opportunity presents itself, Stefano said her company could be ready to set up a site in the U.S. within 12 to 24 months. It takes 90 to 120 days for one of Border Billboards' boards to be manufactured.

As for the borders, Stefano has definite plans to expand to the Juarez-El Paso gateway and the Nogales-Arizona entry point; Canadian sites are being explored.

"We consider ourselves the pioneers in multisensory activation," said Stefano, who noted that public service announcements sponsored by the Ad Council are also featured on the billboards.

Start-up electronic component costs were just over a million dollars for Border Billboards and production costs for the 50-foot board are \$6,100.

## **UNLV JOINS BANDWAGON**

Closer to home, Thomas and Mack Center has used billboard advertising to capture captive audiences. Recently, the arena displayed personal text messages delivered via cell phones. "It creates interactivity that hasn't been done before," said Nevada Colwell, multimedia manager for Thomas and Mack Center. "The text messaging is really cool. You're able to gather data about your customers while they're still here. It creates a good one-to-one relationship with customers."

Text messaging has been featured at the Super Cross World Finals, the Eminem and Fifty Cent concert and the Green Day concert.

"It creates an activity and opens the door for new technology," Colwell said. "It's totally changing. It's becoming much more of a marketing tool. If you're running an event, you have their (the crowd's) attention much more than you do if they're watching television (on the screen)."

Like Border Billboards, Thomas and Mack Center filters out obscenities from text messages.

"Once we secure our own equipment," Colwell said, "we'll do text messaging all the time."

Advertising on the board at Thomas and Mack Center starts at \$1,000 a spot per event, with the more in-demand events drawing higher advertising premiums.

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