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Here, There and (NBC) Everywhere

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A display in Studio 8H shows a screen in the back of a New York City taxi cab, part of NBC Everywhere. (NBC)

Is NBC Universal worried about the flow of advertising revenue at its networks as the writers' strike drags on? Executives made like Alfred E. Neuman today with a pair of "What, me worry?" presentations, which played up ways for marketers to sponsor ads beyond the TV sets that viewers watch — or are watching less — at home.

Studio 8H at the NBC offices in 30 Rockefeller Plaza — idle because the strike has silenced "Saturday Night Live" — played host this afternoon to the presentations to advertisers, media buyers and reporters.

The audiences heard from executives about NBC Everywhere, the NBC Universal unit responsible for making content and ad deals in the fast-growing realm known as place-based marketing.

If the TV set is the first screen in the lives of consumers, the PC the second screen and the cellphone the third, placed-based marketing is all about the fourth screen: TV monitors installed in supermarkets, discount stores, sports arenas, health clubs, hospitals, trains, buses, taxi cabs,

classrooms and airport lounges; and TV screens located on college campuses, the pumps at gasoline stations and billboards.

“It’s no major secret media has become very fragmented,” said Mark French, senior vice president and general manager at NBC Everywhere, and “people are consuming media where they want.”

That is the primary reason revenue for advertising outside the home is the second fastest-growing category, behind only ads on the Internet.

Advertisers working with NBC Everywhere include AT&T, Coca-Cola, Denny’s, Geico, General Motors, Home Depot, Jack in the Box, Kimberly-Clark, J.P. Morgan Chase, Nivea, Panasonic, PepsiCo, Progressive insurance and Sony.

The programming that NBC Universal supplies for NBC Everywhere venues includes original news, sports and entertainment content as well as material recycled from shows that have already appeared on TV.

Among the NBC Universal stars involved: Tina Fey, Lawrence Kudlow, Jay Leno, John Madden, Seth Meyers and Conan O’Brien.

“It’s ‘promotainment,’” said John Miller, chief marketing officer for the NBC Universal Television Group and president at the NBC Agency, the internal ad shop.

The programming “exposes our channels, our shows and our talent,” he added, outside their usual realms of broadcast or cable TV.

The executives discussed 10 examples of how NBC Everywhere operates. There were props set up in various corners of Studio 8H to help demonstrate what each venue looks like.



At an event to attract advertisers, NBC Everywhere Mark French shows how the network’s content reaches to new locations, including supermarkets. (David Ho/Cox Newspapers)

Among them were a concession stand at a stadium, outfitted with a screen for Arena Media Networks; a Shell gas pump with a screen from the Fuelcast Network Powered by NBC (yes, that is the official name); a supermarket check-out line, featuring a screen for the PRN Network, which can be found in stores like Jewel-Osco and ShopRite; and the back seat of a New York City taxi cab with a screen.

In some instances, NBC Universal owns all or part of the NBC Everywhere properties.

For example, the Newborn Channel, which offers programs and commercials to parents in maternity wards, is part of the iVillage division.

In other cases, NBC Universal is a partner in the NBC Everywhere properties.

Among them are the screens in the backs of taxis, where the company teamed up with Clear Channel; screens on college and university campuses, where NBC Universal joined with a company called The University Network; and screens in health clubs, where NBC Universal became a partner of IdeaCast.

The IdeaCast and University Network partnerships were both announced at the presentations.

Mr. French also described details of plans in June to equip PATH trains that travel between New York and New Jersey with screens.

There will be eight screens in each train car, Mr. French said, presenting programming in 25-minute loops; the plans call for two and a half minutes of content to be followed by a 30-second commercial.

The screens will be silent, he added, because commuters could be bothered by continuous sound.

That brings up a question often asked about placed-based media: How do the media companies and advertisers figure out the fine line between entertainment and annoyance?

The audience for the programming on a place-based media screen may be “captive,” Mr. French said, but the material must be “engaging” — or the NBC Universal brand could be tarnished.

Executives are considering more place-based media outlets for NBC Everywhere, he added, in addition to those like NBC on Campus, NBC at the Gym, the Newborn Channel and NBC at Supermarkets.