



The Upright Position

Why tray table advertising aboard airplanes could send your brand's image soaring

Siamak Taghaddos was strapped in his airplane seat on a shuttle from Boston to New York when he lowered the tray table in front of him. Instead of the traditional putty-colored surface he expected, the tray top revealed a colorful, imprinted surface with a commercial message.

The CEO and co-founder of GotVMail Communications in Needham, Mass., thought this would be a perfect place to let prospective customers know about his company's telephone services. "Our main customers are a very affluent set of entrepreneurs who travel a lot," says Taghaddos. "If our ad was [on airplane tray tables], they would see it and realize what we can do for them."

Last year, New York City marketing firm Brand Connections licensed the patented system — which wraps tray-table surfaces with a removable printed plastic sheet — and began showcasing it on one major U.S. airline. Each sheet includes one to three advertisements occasionally mixed with editorial from content partners. The program will be rolled out on a European carrier later this year, says Brand Connections CEO Brian F. Martin. He expects to add another domestic airline next year.

Advertisers can make a national buy, which Martin says produces 20 million impressions per month, or they can purchase a portion of the fleet. Typically, he says, advertisers buy a quarter of the fleet for a few months at a time. GotVMail purchased trays for two months on the entire shuttle fleet, which makes daily stops in Boston, New York City and Washington, D.C. He estimates that the \$300,000 buy netted him about 5 million impressions. While advertisers can buy a portion of the tray table space, "each plane is category-exclusive to an advertiser," says Martin. So companies don't need to worry about appearing next to their competition.

Airlines have long been an effective marketplace for the well-heeled, with opportunities that include in-flight magazine advertisements and video placements, says Nancy Michaels, founder of GrowYourBusinessNetwork.com and co-author of *Off-the-Wall Marketing Ideas: Jumpstart Your Sales without Busting Your Budget*. "If well done, [tray table advertising] might be quite useful in terms of capturing the undivided attention of passengers who can afford air travel, which is not so easy these days," she says.

Michaels says that savvy marketers will want to ask about some key issues, including how well the tray table wraps stand up to wear and tear and what results other companies have achieved through the program. Marketers could measure effectiveness with a specific call to action, such as responding to a special 800 number or visiting a Web page created specially for the promotion.

Taghaddos isn't certain how many new customers he got directly as a result of this promotion, but says he'd do it again for the exposure to key prospects. "The small business, entrepreneurial market can be hard to target," he says. "The feedback that I did get told me that people read our ads and that this was an effective branding effort for us." **D**