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Wallet wonders

Using phone cards as an advertising medium gets aggressive push from new company

SELLING THE "REAL ESTATE" ON

a phone card is not a new concept, but the idea is getting a fresh push from the founders of **Pocket Billboards**. According to **Steven Posen**, company president, and **Mendel Tropper**, ceo, they will partner with phone card providers to offer clients private-labeled cards with both print and interactive audio messages.

With a background in the advertising industry, the duo regards their new program as a solution for advertisers who today are challenged to reach niche markets such as Hispanics as well as to track the results of their advertising efforts.

"We have seen how frustrated advertisers are with what is available to them," Tropper says. "Television prices just keep going up, and the ads are less effective as the number of channels increases. And we constantly hear clients complain that there is no trackability of the media they are spending billions of dollars on every year. Add to that the story of the decade – how huge the Hispanic population is according to the 2000 census – and we know how corporations are clamoring trying to figure out ways to reach them."

Behind the story

The new venture was generated while Tropper and Posen were working in television promotion. "A friend at a phone card company showed me something he had done on a private-label basis with Pizza Hut," Posen says. "It caught my interest."

That "show and tell" led to a discussion with Tropper of the phone card as a direct means of advertising and reaching consumers. With a little research, Tropper and Posen found out the use of phone cards "was staggering," Tropper says, "We realized this was a solution to the ailment of the advertising industry in corporate America right now, and we started to develop a program that made sense for the advertising community based on this product."

Pocket Billboards, founded in April 2003 and based in Studio City, Calif.,



does not create new phone cards. "Our primary focus," Posen says, "is to take the enormous volume of phone cards sold every month and slap advertising on them."

"We are currently in negotiations with several major phone card companies," Posen adds. With cards available from different providers as needed, Pocket Billboards plans to provide an advertising medium to whatever demographic or geographic location a client might want. "If I have a client that wants to advertise in South Florida, then I need the ability to reach them," Posen says. "The more cards we have, the more we can target different demographics."

And who are the potential clients? Pocket Billboards is marketing its concept to a variety of industries including entertainment, restaurant, travel and banking. Advertising might be included on the front and/or back of the cards themselves as well as on the packaging and can incorporate coupons, sweepstakes, rebate and other affinity programs.

Adding revenue

Tropper and Posen believe that adding advertising to phone cards is a way for phone card providers to add a secondary income stream during a time when margins on their products are slim. "The margins in the phone card industry are so slim that just to make a few cents more per card, even if it just eliminates printing costs, can add tremendously to the bottom line," Posen says.

Win-win

According to Tropper, the company helps clients understand the power of the phone card as a medium – one that has print, couponing and audio components. see **Pocket** on page 110

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"We sit down with them and help them solve their marketing challenges," he says. "There is a lot of media planning and strategy that goes into it, and then there is the operational management of it. It's a very involved process, but we have built a system internally to do that."

"Our intention with the whole process is to shake up the phone card industry as well as the advertising industry a little bit," Posen says. "We understand both businesses, and we think the phone card as a medium not only helps the advertiser but helps the phone card industry as well." ■