MA · PLAYBOOK 01 · UNITED STATES

The OOH Growth Playbook

How fast-moving brands use out-of-home to build recognition, credibility and market presence.

An independent, full-service media agency. London, New York & Dubai.

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MA · PLAYBOOK 01

Why we wrote this

Growing brands are in credibility-building mode, whether or not anyone has said so out loud.

Before scale exists, a brand has to behave as though it does. It has to look like a company worth buying from, working for and investing in, often while the revenue, the headcount and the market share are all still ahead of it. That is a harder marketing problem than it sounds, and it is not one that performance media was built to solve.

This playbook is about the part of growth that happens before the click. It sets out how out-of-home builds recognition, credibility and presence for brands that are moving quickly, and how the job it does changes as a company grows. It is written for the US market and for the people making the call: founders, marketing leads, and the person who has to justify a brand budget to a board that would rather see attribution.

It is not a format directory and it is not a rate card. It is how we think, and it is deliberately short enough to read on a flight.

HOW TO USE THIS

If you only have five minutes, go straight to **OOH by growth stage**. That section will tell you what OOH is realistically for at your size, and the investment guidance that follows it will tell you roughly what that costs. The rest is the reasoning.

NEW YORK · TIMES SQUARE

Spectaculars over Broadway.

01 How brands actually grow

The brands that grow are the ones people already know.

Most start the same way. A good product, a performance engine, and a niche that can be reached efficiently. That combination works, and it works for longer than people expect. It captures the demand that already exists, it is measurable, and it makes a clean case to a board.

The problem arrives at the edge of the niche. Performance marketing is very good at finding people who are already looking. It is much weaker at reaching the far larger group who are not looking yet, and who will not recognize the name when they finally are.

5%

of business buyers are in-market at any given time. The other 95% are future buyers who will not respond to a demand-capture channel.

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, 95:5 rule (B2B)

Read that number as a ceiling rather than a curiosity. If a brand only ever speaks to people who are ready to buy, it is competing for a thin slice of its market at the moment of highest competition and highest cost. Real growth comes from expanding beyond that slice: building awareness outside the immediate audience, becoming recognizable before anyone is ready, and creating memory that converts later.

> **"Acquire users now. Build future demand at the same time. The brands that compound are doing both."**

None of which is an argument against performance. It is an argument about sequence. Performance captures demand that already exists. Something has to create the demand it captures, and for a growing brand that something is usually recognition.

02 Where out-of-home fits

Performance captures demand. Out-of-home expands it.

Out-of-home earns its place in a growth plan because it does the thing performance media structurally cannot: it reaches people who are not in the market, in public, at scale, in a context that lends the brand credibility it has not yet earned commercially.

In practical terms, a strong physical presence does five things for a growing business.

- **Builds memory** through repeated exposure in the real world, where an impression is harder to skip and easier to remember.
- **Signals scale and credibility early**, because a brand that can command a visible site reads as a brand that is winning, long before the financials say so.
- **Makes the brand recognizable** in the specific markets that matter, rather than thinly everywhere.
- **Increases brand search and direct traffic**, which shows up in the channels the team already measures.
- **Improves performance efficiency**, because converting someone who already recognizes you costs less than introducing yourself and closing in the same impression.

31%

higher ROI from online advertising when a campaign includes OOH, and 56% higher from paid social.

Analytic Partners

THE MA VIEW

The most common mistake we see is treating out-of-home and performance as competitors for one budget. They are not, and the figures above are the reason. Out-of-home is the channel that makes the rest of the plan cheaper, because it warms an audience your performance media would otherwise have to pay full price to introduce itself to.

LOS ANGELES · SUNSET STRIP

Roadside bulletin, opposite the Whisky a Go Go.

03 Where out-of-home shows up

Six environments do most of the work in the US. What matters is not the specification but the job each one is good at, because the same budget spent in the wrong environment buys the wrong outcome.

01 Roadside bulletins

Large-format, high-frequency exposure on major commuter corridors. The classic scale play: few sites, seen repeatedly by the same people, which is what builds familiarity fastest.

02 Transit networks

Stations, street furniture and interiors, for dense urban repetition. Long dwell time and high frequency in a small geography, which suits a brand that needs to own a city rather than a country.

03 Digital kiosks

Flexible, always-on presence in high-signal districts. The most forgiving entry point, because creative and location can both change quickly while you learn.

04 Wildpostings and wheatpaste

Low-cost, hyper-local density in cultural neighborhoods. Buys credibility with a specific community rather than reach across a market, and reads as native to the street.

05 Airport networks

Premium reach during high-intent business travel. Small audiences, disproportionately senior, in a context where a brand looks established simply by being there.

06 Tactical activations

Projections, stunts and experiential drops tied to real moments. Earns attention rather than buying it, and travels further through social than the media cost implies.

CHOOSING BETWEEN THEM

Almost every growing brand asks which format is best. It is the wrong question. The right one is which environment matches the job: proving you exist, owning one city, reaching a senior audience, or being unmissable in a single neighborhood. The next section maps those jobs onto the stage a business is actually at.

04 Out-of-home by growth stage

The role of out-of-home changes as a company grows. Same channel, different job. This is the part of the playbook worth arguing with, because if your stage and your objective disagree, the objective wins.

PRE-SEED

Narrative seeding

- Establish a sharp, memorable point of view
- Use hyper-local OOH: events, wildpostings, tactical drops
- Create early recognition in the hubs that matter to you

Out-of-home proves you exist.

SEED

Legitimacy at scale

- Signal seriousness to investors, talent and early customers
- Move beyond paid social into the physical world
- Establish presence in the corridors your audience travels

Out-of-home builds credibility.

SERIES A

Differentiation

- Define your category position rather than your product
- Expand awareness beyond the people already looking
- Use larger formats to project confidence

Out-of-home states your difference.

SERIES B

Market authority

- Expand into new geographies
- Raise creative ambition alongside the media weight
- Anchor perception in the markets you intend to lead

Out-of-home establishes leadership.

SERIES C+

Trust and power

- Reinforce stability ahead of a raise, an IPO or an acquisition
- Signal permanence through iconic placements
- Activate internationally

Out-of-home makes the valuation legible.

IF YOU ARE NOT VENTURE-BACKED

The stages are a convenient shorthand, not an entry requirement. An established business entering a new US market is solving the Seed problem, whatever its age or balance sheet: nobody there knows it yet. A company launching a new division is at Series A on that division. Read the objective, not the label.

05 Investment guidance by stage

A directional starting point, and nothing more than that.

The ranges below describe the relationship between stage, ambition and sensible out-of-home investment. They are a way to sanity-check a number before you take it to a board, not a price list and not a minimum spend. A market, a format and a set of dates will move any of them.

STAGE	GOAL	FORMATS	% OF MARKETING BUDGET	TYPICAL TEST RANGE
Pre-Seed	Prove you exist	Wildpostings, hyper-local activations	5-8%	**$25-75K**
Seed	Build credibility	Digital kiosks, transit, 1-2 bulletins	5-10%	**$50-250K**
Series A	State your difference	Larger formats, broader market bulletins	8-12%	**$250-500K**
Series B	Establish leadership	Multi-market, airport, always-on transit	10-15%	**$750K-1.5M**
Series C+	Make the valuation legible	Iconic large-format, international activation	10-15%+	**$1.5M+**

Two things to hold in mind when reading the table. The percentage is a share of the marketing budget, so it scales with the plan rather than sitting outside it. The dollar range is a **test** range: what it typically takes to run something meaningful enough to learn from, rather than a spend that proves anything on its own.

LOS ANGELES · SANTA MONICA

Digital network across the city.

06 How ma approaches US out-of-home

We are an independent media agency with people in London, New York and Dubai, and we buy US out-of-home directly.

Independence matters more here than it sounds. We are not working an inventory position or a parent group's trading deal, so the recommendation can be the site that suits the brief rather than the site that suits us. If the answer is a single wall in one neighborhood rather than a national plan, that is what we will say.

- **We start with the job, not the format.** What has to be true at the end of the campaign, and who has to have seen it for that to happen.
- **We plan for memory, not impressions.** Frequency in a defined geography beats thin coverage across a country almost every time for a brand at this stage.
- **We treat it as one plan.** Out-of-home that ignores what the performance team is doing wastes the uplift that is the main reason to run it.
- **We are honest about scale.** If a budget is too thin to do anything memorable in a market, we would rather narrow the geography than spread it and call it coverage.

WHAT WE WOULD ASK YOU FIRST

Before quoting any of these back at us, expect us to ask what the campaign is for. A $75K wildposting run in two neighborhoods and a $75K attempt at national coverage cost the same and do completely different things. The number is the last decision, not the first.

> **"Presence precedes power. The brands that win are more visible, more familiar and more trusted, well before the market decides."**

MA · NEW YORK, LONDON, DUBAI

Start a conversation

If out-of-home is on the table, the fastest way to get something useful from us is to tell us four things.

- **Which markets** matter to you.
- **Who** you need to reach in them.
- **What** the campaign has to achieve.
- **Roughly what** you have to spend.

We will come back with where we would start, which markets and environments fit, and what is realistic at that level. No deck required, and no obligation to run anything.

CLAIRE ROONEY, MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

claire@wearema.com
ma · 104 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018
wearema.com/ooh-growth-playbook

Sources

The 95:5 finding is from the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, established by Professor John Dawes in research for the LinkedIn B2B Institute. It is **B2B research** and is presented here as such. The media-mix figures are from Analytic Partners and describe ROI uplift on campaigns that included out-of-home, against campaigns that did not. Both should be confirmed against the latest published source before external republication. No other figures in this document are research claims: the investment ranges are ma's directional guidance.