



ma

Together, we build New York City.

MA · A POINT OF VIEW

The OOH Planning Guide

A point of view on out-of-home for ambitious brands.

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

wearema.com

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Foreword

Attention has become the most contested resource in marketing, and the most expensive.

Every year there is more content, more channels and more noise, and every year it costs a little more to be seen and a little less time to be remembered. Digital promised precision and, for a while, delivered it. But precision at scale has a price, and that price keeps rising. The feed is crowded, the auction is hot, and the half-life of a digital impression is measured in seconds.

This is the paradox worth sitting with: in the most digital era in history, the physical world has quietly become one of the few places a brand can still be unmissable.

“In the most digital era in history, the physical world has become one of the few places a brand can still be unmissable.”

Out-of-home is not a nostalgia play. It is a response to where attention actually is. Used well, it makes a brand feel large, established and worth trusting, and it makes every other channel work harder.

It is also how we think. At [ma](#) we plan to a single idea: buy memory, not media. The job is not to rack up impressions that vanish by the next junction. It is to leave something behind in the mind of the person who saw it, and everything that follows in this guide returns to that one belief.

This guide is our point of view on how to plan it well. It is not a directory of formats. It is the thinking we use every day at [ma](#). If one idea in here changes how you brief your next campaign, it has done its job.



CAMPAIGN · DAZN CLUB WORLD CUP

Taxi livery, Westminster, London.



01 Why physical still wins in a digital world

Start with an uncomfortable truth: most digital advertising is not remembered. A large share is served to be scrolled past, measurable but not memorable. Out-of-home sits at the other end of that spectrum. It cannot be blocked, skipped or muted, and it reaches people in a public, shared context that lends a brand what performance media struggles to buy: legitimacy.

98%

of the UK population is reached by out-of-home every week, one of the few genuine mass-reach channels left.

Route / Outsmart

But here is the number that should change how you think. Out-of-home drives roughly a quarter of the search prompted by offline media, from a fraction of the spend, nearly four times its weight at the digital response everyone is optimising for.

26%

of offline-driven search comes from OOH, from about 7% of ad spend. Nearly four times the online activity per pound of TV or radio.

Nielsen

MA INSIGHT

The most common mistake we see is treating out-of-home and digital as competitors for the same budget. They are not. Out-of-home is the channel that makes your digital cheaper: it warms the audience so your performance media converts someone who already recognises you, rather than paying full price to introduce yourself twice.

“Out-of-home does not compete with your performance media. It makes your performance media work harder.”

02 What out-of-home actually does for a business

Fame is the word the industry reaches for, and it is not wrong, but it is too soft to brief against. Here is what a strong physical presence actually does in commercial terms.

It changes perception before a word is read

Scale signals success. A brand that can command a landmark site is, in the mind of the person walking past, a brand that is winning. Perception moves before the message even lands.

It builds trust

Public, physical presence is a costly signal, and audiences read it as such. In categories built on confidence, from finance to healthcare to premium retail, that is not a soft benefit. It is the sale.

It makes digital perform harder

A person who has seen your brand at scale searches for it by name, clicks with more intent, and converts at a lower cost. Out-of-home lowers the price of every stage of your funnel. We have watched a single landmark takeover lift branded search enough that the performance team's cost per acquisition fell for the length of the burst. The billboard, in effect, subsidised the paid search.

It works inside the business, not just outside it

A brand that feels famous is easier to sell for your sales team, easier to hire for, and easier to defend in a boardroom. Physical presence gives a company the confidence of a market leader.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR AGENCY

Not how many people will see it, but who, in what mindset, and what we want them to do next. If the answer is only a reach number, the plan is not finished.

LIVERPOOL STREET

Way out →

LIVERPOOL STR



THIS
FRAGRANCE
RUNS.
IT JUMPS.
IT CLIMBS
ON THINGS IT
SHOULDN'T.

PENHALIGON'S
EST. LONDON 1870

03 Why physical media creates memory

This is the section most guides skip, and it is the most important one. Advertising only works if it is remembered, and memory is not built by exposure alone. It is built by attention, emotion and context, and the physical world is unusually good at supplying all three.

People remember places

Human memory is spatial before it is anything else. A brand tied to a real place, a station, a street, a skyline, borrows that spatial memory in a way a banner ad never can.

People remember scale

Size is not vanity. A large-format site is processed as significant precisely because it is large, and significance is what the brain files and keeps.

People remember experiences, not impressions

A digital impression disappears. A mural, a station takeover, a screen that stops you on the way to your train, these are small experiences, and experiences are what the mind stores.

Landmarks carry permanence and emotion

A building was there yesterday and will be there tomorrow, and that continuity transfers to the brand on it. Put a brand somewhere iconic and it inherits the feeling of the place.

The research supports the instinct. Attention is the gateway to memory, and high-attention environments drive far larger shifts in brand choice than low-attention ones. The physical world, where people are present rather than half-scrolling, is one of the last high-attention environments left.

MA INSIGHT

Digital impressions are rented. Physical memories are owned. A campaign that lives in the real world keeps paying back long after the media schedule ends, because it has left something behind in the one place that matters, the memory of the people who saw it.

“Buildings become memories. Impressions disappear.”

04 Choosing the environment: answer a strategic question

Do not start with formats. Start with the question your campaign is trying to answer. Each environment is really the answer to a different one.

Want to dominate a city, fast?

Roadside and large-format. Broad, simple, unavoidable. How a brand goes from unknown to everywhere in a fortnight.

Want to reach decision-makers who screen out most advertising?

Airports. A senior, affluent, hard-to-reach audience, captive and receptive, where a brand borrows the prestige of the space.

Want repeated exposure to the same high-value audience?

Transport and the Underground. People wait, and waiting is dwell time. Frequency compounds day after day.

Want people to stop, and to photograph it?

Landmark sites, spectaculars and hand-painted murals. Scarcity and craft are the point. The photograph travels far beyond the site.

Want to be part of a cultural moment?

Cinema and premium indoor large-format. Engaged audiences, receptive frame of mind, often before a shared social occasion.

Want to nudge a decision near the point of purchase?

Retail and point-of-sale, working alongside a broader brand presence rather than in place of one.

COMMON MISTAKE

Choosing the environment for how it looks in a photo rather than the audience it delivers. The most photogenic site is not always the most effective one. Start with the job, then find the site that does it.

Most strong campaigns use two environments on purpose, one for fame and one for frequency. Very few need more than three.

05 The Five Rules of Effective OOH Creative

The environment can be flawless and the campaign can still fail if the creative fights the format. Out-of-home rewards discipline. We brief against five rules.

One. One message. If it says two things, it says nothing. Decide the single thought and cut the rest.

Two. One glance. Assume three seconds, in motion, from a distance. If it cannot be understood in a glance, it will not be understood.

Three. One brand. The brand should be obvious immediately, not discovered at the end. Fame compounds only when people know whose it is.

Four. One emotion. Information is forgotten. Feeling is remembered. Make someone feel something, not just know something.

Five. One memorable idea. The best sites leave a single image in the mind. If nothing stays, nothing worked.

PLANNING PRINCIPLE

If you cannot understand the site as a passenger going past at speed, it is too complicated. Strip it back until you can, then strip it back once more.

06 Not all inventory is equal

Here is something the open market will not tell you: the best out-of-home is rarely the out-of-home you can simply buy off a list.

The most valuable positions, the landmark sites, the true spectaculars, the takeovers that define a moment, are finite. They move through relationships, not rate cards, and they go to whoever is ready and trusted when the window opens. This is where an independent agency with real media-owner relationships earns its fee several times over.

Premium and landmark inventory

Scarce by definition. Its value is precisely that not everyone can have it.

First-refusal and negotiated availability

Exists for agencies with standing relationships, long before it reaches an open list, if it reaches one at all.

Cancellations and late availability

A brand ready to move quickly can secure a premium position, at a better rate, that was never openly for sale. Flexibility is a buying strategy, not a compromise.

Rate card is a starting point, not a price

A well-negotiated campaign rarely pays published rates. Independence matters: advice with no obligation to spend where it suits a parent company is advice genuinely on your side.

In practice. A recent brief called for a landmark position that was on no public list. Because the opening came through a media-owner relationship rather than a rate card, the brand secured a defining site weeks before it would have surfaced anywhere, at a price the open market never saw. That is what access actually looks like.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR AGENCY

What can you get us that we cannot get ourselves. If a site is available to everyone, it is rarely the one that makes you unmissable. The answer to that question is the real measure of an out-of-home partner.

07 What experience actually teaches

Some things are only learned by planning hundreds of campaigns. A few of them are worth more than any format guide.

Buy the audience, not the billboard

The site is a means of delivering an audience. Fall in love with the audience, and let the data choose the sites. Planners who do it the other way round overpay for the familiar.

Famous sites are not always the best investment

The most photographed position is sometimes the least efficient, priced on prestige rather than performance. Often the cluster nobody talks about quietly delivers the audience at half the cost.

Concentration beats dilution

Budget spread thinly makes noise, not impact. The same budget concentrated for a fortnight makes a brand feel unavoidable. Weight in one place beats presence in many.

Flexibility improves campaigns

The best buys are often the ones you were ready to make when an opportunity appeared, not the ones locked in months earlier. A partner watching the market for you beats a perfect plan set in stone.

In practice. Handed a national budget too small to be felt everywhere, we have concentrated the entire weight into two cities for a fortnight. The brand felt unavoidable where it mattered, branded search rose sharply in those regions, and the same money spread evenly across the country would simply have disappeared.

MA INSIGHT

The single biggest driver of a campaign's return is not the creative and not even the site. It is whether the audience was bought deliberately or the sites were bought habitually. Everything else is downstream of that one decision.

08 Measuring what matters

Out-of-home can be measured. It simply should not be measured like a click. Judge it on the job it was hired for: attention, fame, and the effect it has on everything else.

- **Audience delivery** is the baseline: independently verified estimates of who was reached, and how often.
- **Brand lift** is the proof: pre-and-post research on awareness, consideration and perception, exposed versus control.
- **The digital echo** is often the clearest signal: branded search, direct traffic and better digital performance during and after the burst.
- **Business outcomes** are the point: footfall, enquiries and sales in exposed regions against control regions.

COMMON MISTAKE

Judging a fame channel on last-click metrics is like judging a reputation by a single conversation. Set the baseline before launch, measure the brand and the business, and let the last click keep its own, smaller, credit.

WHEN WE WOULD TELL YOU NOT TO SPEND

Not every brief should run out-of-home, and we will say so. We would tell you to hold the budget if the audience is too narrow or too online to reach efficiently in the physical world, if the money is too thin to buy real frequency and would only spread into noise, if there is no plan to carry the impression into digital, or if the creative cannot yet survive a three-second glance. The campaigns we talk clients out of build as much trust as the ones we run.

The **ma** Planning Principles

01 Audience before asset.

Buy the people you need to reach, and let that choose the sites. Never the reverse.

02 Concentrate, do not dilute.

Weight in one place beats presence in many. Feel everywhere by owning somewhere.

03 Design for the environment.

Built for the format and the moment, not adapted from a screen and hoped for.

04 Think beyond the poster.

Plan the physical moment and the digital follow-through as one campaign.

05 Negotiate everything.

Rate card is an opening position. Access, timing and flexibility are where value is won.

06 Buy memory, not media.

The goal is not impressions. It is to leave something behind in the mind of the person who saw it.

Let's make something unmissable

We are [ma](#), an independent, full-service media agency, and making brands impossible to ignore is the entire point of what we do. We plan and negotiate across every out-of-home environment, from roadside and transport to airports, cinema and the world's most iconic landmark sites, and we regularly secure exclusive positions that are simply not available elsewhere. Because we are independent, our advice is unconflicted and our negotiation is genuinely on your side.

So here is an open offer. If you are considering out-of-home, send us the brief. We will read it properly and tell you, straight and without obligation:

- whether out-of-home is the right channel for the objective at all
- where we would invest the budget, and where we would not
- what we would avoid, and why
- whether the creative is likely to work in the environment

No strings, and no pitch, just a straight opinion. We would rather be useful than pushy, because the brands we are proud to work with tend to be the ones we were honest with first. The best conversations start with a real objective, a blank page, and one idea we keep coming back to: buy memory, not media.

TALK TO US

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Sources: weekly reach, Route / Outsmart. Online activation and search-versus-spend, Nielsen. Fame and share of voice, IPA and WARC. Attention and memory, Ipsos. Figures are indicative of published industry research; confirm against the latest source data before external publication.