



# TALKING GAS PUMPS PITCH PRODUCTS

**Fill 'Er Up and Get an Earful From Latest Marketing Device**

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By Jean Halliday

DETROIT (AdAge.com) -- Just when it seems we've run out of places to put ads, along come talking gasoline pumps.

Several major advertisers signed up for a two-month test program at U.K. gas stations that feature talking petrol pump nozzles. Mercedes-Benz' small Smart Car, Nestle's Kit-Kat bar and Dalton's Weekly travel magazine are paying roughly \$157 each per month to have their 15-second audio spots broadcast through the nozzles at 13 high-traffic gas stations. All the advertisers' messages run during a two- to three-minute cycle, which includes trivia questions and sports information.

## **Greeting customers**

"There's no other way for the oil companies to greet their customers daily," said Chip Rimmer, marketing director of DirectCast Network, the U.K. subsidiary of DirectCast Network LLC, the Midland, Mich., marketer of the Fueling Talker.

Mr. Rimmer wants Fueling Talker to be gabbing at 1,000 U.K. stations by the end of the year. The pumps will get a limited exposure in the U.S., appearing at 100 gas stations, mostly in Michigan, and playing local advertising. Mark McKinley, president-CEO of the U.S. DirectCast Network, said he expects to launch in Orlando, Fla., and Las Vegas, Nev., this fall.

## **'Intrusive medium'**

"It's an intrusive medium, but it's elective as well," said Mr. Rimmer. Pumpers can opt out by turning off the volume on the nozzle, which also has a counter to measure consumers who activate it. "From an advertising point of view, that's total accountability."

Mr. Rimmer has inked deals with the petrol purveyors, which also have 15-second messages about their own offerings on the Fueling Talker broadcasts. They include Exxon Mobil Corp., Kuwait Petroleum International's Q8 chain, Snax 24 and Supermart. Snax 24 gas retailers told Mr. Rimmer they have seen a jump in sales of the fresh pastries they sell since their Fueling Talker ad started in early July. Exxon Mobil is advertising a deal on its Esso-branded car products.

Mercedes' Smart Car spot, from Interpublic Group of Cos.' Springer & Jacoby, Hamburg, touts it takes just 15 pounds (about \$24) worth of fuel to fill up, vs. 40 pounds (\$63) for an average car.

### **Can't build message**

Tom Healey, a former agency media director and now a partner at consultancy J.D. Power and Associates, said the Smart Car ad is a "very relevant message since it's talking about the price of gas." But he dubbed Fueling Talker a point-of-sale tool. "I don't know how you could build any frequency or message continuity since it's a one-shot deal." He went on to call the advertising method "intrusive and offensive."

Marketers keep trying new ways to reach elusive consumers. A year ago, a gas-pump video ad network called Video Venue launched in the U.S. at several hundred Casey's General Stores with ads from major advertisers that included General Motors Corp. and Toyota Motor Sales USA.

Bank of America is now charging advertisers, including several AOL Time Warner's TV networks, to run ads less than 10 seconds long on its automated teller machines in California.

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