

# West African outdoor media landscape

By [Tatenda Chiweshe](#) 22 Feb 2012

On a recent audit of a leading cellular network's outdoor media holdings in Africa, I realised that my perceptions and understanding of this medium that I have dedicated my life to would never be the same again. "Reach and frequency" were the basic tenants that I had learnt informally, while somewhere in the back of my mind impact was what I have always believed in.



I quickly understood that more is not mostly better. Coca-cola, Nescafe and Cowbells (powdered milk) are hardly as visible on billboards as the cellular networks, but are consumed more indiscriminately than any of cellular network's offering. Why? I asked myself.

The commonality seems to be 'fear of loss' more than 'a desire to gain'. Simply put, outdoor media placement is being driven by counting how many boards a competitor has in a location and trying to beat them to death with the size of my wallet. So when we put placement on geospatial maps, the results were astounding:

- None of the brands had actually analyzed the proximity of their own campaigns against the possible spread they could have achieved for the same budget;
- The placement decision making processes were not aligned to the holistic business advantages they already had (e.g. advertising the iPad on boards located in areas where the company's distribution of iPads is lacking);
- Placing boards to match or beat competitors' exposure without interrogating if the competitor was right to put boards there in the first place;
- Not being able to justify strategic relevance of boards placed, even when the boards have all the desired attributes.

My conclusion became that media buyers are not aware that outdoor insights are also available to make buying decisions more impactful. Considering how much budget is spent on this medium, things have to change! We can no longer work on hunches or delegate this medium to something where decisions are acceptable on norms that nobody accepts on 'gut feels' anywhere else.

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