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Subway Advertising Represents a New Concept in Tunnel Vision

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Everyone knows how a movie works: The audience sits still and the film moves.

Yesterday, the PATCO High-Speed Line turned that idea upside down in a new advertising concept that creates a movie theater out of a darkened subway tunnel.

"It's the audience that moves," said Joshua Spodek, 30, a former Philadelphian from Mount Airy and now the chief executive officer of Submedia L.L.C., the closely held New York advertising company that developed the concept.

"That's pretty cool," said Dan Whiteman, a Haddonfield insurance salesman riding the train to Jersey yesterday.

When Whiteman first looked out the window into the darkened tunnel after the Port Authority Transportation Corp.'s Eighth and Market stop, he saw the usual black walls, interrupted here and there by a stray burst of graffiti or a construction sign.

But, then a waterfall began to pour from the side of the wall - water that actually looked good enough to drink. (And when does anyone see *that* in a subway station?) Fifteen seconds later, a message from Dasani, Coca-Cola's bottled water, circled across the water. "Treat yourself well - every day."

The train moved too rapidly for Whiteman to see what created the illusion - a series of 100 lighted boxes, each with a slightly different image, strung along a 450-foot length of tunnel. The boxes are actually mounted in the unused Franklin Square station, but they could be installed along any portion of tunnel.

"I think it catches your eye," said Leah Brown, a lab technician from Willingboro, who said she was stunned when she saw it the first time. "Somebody did a real good job."

Over the last several years, as the media have become increasingly cluttered with advertising images, marketers have begun to look for innovative places for their messages. Now, there are advertisements on tollbooths at the turnpike and on toilet stalls in public bathrooms.



Aboard the PATCO High-Speed Line, Submedia's Joshua Spodek experiences his company's ad for Dasani water. (Jonathan Wilson / Inquirer Staff Photographer)

"You'll never see a subway tunnel in the same way again," Spodek said. "Your subway ride is transformed."

He said he got the idea from looking at a zoetrope, an old-fashioned child's toy: When a revolving cylinder - with images on the inside and slits along the outside - is spun, the images, seen

through slits, appear to be moving.

“We’re always on the lookout for new opportunities that will bring revenue into the system,” said Thomas R. Hickey, PATCO’s general manager.

PATCO raises about \$160,000 of its \$3 million annual budget from selling advertisements in its stations.

Hickey doesn’t mind showing off a bit either.

Last night, PATCO and Submedia planned to have a reception in the abandoned station for the 3,000 transportation officials in Philadelphia for the American Public Transit Association conference.

“We wanted bragging rights,” Hickey said.

Submedia officials said advertisers could expect to pay between \$35,000 and \$250,000 a month, depending on commuter traffic and installation costs, with the transit agency receiving a cut of no more than 60 percent.

The Dasani ads are part of a three-month pilot program, with installation costs being shared by Submedia and PATCO. Atlanta’s transit system, on the other hand, was able to snag \$90,000 for a similar three-month trial, which began last week. Atlanta’s system carries about 300,000 riders compared with the 20,000 that travel twice a day through the PATCO system.

PATCO’s Hickey likes the idea of the ads in the tunnels, particularly because he doesn’t like to see advertisements in the rail cars.

Ads in the cars, Hickey said, detract from the cars’ clean look and interfere with PATCO’s own message - “PATCO is a nice, pleasant way to travel, and reliable.”