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## Pitch for mini-cinema subway ads

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New York-based Submedia has become the latest firm to pitch its technology to install motion-picture advertising along Hong Kong's subway tunnels.

Mass Transit Railway Corp (MTRC) and Kowloon-Canton Railway Corp (KCRC) have also been talking with two other companies to fill both sides of dark-tunnel subway lines with mini-cinema screens showing advertisements.

"The beauty of our technology is that it is so simple, which means that it requires very little maintenance," said John Butziger, Submedia's director of engineering.

Unlike its competitors, who use sensors to trigger lights to illuminate posters lining the subway walls, creating animated pictures for subway passengers looking out the windows, Submedia's technology is based on a simple 200-year-old toy called a zoetrope.

The zoetrope is a cylinder with slits cut in the top and images placed inside. As the cylinder spins, the images appear to be moving.

In 1996, Submedia co-founder Joseph Spodek, a physics PhD candidate at the time, came up with the idea of stretching out a zoetrope and installing it linearly in a subway tunnel.

So instead of moving the cylinder, the viewer sitting in a subway train moves past the images and experiences the same effect.

But it was not until 1999, after Mr Spodek had graduated from Columbia University and taken a job calibrating satellites, that he and college friend Matt Gross began to develop the technology for subway systems and formed Submedia LLC.

"Subways are a great first market, both because of the size of the audience and because the ad revenues can help defray the riders' fares," Mr Spodek said.

Both railway operators have already held talks with London-based companies Motion Poster and Metrocom to discuss installing animated advertisements in their subway tunnels.

"We are still studying this new form of advertising with reference to the implementation of such in other countries and the acceptability of the Hong

Kong market. Because of this, it is too early to say whether we shall use this form of advertising," said Jeremy Lau, MTRC deputy corporate relations manager.

Motion Posters has already begun operations in Budapest and Athens. It has also just agreed to terms with Seoul Metro in South Korea.

Motion Posters has also signed advertising agreements with Adidas and Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola also has a deal with Submedia to run 20-second advertisements for its Dasani bottled-water brand in the beverage company's hometown of Atlanta starting next month.

Submedia and the local transit system would split the advertising revenues.

In its sales pitch to Atlanta's transit authorities, Submedia predicted that Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority would make US\$15 million in advertising revenue over the next five years.

"We expect the Hong Kong figure to be higher because [subway traffic] is so much higher than Atlanta's," Mr Spodek said.



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