

Camera Phones Turn Everything Into Ad Links

By AlyshAsidemAndAvidson

NEWSPAPERS LOOKING for the next step in interactive advertising may want to put down the computer mouse and pick up the camera phone.

New image-recognition technology, currently being tested in the marketplace, encourages consumers to use their camera phones to snap a picture of an advertiser's product and text message it to a central database. Software automatically identifies the product photographed by comparing it to those in its database, and relays product pricing or other information back to the consumer.

Essentially, it turns any object capable of being photographed into a hyperlink that is "clickable" by cell phone. It also enables advertisers to track those who respond to its ads this way.

With the Gartner research firm in Stamford, Conn., predicting that North American camera phone sales will have hit 70 million, or 47 percent of all mobile phone

restaurant specials and other content also could be sent. Mobot works on all carriers and camera phones.

Other physical objects that can be recognized by the technology include clothing, logos, CD covers and cereal boxes. "A picture launches a thousand options

Publisher Deborah Burns declined to provide specific data, saying only that responses were in the "five figures."

Neven Vision Inc. in Santa Monica makes a similar image-recognition technology that also works on all camera phones and major carriers. The technology



the skinny

New technology allows camera-phone users to receive info from advertisers about products they photograph.

sales, in 2005, it's an advertising technology that can potentially reach many consumers when they are shopping.

Mobot Inc., a mobile search technology company in Lexington, Mass., expects to test the concept with at least one newspaper this year, says Lauren Bigelow, vice president of marketing and product management. "The challenge is figuring out what it is that the consumer wants to do, and how to make the media interactive."

One way is for a newspaper to encourage readers to take a picture of a display ad and text message it to Mobot. An ad for a movie, for example, would lead Mobot to send a video trailer and show times for the movie to the reader's phone. Retail coupons, local

with the consumer and the marketers," Bigelow says.

One thing Mobot discovered is that its technology is popular with some younger readers. The September issue of ELLEgirl, a fashion magazine that reaches a female audience with a median age of 16, included a Mobot-based ad—in the form of an interactive calendar—sponsored by several national companies. Readers were instructed to take a picture of a different object every day that month and send them via text message to Mobot for a chance to win a daily prize.

"The number of entries actually went up as the days went on," Bigelow says. "It was a word-of-mouth response." ELLEgirl

is "replacing the key word as the entry point," says Chief Executive Officer Alex Cory, referring to the growing popularity of "paid-search" advertising online.

The system is so fast and accurate, it can tell the difference between images of the same type of products made by different companies, says founder and Chief Technology Officer Hartmut Neven.

Still, Adrian Bordeaux, new media manager at The Day in New London, Conn., believes it will be years until the technology catches on with advertisers.

"My experience with advertisers is that they are slower to adapt to technology than end-users," he says. Bordeaux adds that it took about five years before advertisers began buying display ads on his newspaper's Web site.

"They shy away from anything they can't hold in their hands." ■