

Weeding Out Billboards: An Orem Campaign has Deep Roots in the Past

In the 1920s, a group of women's associations, including the Garden Club of America, published a pamphlet titled "The National Committee for the Restriction of Outdoor Advertising." By contacting companies that used billboards and asking them to consider other promotional methods, the Committee was successful in getting some big brands to reduce their billboard usage. B.F. Goodrich Rubber, Champion Spark Plug, Pillsbury Flour, and Gulf Refining Co. were some of the corporate giants who "took the pledge."

The Committee focused on two things: "...arousing Public Opinion to the danger of allowing the present methods of outdoor advertising to continue," and "drawing out an expression of the Public Opinion and taking it directly to the advertisers."

For one neighborhood group in Orem, the 1920s campaign still has currency. A modern-day campaign targeting advertisers to reduce the impact of billboards in Orem's Lakeview, Grandview and Lakeshore neighborhoods has been going strong for more than 25 years.

"In our experience, given the hours and hours we've spent in meetings with them, our state and local government officials are powerless or apathetic about mitigating billboard blight," said one Lakeview business owner and campaigner. "Our effort involves appealing respectfully to advertisers about the impact they're having in our community. The golden rule, after all, is 'he who has the gold makes the rules.' In this case it's the customers."

What stands out to the community group about the Garden Clubs' campaign is the commitment of the advertisers to stop buying billboards. "That's exactly what our little neighborhood campaign is all about," they say.

Campaign representatives say they've reached out to national and international companies, and the response has been terrific. "Some companies have told us they didn't know precisely where their advertisements were running, or the impact the advertisements were having on our neighborhood's quality of life. They instructed their marketing teams to have their outdoor advertising provider move the ads elsewhere."

Other successes for the neighborhood group have included removal of a digital billboard face. And they were able to get louvers installed on two digital billboards, helping to diminish some of the light projecting from the sides of the signs.

Their outreach has not seen the same level of success with advertisers based closer to home, they admit. "In general, smaller local companies have pushed back when approached. It's been a real education. We hope that by continuing our engagement with them, we can get more of local businesses to change their minds."

Utah has a reputation as a business-friendly state. When asked if reducing billboard blight makes us any less business friendly, another campaigner replied: "We think the effort to reduce billboard pollution makes us *more* business friendly because it aligns companies to work with their customers on quality-of-life issues. Endearing people to your company—that makes you a stronger business."

The neighborhood group recently posted a change.org petition aimed at "encouraging Utah advertisers to take immediate action to find safer ways to advertise, or limit their advertising to non-residential areas." And they'd love to see other residents join their effort. "An email to an advertiser that comes from a fresh contact is really impactful," the group notes in its materials, adding: "Google Reviews are another great way to get the attention of companies."

The group also offers to share with other community groups the emails and letters they have sent to advertisers over the years. Anyone interested in joining their Orem-area campaign, or starting one in their community, can contact the group at lakeviewresidents1@gmail.com.

You can read the historic Committee pamphlet here: https://omeka.stmarytx.edu/omeka-s/s/ost/item/172561.

SERIES NO. 6

The National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising

WHAT WE STAND FOR

The National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising urges that all forms of display advertising be confined to commercial districts, where they will not injure scenic or civic beauty.

We are opposed to display advertising in all rural locations. We are opposed to display advertising in the city locations adjacent to fine public buildings, such as the Library on 42nd street, New York; also locations adjacent to public parks, residential sections and boulevards.

THE SPIRIT OF OUR CAMPAIGN DIGNIFIED—COURTEOUS—KINDLY

We are working through Public Opinion only. We are not recommending boycott, blacklisting, or intimidation of any sort.

We believe that most of the great advertisers, when their attention is called to the present desecration of scenic and civic beauty, will gladly call a halt.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

The National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising is doing just two things. It is arousing Public Opinion to the danger of allowing the present methods of outdoor advertising to continue. And it is drawing out an expression of the Public Opinion and taking it directly to the advertisers.

The second step is the vital step, and it is the step which has been neglected in previous campaigns against the signboards. The advertiser desires above all else to please the public. If you can carry home to the advertiser the conviction that the public resents the signboards where they destroy scenic and civic beauty, the advertiser will cease to use those boards.

