

Retail & Marketing

Nontraditional ad company detests copycats



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There is an expression that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. The Las Vegas version of that saying should probably be: If you build a better mousetrap, somebody will develop a cheap knockoff, wrap it in smut and use it to besmirch the reputation of your industry.

At least that has been the experience of Maria Letizia, owner of Maria Letizia's Big Traffic. She brought the mobile billboard concept to Las Vegas, advertising local companies on trucks that traveled the Strip and throughout the valley. Soon afterward, vehicles from rival companies began advertising a variety of seemingly messages for escorts who would come to hotel rooms for a price. The billboards from those companies are usually emblazoned with larger-than-life pictures of scantily clad women in provocative poses.

Recently, Letizia's company unveiled another marketing concept, the WOBI, which is a sort of walking billboard with the message displayed on the wearer's back. The product was unveiled at the Super Bowl this year and has been used to promote Hooter's Hotel and other businesses on and around the Strip.

Now a remarkably WOBI-like device is

being used by those guys who hand out escort cards on the Strip. The billboard displays a larger version of the cards with the barely dressed women in a promotion for two-for-\$89 and three-for-\$99 "escort" offers.

As if it wasn't annoying enough that these guys step in front of passers-by on the Strip and smack the cards together as they shove oversized pictures of sleazy-looking women strapped to their backs.

Letizia not only introduced mobile billboards and WOBI in this market, she also established standards for content and conduct from her employees. She expressed frustration that these imitators are diminishing the image of these innovative marketing concepts.

"These are despicable copycats, and every time I create something new (someone) develops a cheap knockoff," Letizia said. "It's very disturbing to me, and now I know how Louis Vuitton and Gucci feel."

Comparing billboards to designer fashions is a tough leap to make, but Letizia has developed strict guidelines for the equipment she uses and clients she accepts.

She would like to see similar standards established to govern the industry, essentially making mandatory the things she has done voluntarily.

WOBI walkers, for example, are trained not to initiate contact with people.

"Our guys are trained to wait until people react with us, and then we respond," Letizia said. "These others are forcing handouts on people."

Big Traffic also has a dress code that

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prohibits exposed tattoos or piercings. Big Traffic trucks have established routes and a strict maintenance schedule.

Letizia also has strict guidelines regarding content of mobile billboards and WOBI. Although Letizia admits she has left a lot of money on the table, questionable or racy content is prohibited.

Unfortunately, many in the community do not distinguish between the different billboard companies, and Letizia is concerned that the same thing could happen with WOBI because of this new advertising gimmick.

Many maintain the "escort services" advertised on the handout cards are really just a front for illegal prostitution, and there is no place for this type of advertising on the Strip. Strip visitors run the gamut from children to elderly couples and the lack of discretion with some mobile billboards and the handouts has rankled more than a few, including politicians.

A bill has been requested for the upcoming legislative session that, if introduced and passed, would restrict the use of mobile

billboards. Many bill requests die before they reach the Legislature and fewer still become law. The fact that it is being considered, reportedly at the urging of a county commissioner with a hard-to-pronounce name, suggests there is a fair amount of local opposition to the concept.

Aside from feeling a little sorry for the woman who is the \$10 throw-in in the three-for-\$99 special, it's hard to muster much sympathy for anyone associated with the "escort" business and if that marketing idea goes away, few would probably shed any tears.

It would seem unfair, however, for the solid, innovative and self-governed marketing concepts developed by Letizia's Big Traffic, to be lumped in with this group and targeted for elimination as well.



Chrome Citrus Blitz, the premium-imported soda made in Italy that was introduced this year by local entrepreneurs Paul Vultaggio and Chris Napolitan, has inked a distribution deal with Southern Wine and Spirits.

"We are very excited to be part of Southern Wine," Vultaggio said. "They are a great company that prides (itself) on premium products and exceptional service."

The distribution deal should allow for increased market exposure of the product, which is available at local 7-Eleven stores, restaurants and casinos.

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