

HELICOPTER ADVERTISING HITS BALTIMORE



One of the most common forms of airborne advertising is when airplanes fly over beaches and stadiums with banners in-tow. This form of advertising might be obsolete if a new Columbia startup's advertising idea succeeds. The startup is using a helicopter with a digital billboard to hover over traffic and events in the Baltimore-Washington D.C. area to advertise its messages. This type of advertising, with the scrolling billboard, has been seen at the Jersey Shore recently, but employed the use of a boat. Bootcamp Lights' owners hope that the glowing words and images up in the sky will grasp the attention of onlookers, commuters, and pedestrians as they travel about the Baltimore-D.C. area. Bootcamp Lights is also hoping to grab the attention of potential advertisers. Back in June, ads for the Scores Baltimore club were shown over tens of thousands of people who had attended the U2 concert at M&T Bank Stadium. The helicopter also spread messages to the residents about the Baltimore police department's hiring campaign during the Labor Day weekend. To advertise 100 characters on the billboard, an advertiser will have to pay a \$25 fee, with the ad being displayed over busy highways at rush hour. This equate to roughly a one-minute commercial. For only \$25, it seems like a steal. "It's pretty amazing to see it coming from out of nowhere," said Kyle Benham, Bootcamp Lights' co-founder and chief executive. "You don't even see the helicopter in the sky — it's just hovering in one spot." The FAA does not have a solid number as to how many firms are flying advertising helicopters across the country but the Helicopter Association International feels that it is a very small number. "This is a pretty unique operation that Bootcamp Lights has going," said Chris Dancy, a spokesman for Helicopter Association International. Rebecca W. Hamilton is a marketing expert who feels that advertising on a digital board carried by a helicopter could make a major difference in getting people to spend money on a product or service. "If we think of the average consumer, they're encountering hundreds and hundreds of messages every day," said Hamilton, who is a marketing professor at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business. "More and more, every surface that we're encountering is covered with advertising. If you look up in the sky, it's one of the last untapped areas where consumers still are not being bombarded with messages. There's going to be a drop-off in its effectiveness if it's copied and overused, just like other forms of marketing." The State Highway Administration is hoping that this type of air advertising is not used often over roads, whether they are heavily traveled or not, because of the distractions it can cause to drivers and pedestrians. "SHA discourages any overt activity deliberately intended to distract a driver," Lora Rakowski said. Radowski is a spokeswoman for the State Highway Administration. "But ultimately, it is the driver's responsibility to give full time and attention to the task of driving."

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