

Take a Picture of an Ad, Earn a Reward

Stephanie Clifford

Two men's magazines are trying to engage their readers more — by increasing their cellphone bills.

Rolling Stone and Men's Health are both testing programs in which readers can take cameraphone pictures of icons on ads, then send them to a certain number. In exchange, they'll receive more information or an offer from the advertiser.

In Rolling Stone's current issue, five advertisers are running these offers. They include a motorcycle ring tone for Allstate's motorcycle-insurance program and a video preview of The Discovery Channel's new season of "Man vs. Wild." Men's Health is going even further, saying each full-page advertisement in its July-August issue will have the added feature.

An image-recognition company called SnapTell is behind both magazines' efforts. Technology from the company, based in Palo Alto, Calif., can differentiate the icon on one advertisement from that on another and text back the appropriate offer.

For the magazines, it's a way to make print products interactive.

"We've got a product made of paper and ink sent out every two weeks," said Ray Chelstowski, the publisher of Rolling Stone. "We're always in the market to find other ways that we can work with our advertisers in providing empirical data in showing how readers engage and interact with our ads."

Although advertisers could use the readers' cellphone information to do further marketing, some said that was not the plan. "We will have some cellphone data, and if they opt in to receive something from Discovery, we can obviously send something back to them," said Brad Feinberg, director of media planning for Discovery Communications, but "the purpose of this really isn't to collect data per se as it is to give the readers some value."

For the advertisers, the effort is low-risk. Neither Rolling Stone, published by Wenner Media, or Men's Health, published by Rodale, is charging advertisers extra for the feature. SnapTell, too, is charging the publishers only a promotional price, "but the end business model here is we hope the magazines convince their advertisers to pay a little more for this extra feature, and we would then participate in the upside of the revenues," said SnapTell's chief executive, Gautam Bhargava.

Advertisers said they were happy to give it a whirl, especially given the cheap price tag, even if they did not see an overwhelming response.

"There really aren't any benchmarks yet, and we are a test-and-learn company," said Lisa Cochrane, vice president of marketing for Allstate. "It's cool, it's innovative and it's not a really big risk to us because there's no additional cost."

Disponível em: <<http://www.nytimes.com>>. Acesso em 28/4/2008.