

Adblock Bristol presents: The case for an ad-free city



Above: Community campaigners in Australia drew attention to tobacco advertising throughout the 1980s

Why taking down the billboards is good for the local economy

Across the globe, communities are organising together to remove outdoor advertising from their streets. In 2015, the city of Grenoble in France removed 326 advertising signs and replaced them with trees and community noticeboards.

Residents have highlighted the impacts of consumer advertising relating to mental health, body image, debt, wellbeing, obesity,

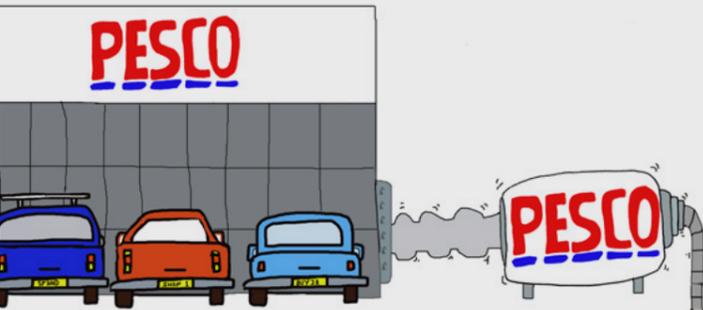
environmental pollution and public space.

Advertisers make bold claims about “driving competition” and boosting economic growth.¹ Other research concludes that for every £1 of value created by an advertising executive, £11.50 is destroyed.² So who profits from outdoor advertising and what are the hidden costs?

Advertising on billboards isn't cheap. Ad firms sell space for the highest market rate and this

typically means that they are used mostly by larger, multinational brands with smaller, local firms less able to afford the space.

To advertise on one ‘48 sheet’ (20 foot wide) billboard in Bristol costs around £300 - £1400 per week depending on the traffic intensity of the road. The rates are even higher for digital billboards (around £2,200 per week) as the changing image draws the eye.



The graphic opposite shows the advertising supply chain. It shows that private landlords receive comparatively little per year for leasing out space to billboard companies to push their messages at us. In some cases, the land will be owned by the billboard companies themselves. In a small number of cases, local authorities receive some rental income from these sites - with money raised going towards Council budgets to pay for goods and services. In 2012, this revenue was worth £294,000 per year³, which is relatively small amount in the Council's annual spend of £1.2billion.

The chart also shows the other financial flows to the Council in business rates received. The council also benefits from bus stop contracts with advertising companies, who are contracted to maintain and repair bus stops in exchange for the right to advertise at us. These are the financial benefits to the public purse of allowing billboards in our streets, which apply to the bus stop adverts and a handful of large billboards only. The rest of advertising revenues is accrued as private profit for the industry.

Outdoor advertising is for big business not local shops

Corporate outdoor advertising regularly promotes big brands - and re-enforces the idea that those with the most money should be able to place their messages in front of us. It is typically large corporations such as McDonalds, Tesco and KFC that have the revenue for outdoor advertising campaigns (see table 1).⁴

Bristol has a much celebrated culture of supporting independent shops and businesses - compared to the dominance of larger corporate brands that characterise other UK high streets. Shopping locally helps to

TABLE 1: TOP 10 COMPANIES USING OUTDOOR ADVERTISING (2017)

1. sky	2. Coca-Cola
3. Unilever	4. McDonald
5. BT	6. TESCO
7. KFC	8. DIAGEO
9. O ₂	10. Vodafone

keep money circulating in the local area, where it can be re-spent with a 'multiplier effect' (which loosely means an increase in economic activity that is generated by an injection of local spending). By comparison, purchases with bigger corporate brands siphons profits out of our communities where they feed large executive pay packets, dividends to shareholders or even to offshore tax havens. If we shop at one of the big supermarkets, 90p in every £1 disappears from the local area. If we spend our money in local shops, or even in a local currency such as the Bristol Pound, that money goes round the area on average eight times.⁵

*"Smaller independent businesses are much more likely to re-spend that money within the local area and have a bigger multiplier effect for every pound."*⁶



THE ADVERTISERS

Includes the big ad agencies like WPP, Saaatchi, Ogilvy.

They deal with the companies (e.g Sky, Unilever, Tesco) and do the creative content production.



BILLBOARD COMPANIES

E.g JC Decaux, Clear Channel, Primesight, Ocean, Out of Hand*



AGENTS

E.g Insite Poster Properties, Wildstone, Harlech. These companies pay business rates to the Council.

Agents have been described by one industry insider as 'sharks', often writing unfavourable contracts for landowners.

*Out of Hand are Bristol-based print, distribution and advertising company who largely focus on local arts, culture and music events.



LANDOWNERS

The rent that landlords receive from the Agent is surprisingly low, between £750 and £1500 per year in residential areas.

Hidden costs

Advertisers talk about "encouraging consumers to connect with your brand."⁷ They are usually more silent about connecting consumers to the social and environmental impacts of these brands however - something that's unlikely to change until public opposition leads to greater regulation. Some examples of these costs are explored below. They can be difficult to measure and are often picked up by the public purse.

Advertisers talk about offering consumers choice. What this means in practice, is some of the most sophisticated powers of

persuasion are used to convince us to buy products - often appealing to our emotions and subconscious thoughts about our identities. For years, health campaigners had to battle well-funded industry lobby groups to stop tobacco companies from being able to advertise their wares. Today, food and drink companies are facing a public backlash over the health impacts of our increasingly high sugar and high salt diets. The top ten companies using outdoor advertising in the UK feature Coca-Cola, McDonalds and KFC. In response to the rising health and financial costs of obesity on children and adults, Bristol Council has initiated its 'Sugar Smart'

campaign. The campaign aims to promote healthier diets among Bristol's residents. But so long as large multinational brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonalds are able to use their financial power to push their advertising on us, Bristol Council will be fighting with one hand behind its back. In 2018, London Mayor Sadiq Kahn announced a ban on junk food advertising on land controlled by Transport for London. Bristol Council could implement similar measures on the land it owns - but most of Bristol's billboards are on private land.

Other examples of hidden costs include the relationship between motor advertising in the city and air quality. Poor air quality resulting from vehicle emissions in Bristol is responsible for 117 deaths per year in the city⁸ and the health cost of Bristol's air pollution (from multiple sources) is estimated at £87 million per year.⁹ Outdoor advertising is typically located on busy roads and aimed at motorists. Car manufacturers are among the top 7 sectors using outdoor advertising with brands such as Ford, BMW, Mercedes, Toyota, Nissan, Audi, Fiat and Citroen spend around £25 million on out-of-home ads in the UK annually.¹⁰ Whilst the causes of air pollution in Bristol relate to multiple factors including public transport options and vehicle types, the hidden cost of motor advertising is borne by the public purse.

Building a new economy

Bristol prides itself on independent thinking, doing things differently and pioneering new ideas. Visitors flock to the city to soak up its culture, street art and ethos. Becoming the first UK city to remove corporate billboards from its streets would represent a shift away from an economy based on consumerism and endless economic growth - and towards a city that places greater value on place, space and wellbeing.



Artwork (above) by Milo

Join Adblock Bristol

Adblock Bristol is working towards a city that celebrates its creativity and independence, where communities have a say in what they see in the city's streets and other public spaces. We are opposed to billboards and other corporate outdoor advertising, preferring a visual environment which reflects the unique identity of our city, the values of local communities and the local economy.

We run community arts projects, hold open monthly meetings and support residents in opposing new billboard planning applications. Visit our website to find out how you can get involved.

**Adblock
Bristol**

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