



Bl m ing Billboards

For Ohio's Petitti Garden Centers, flexibility was the missing ingredient necessary to add outdoor to their media mix. With Clear Channel's digital network, their ads are sprouting all over Cleveland.

by Ellery C. Berryhill

Sixteen-year-old Angelo Petitti immigrated to the United States in 1963. Following high school graduation, the motivated student pursued a political science degree at Kent State University and worked as a part-time assistant to a local landscaper. When his passion for plants outweighed his passion for politics, Petitti decided to forge his way into the landscape business. Following a short summer stint in Florida, he returned to northeast Ohio in 1971 and engaged his brother Dominic in his new enterprise – aptly named Petitti Landscape Company.

When passersby began to stop at the garage where the brothers were storing extra trees and shrubs, Petitti Garden Centers was born. Today, the company's flagship store still stands in that garage's spot in Oakwood Village, Ohio. In addition to the flagship location, the company now operates eight retail garden

centers located throughout Northeast Ohio, a 300-acre nursery in Madison and 32 acres of greenhouses in Columbia Station. The acreage allows Petitti to produce 98% of all plants sold in their retail stores. *Greenhouse Grower* named the company one of the top 100 growers and one of the top five perennial growers in the nation.

With his business developed and growing strong, Petitti began to cultivate his media celebrity in the early 1980s. Today, he can still be seen sharing gardening tips on local television news segments; he still authors a twice-weekly gardening column in Cleveland's Sun newspapers, and his call-in radio show routinely garners 30,000 listeners. In 2003, Petitti's son AJ started producing his own gardening feature, which airs weekly on Cleveland's FOX affiliate.

With this assortment of media, was there any room for outdoor in Petitti's marketing mix?

"Not initially," says Pam Holtz, mar-

keting director for the company. "The cost was prohibitive, and with our business we require a lot of flexibility due to weather being a prominent factor for us. The regular outdoor billboards just couldn't be changed at the drop of a dime, so it wasn't feasible for our needs."

However, when Clear Channel introduced seven bright, networked LED digital displays to the Cleveland market in 2005, Holtz and the management team at Petitti's took notice. "The actual look of the boards attracted us as well as the flexibility. They're absolutely beautiful," she comments, adding, "When you're selling flowers, you really need the digital element to make them more enticing and visual."

Holtz knew somebody who was already doing advertising on the digital network and got in touch with Clear Channel Cleveland office through them. Since then, the digital executions – updated weekly — have been a solid part of Petitti's advertising mix, coordinating



This Ohio-based garden chain favors dark green backgrounds and prominent product photos on its weekly uploads to the Clear Channel's digital outdoor network.



The flexibility was key for this advertiser, which requires weekly and sometimes daily changes of its advertising based on weather conditions and product inventory.

with their newspaper ads and local television and radio spots.

"There have even been times where we've had to do a 24-hour turnaround on something due to weather or inventory level," says Holtz. "The digital option certainly made that doable."

A graphic designer for Petitti Garden Centers designs the boards, which typically feature one product prominently next to a quick tag and the company logo. "Clarity is very important. We use a lot of dark green as a background color. It makes the flowers appear even more vibrant and bright. And we will do white on green type quite a bit as well," says Holtz.

The digital files are then forwarded to Joyce Fijalkovich, Clear Channel's Digital Outdoor Network Manager, who uploads them to the network. Holtz says staff from Petitti's drive by each of the new messages to check on color contrast, brightness and clarity of message. While she notes that it's difficult to truly separate outdoor advertising response from the company's

other marketing, Holtz says the company has received very positive feedback from the public. "We are constantly told we're being seen. We've had people come into the store looking specifically for items we've highlighted on the billboards. Since we do very specific advertising on the displays by featuring one product at a time, we can track the ads by products to a certain degree."

The response from Cleveland's public has been positive enough for Petitti to renew an annual contract with Clear Channel. "It's great to be able to add outdoor to our other marketing, and the digital boards just really make it work," says Holtz.

In 2005 the Cleveland market served as the company's flagship digital market, introducing a seven-board network to a positive and receptive community. Since that time, the company has furthered its digital progress, installing boards and networks across a variety of markets.

Most recently, the company installed a 10-display network of 14' x 48' digital boards in Los Angeles this past May. The displays run a continuous, 64-second loop of eight-second static advertisements, resulting in each creative execution being displayed over 1000 times per board daily.

"A brand new medium for advertisers has arrived in Los Angeles," said Paul Meyer, President and Chief Operating Officer of Clear Channel Outdoor. "Los Angeles is the first of a number of top ten U.S. markets in which we will launch our Digital Outdoor Networks this calendar year."

In addition to Cleveland and Los Angeles, Clear Channel now operates digital billboard networks in Akron, Albuquerque, Cleveland, Columbus, Las Vegas, Memphis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Tampa Bay, and Wichita.