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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: How advertisers are looking for new, outrageous ways to get their message out

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BODY:

DAVID BROWN, anchor:

This is MARKETPLACE. I'm David Brown in for David Brancaccio.

It sounds like a script from a crass TV sitcom, but this next item is for real. A New York couple is holding an online auction for naming rights for their baby boy. The idea here is that if companies can buy the naming rights for sports stadiums, then perhaps a company might consider bidding \$1/2 billion or more to give their baby boy a 'brand' name. No takers yet, but that New York couple appears to be tapping into a new trend.

With ad revenues sharply declining, advertisers are looking for more and more outrageous new ways to get their messages out, and critics say we're reaching a kind of critical mass. In fact, our own media maven, Marty Kaplan, associate dean at USC's Annenberg School for Communication, argues that the time has come to call it like it is, the ad-free zone is dead.

Mr. MARTY KAPLAN (Annenberg School for Communication): It's about the penetration of marketing and branding into every conceivable space. There used to be thought of as some part of modern life as commercial place or the marketplace, but, in fact, I mean, the title of this show could be about the whole of human existence. There's no realm--education, religion, architecture, fashion, sports, on and on--which does not now have the imprint of advertising and marketing.

BROWN: I want to play the devil's advocate here, though, for just a moment. I can remember growing up in the rural South, and you would see barns with signs painted on them: Sea Rock City. Chew Red Man Tobacco. Those kinds of things. Even in rural America, you would see the proliferation of advertising.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes.

BROWN: What really has changed, and why?

Mr. KAPLAN: Well, as I look over that attractive ViewSonic flat-panel monitor and your Washington and Lee Law School T-shirt and the very impressive Sony headset you're wearing, it strikes me that some lines have, indeed, been crossed. There are two young high school students just graduated from New Jersey, who auctioned personal branding off to the highest corporate bidder. And so now a credit card company, First USA, for the cost of sending them to college, will have them as human spokespeople.

If you go into a bar and eavesdrop on somebody saying what a cool new vodka this is, chances are that they're being paid for it. If you go into a bookstore and see a rack of books in the front, it's not because the proprietor of the bookstore thinks it's a book worth recommending. It's because the publisher has purchased that space to market and promote and get your attention for a certain period of time.

BROWN: I read somewhere that the average American's already bombarded with at least 3,000 marketing messages per day, at least. Surely there's a saturation point, where people stop noticing ads, because they've become such a part of our landscape. We've entered a kind of "Blade Runner"-esque situation where we're constantly avoiding the obstacles of advertising and missing the messages that they're trying to send to us.

Mr. KAPLAN: I don't think it's possible to avoid them anymore, and I think society has relaxed its vigilance about declaring certain spaces to be sacred preserves. The idea of a commons is deeply in peril. There is a movement, however, of ragtag citizens who are kind of lost in the anarchist shuffle of Seattle and Genoa, who are saying that brand bullies need to be stopped.

BROWN: Do you believe it's going to come from the grass roots, then, or is it that advertisers themselves will see the folly of their ways or their inability to actually make these ad dollars convert into something that's economically worthwhile for them?

Mr. KAPLAN: I think they'll discover that it doesn't work, because in the end, no one can prove that advertising makes any difference. All the quantitative studies about what the advertising industry can accomplish have equivocal results, and so the most important message for the advertising and marketing industry to put out is, isn't marketing and advertising cool? Look at these new ways of doing it. Because the more people pay attention to the cleverness involved, the less they'll pay attention to the impact of it. Look at the 97 cents on the dollar that most dot-coms spend on advertising and look where it left

them. But as is almost always the case, the market will be a corrective to the market.

BROWN: Marty Kaplan is director of the Norman Lear Center, and he's also associate dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. Marty, thank you very much.

Mr. KAPLAN: Thanks for all three brands.

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