

Electronic billboards are to sell advertising, not to issue missing children alerts

Let's be honest.

The few electronic billboards being placed on heavily traveled streets within Cheyenne will provide little help in finding abducted or missing children.

NextMedia garnered free publicity about the use of these billboards for AMBER alerts but the purpose and 99.5% of the use of these electronic billboards will be to carry paid advertising, not public service or missing children announcements.

"The AMBER Alert Program, named for 9 year-old Amber Hagerman, is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement agencies, broadcasters and transportation agencies to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases. Broadcasters use the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to air a description of the abducted child and suspected abductor. The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize the entire community to assist in the search for and safe recovery of the child."

There have been several successful recoveries that may have been related to the AMBER Alert Program. There have been 36 through October 7, 2009 - 40 in 2008 and 45 in 2007. Nationwide. And every child recovered from a noncustodial parent or abductor is worth every effort that is and can be taken.

A review of the AMBER alerts put out

during that nearly three year time frame on the www.missingkids.com website indicates that there is very little effective use made of billboards or signs placed on city streets.

The four most common ways the public have been made aware of a disappearance and reported sightings to law enforcement have been television, radio, law enforcement directly, and freeway/interstate signs. Television coverage distorts the perception that interstate electronic messages have contributed greatly. Actually, the other three means have been much more effective. Many recoveries have been from a BOLO (Be On the Look-out) to law enforcement. To their credit, they often spot the offender and effect a rescue or recovery. Radio and television messages may be equally effective.

Electronic billboards in Cheyenne, especially with only four of them, are unlikely to aid law enforcement to much of an extent. Those four signs are about producing revenue. Consider the revenue generated with paper panels, one advertiser per month, to eight second messages that can accommodate dozens of advertisers daily on the same billboard. 24/7.

The greatest benefit to AMBER alerts is that the message can be put out to broadcast media instantly, as well as to law enforcement and on freeway signs. Let us hope that the warnings work better to apprehend culprits and rescue abducted

than in creating a panic in the abductor's mind that leads to worse actions being taken to avoid being caught with a child. Often, the mother is abducted with the child by an ex-husband, angry boyfriend or other male acquaintance.

The link referenced earlier deals with only successes. It is not a listing of all AMBER alerts issued nationwide since the program began. Just the successes.

Because these warning programs are voluntary, there is no requirement that NextMedia post AMBER alerts, even though it is likely they will because they will be so infrequent and it's good PR.

What about messages on the recent spate of bank robberies? Will Next go dark with their paid advertising so they can blast messages about the robberies and robber's description and that of vehicles so people around Cheyenne can call in a report if they witness something?

How quickly can, or will, Next place any public service message? And, if some in city government thought cell phone use while driving was dangerous, how will they feel about motorists looking skyward to read the words scrolling and perhaps a picture or description of a person(s) or vehicle? To be most effective, these electronic billboards will be placed on the busiest streets where there is already the

greatest incidence of accidents.

Remember the stink when CFD wanted to place an electronic billboard on Hynds with messages having to do with CFD events? The nearest houses weren't very close but there were objections because of the light pollution. And has that sign ever been used to post an AMBER alert? Chances are there isn't anybody to change the sign at a moment's notice.

AMBER alerts are local or regional in nature. Cheyenne would probably only be asked to post such a message if there was a reason for a national appeal and that is seldom the case. Will there ever be one? With modern communication devices, it is unlikely a person could flee to unknown places with no links.

What you will see on the electronic billboards are ads. Commercials without audio, if you prefer. More attractive? Definitely. The shredded paper hanging from signs will be gone. An AMBER alert will likely never originate locally. These billboards will be too valuable to NextMedia to use them to search for lost animals (unless the owner wants to pay commensurate rates to scroll the message) so very, very, very seldom will you see a message that is not a paid ad.

To claim otherwise - by either NextMedia or the local PD - is disingenuous.

The lies about Jimmy Valdez

There are studies that show Christmas is a time when some who are dissatisfied with their lot in life drink excessively. They can't cope with the holidays without liquor. And many of them become what is referred to as a "mean drunk." Not knowing the personal circumstances of a WTE letter to the editor writer whose piece of garbage appeared today, it is entirely possible that he/she may be one of those mean drunks. The androgynous name made it impossible to know whether the writer is male or female but, whichever, the message is one of "making it up" as they went along.

The thrust of what could have been a well presented and accurate criticism of perks enjoyed by higher paid city employees and elected officials that should be tapped before taking pay from other employees was tainted by misstatements, errors and downright lies.

A reference was made to RIF'ing employees. I've not heard that was planned - but if the letter writer knew that the city attorney's office cost taxpayers \$321,465 in FY 2008 but is budgeted to cost \$455,289 for FY 2010, that would be a logical place to RIF someone. (RIF is Reduction in Force, of course. Termination.)

And, city council members don't make \$84,000 a year - they make \$12,000. They should not be eligible for employee health insurance at public expense but get your facts right before trashing them.

The idiot: "Anyone know that Councilman Jimmy Valdez had two major surgeries as soon as his health insurance kicked in, costing the rest of us thousands and thousands? He purposely waited until the city insured him to get the surgeries done."

That's not only a lie. It's a damned lie.

Jimmy ran for city council the first time in 1998. He started campaigning from the day he filed for office in May 1998 and continued through the November general election. He had high blood pressure but had no other heart issues that we knew about and none was in evidence. I came to know Jimmy and his family very well because I managed his winning campaign. Sworn in on January 2, he enrolled in city health insurance as did all other council members and the mayor. He allowed his very expensive private plan to lapse. In April, while entertaining at the G.I. Forum, he had a heart attack. He was taken to the hospital by ambulance. He required quadruple bypass surgery, often a fairly routine surgery with a four or five day hospital stay. Unfortunately, after great surgery, the aftercare at UMC was poor and Jimmy underwent further surgeries on his leg because of lack of circulation from where the vein was taken for the bypass surgery. Jimmy spent 35 days in the hospital because of that negligence. He did not sue the hospital for medical malpractice as he could have. And, I have always believed, should have.

UMC ruined Jimmy's leg and he will wear a brace the rest of his life because a muscle was removed. After spending 35 days in a hospital bed because he could not walk, he was finally released. He did not "plan" the heart attack. He did not "wait" for coverage. And he sure as hell did not want surgery on his leg. Multiple surgeries. Wanna see a Polaroid of that leg, creep?

Criticize Jimmy Valdez when it's warranted. I will. But I wouldn't wish Jimmy's suffering on even this dumbass letter writer. Calling him/her a mean drunk is too kind.

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