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## The Electronic Supermarket and Beyond

### **We now have TV screens and computers in our supermarkets. Why? What are they supposed to accomplish? What's next?**

Imagine walking into your neighborhood supermarket. You begin by touching an interactive video screen to find the products you need. As you go from aisle to aisle, your cart, equipped with LED readout, displays the week's specials. Meanwhile, you hear the store's own "radio station" giving you shopping tips and promoting specific products. A machine attached to the shelf dispenses coupons for items you select. While you're waiting in the checkout line, you watch Headline News until you pay for your purchases with your ATM or credit card. And, finally, you scan in your supermarket club card to receive multiple discounts on weekly specials.

The future? Well actually interactive video and other electronic media are already here...in supermarkets, malls, airports, etc. Although in only a few isolated locations locally, the wave of alternate electronic media is growing and will begin to affect us all.

"The store is the only place where the product, the advertiser's message and the consumer all come together in one place," explains David Walthall, president of Heritage Media Corp., parent company of Actmedia, an in-store promotion and advertising firm.

In-store advertising and promotion is growing rapidly. Experts attribute this to the surge in new product introductions. With so many brands fighting for attention, national advertisers are finding it more difficult to break through the clutter. And if the big guys are having a tough time, imagine the difficulties facing the smaller brands. Manufacturers realize that the grocery store aisle is their last contact with potential

consumers and that many purchase decisions are made without prior planning. In some product categories, impulse purchases account for over 90% of all sales. And that's why in-store advertising has become so important. It reaches a captive audience of consumers right at the point of choosing the product. By using their in-store TV, sound system and point of purchase materials, the clutter of competing promotional messages can be controlled as the consumer sees or hears only those messages that help reinforce specific promotions, specials or sales.

On the other hand, in-store electronics does have its drawbacks. Some customers have reacted with annoyance to the Checkout Channel, which runs in eight-minute cycles (the approximate time a customer stands in line). They object to the intrusion of television in the checkout line and some even feel as though they're being watched, a la George Orwell's "Big Brother." However, the level of annoyance seems to vary by demographics and region.

The growth of in-store advertising doesn't eliminate the need for traditional advertising. Obviously there will always be the need to attract new customers, to change buying habits, to inform and educate, even change or correct perceptions. But once you get the prospect to your location, in-store advertising opens up new and effective communications horizons. It offers opportunities to expand the media mix to help ensure a promotion's success. Traditional advertising, linked to in-store promotions, using the same message, and the same call to action, can provide powerful persuasion.

Supermarkets are only the beginning. Soon we will see interactive video and other electronic images in retail locations, banks, hospitals, tourist centers, parks, golf courses...anywhere people gather.

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