

# DIGITAL SIGNAGE DELIVERS NEW ROADWAY DANGERS

## DRIVER DISTRACTION

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According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are three main types of driver distraction:

- 1 • Visual: Taking your eyes off the road (looking at something other than the road)
- 2 • Manual: Taking your hands off the wheel
- 3 • Cognitive: Taking your mind off driving

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), distracted driving is dangerous, claiming **3,166** lives in 2017 alone. Each day in the U.S., approximately **9** people are killed and more than **1,000** injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver. Every year, about **421,000** people are injured in crashes that have involved a driver who was distracted in some way.

It takes an average of **three seconds** after a driver's mind is taken off the road for any road accident to occur. This is the bare minimum amount of time it takes, and it is surprisingly small. Three seconds is the time it takes to turn your ignition when starting your car.

How many drivers look away from the roadway to watch the changing messages on a digital billboard? Who is endangered when they do—a bicyclist, pedestrian, the passenger in the next car over?

Worldwide studies now document the dangerous distractions caused by digital electronic messaging signs.

In a city seeking to reduce injuries and deaths on our streets, any measure that creates new sources of driver distraction on our streets **must** be stopped.

Halting today's measure will prevent needless injuries and death on the streets of Los Angeles – a rather fine and consequential accomplishment for a day's work, Councilmembers.

# The Dangerous Distraction of Digital Billboards

By Melissa Thompson - Thu January 11, 2018

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Advertisers know it's important to capture people's attention to make an impact, but when it comes to taking people's attention away from driving, the impact could come in the form of a high-speed crash.

Unlike traditional billboards, which are simply large painted boards, digital billboards can change their bright and colorful images every few seconds. This makes the digital billboard flashy and interesting to the traffic passing by, not unlike a huge big-screen television along the side of the road, but is it too eye-catching for safety?

The scientific proof is still disputed, but marketers ought to be aware of the potentially deadly consequences of digital billboards as an advertising channel. To inform marketers who may be considering digital billboards going forward, here are some studies and their findings regarding safety.

## Virginia Tech study

The Transportation Institute at Virginia Tech published a fact sheet based on their 2006 study of car accidents and near-collisions. They used a number of monitoring instruments in each car, including five channels of digital video, front and rear radar sensors, accelerometers and vision-based lane trackers, to capture about a year's worth of data on 100 different cars used for general-purpose driving.

They found that nearly 80% of crashes, and 65% of near-crashes, occurred due to driver inattention such as distraction or simply looking away for three seconds. When it comes to rear-end striking crashes, inattention was a contributing factor in 93% of cases. Interestingly, the rate of crash and near-crash incidents due to inattention decreased with age, with the 18-20-year-old age group four times higher than older age groups such as 35+ years of age.

This well-respected study shows that only a couple seconds of inattention can easily lead to auto accidents.

## ODOT study

In this early study of digital billboard safety in 2008 by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), brought about when Salem, Oregon introduced four digital billboards to a major arterial thoroughfare, ODOT reviewed the existing literature and found that further research was needed.

One noteworthy point ODOT raised in this brief report is that the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson after having been led by the efforts of his wife Lady Bird Johnson, was based partially on concerns about driver distraction by billboards. "Advertising that could distract or impair the driver's vision was removed from highways under the Highway Beautification Act of 1965."

## Swedish study



Furthermore, as public awareness grows about these safety issues, companies using digital billboards may experience damage to their reputations for partaking in the questionable practice.

Perhaps, with the advent of self-driving cars, accidents due to distracted drivers will be eliminated and all vehicle occupants will be able to fully amuse themselves safely in looking at all the digital billboards decorating the roadside.

In any case, in this age of constant and rapid technological innovation, marketers need to choose their advertising media wisely. Effectiveness and return on investment are key factors in evaluating new advertising technologies, but as these studies show, there are some audiences whose attention you should not seek to capture.

### **Melissa Thompson**

Melissa Thompson writes about a wide range of topics, revealing interesting things we didn't know before. She is a freelance USA Today producer, and a Technorati contributor.

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## Swedish Study Shows Digital Billboards Distract Drivers

The photos below were taken in Stockholm, Sweden in 2009, during the country's test of digital billboards. The signs have since been removed. Click to enlarge.

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A new study (</storage/PDFs/eebdd.pdf>) published in the journal *Traffic Injury Prevention* concludes that digital billboards attract and hold the gazes of drivers for far longer than a threshold that previous studies have shown to be dangerous.

@firefly\_cities on Instagram

## A Battle Is Brewing Over Those Digital Billboards on Rideshare Roofs

An L.A. city councilman wants to stop blight, but rideshare drivers say they'll lose out on extra income

By [Steven Blum](#) / LA Magazine / April 5, 2019

<https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/firefly-rideshare-billboards/>

For L.A.'s billboard merchants, business is booming. As of last spring, billboards on the Sunset Strip were commanding as much as \$100,000 a month, thanks to tech's affinity for outdoor advertising. More recently, Netflix purchased nearly two dozen billboards in the area for a cool \$150 mil, and since 2008, the number of [digital billboards along California's highways has tripled](#).

But not everyone is cheering on the proliferation of ads in the visual landscape. For years, L.A. District 3 city councilman Bob Blumenfield has been battling billboard companies, which he refers to as "blight merchants." His fight with the industry reached a fever pitch in the San Fernando Valley years ago, when reps for the billboard companies "knocked on [Blumenfield's] door, screamed at him in front of his children and left billboards lying on his front lawn," according to Blumenfield's spokesperson, Jake Flynn.

Now, Blumenfield is going after [Firefly](#), an advertising company that outfits Ubers and Lyfts with digital billboards on their roofs.

The councilman recently submitted [a motion](#) that would essentially ban all Firefly ads in the city—which number in the mere hundreds. "In reality, driving with these billboards was already illegal," says Flynn. "We're just making it crystal clear so that the city doesn't have laws on the books that are out-of-date."

Firefly's representatives say that the move would further hurt rideshare drivers, many of whom have already seen their [per-mile wages slashed over the last few months](#). By transforming their cars into roving billboards, Firefly would allow cash-strapped drivers to make an extra \$300 in supplementary income every month, the company says.

Pete Gould, Firefly's policy director, says the company has done everything in its power to ensure compliance with city restrictions. "We've done independent safety testing and brightness testing and provided that to the city attorney's office and heard nothing back for months," says Gould. "And now they're coming up with new interpretations of laws."

But Blumenfield says that Firefly's mobile billboards are inherently distracting and could cause accidents. "If we let these digital ads fly through traffic we risk making every street in Los





**Do we really want to allow  
vehicle mounted  
digital signs?**