Written by Matt Willey
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Airport advertising concessionaire JCDecaux Airport and BAA have unveiled research that they claim demonstrates the powerful engagement of digital airport panels (DAPs) at UK airports.

Carried out by Europe's only specialist eye-tracking agency, Eyetracker, the study uses state-of-the-art technology to pinpoint where passengers look, using high-tech 'Eyetracking' glasses that monitor passengers' eye movements during their airport journey.

Designed for the defence industry, the Eyetracker glasses have two small cameras that record the wearer's field of vision and pupil focus. The latest research indicates that the impact of screens at the airport is extremely high, that passengers see almost 100 DAPs on average on their journey through the airport, that movement in the media message is key, and that important lessons for campaign planning can be drawn from the non-linear way people on the move look around their environment.

JCDecaux Airport Marketing Director Richard Malton said, "The research provides a new level of understanding about digital media, with important findings that will shape the face of future campaigns at our airports. The Eyetracker research has demonstrated the high levels of engagement of the Digital Airport Panels, showing that it is a highly efficient medium with no wastage.

"It has proved that even small movements capture passengers' attention, which has important implications for the introduction of live feeds and countdowns on our DAPs, to constantly refresh the screens for the eye," he added.

Non-linear eye movement

Another key finding is that people on the move look around in a non-linear way, with their eyes flicking back and forth from the middle distance as they search for and are attracted by airport signage. Frequent repetition of the creative is important for advertisers to take advantage of this way of viewing, said BAA and JCDecaux. This is because passengers absorb messages in rapid bursts, and 'stitch' the creative together as they look at each screen for 0.3 seconds at a time – the outdoor industry average for digital.

The findings suggest that rather than running the same creative along a line of digital screens, advertisers should refresh their creative in banks of three to four screens so that passengers absorb these messages before reaching the next bank of screens where the message can be reinforced.

BAA head of media and sponsorship Juan Perez noted, "Digital media plays an integral role in the life of airports both to display information and to drive footfall and penetration in the stores. The investment in both the format and sophisticated research to better understand passengers' relationship with digital media has been, and will continue to be, a significant one. Together with other important research initiatives we hope to take the strategic planning of the airport digital medium to a new level."

The research proved that movement achieves the best cut-through for passengers. Respondents spontaneously cited movement in advertising as being important: 94 per cent said moving advertising was "more striking" while 44 per cent said movement was the "most important factor in an advertisement". The research also suggested that the amount of movement was immaterial, as even small movements caught the eye.

JCDecaux Airport has already made changes to the way advertising is shown on the DAPs by

introducing a short countdown between each wave of advertising on the DAPs to attract passengers' eyes to the changes on the screen as a result of the research.

About the Eyetracker study

The Eyetracker research was commissioned by JCDecaux Airport and BAA, and was conducted in the International Departure Lounge of Heathrow Terminal 5 – where there are 89 Digital Airport Panels.

The research was conducted in three stages. Participants wore the Eyetracker glasses as they browsed the international departure lounge for 25 minutes. Passengers were then interviewed about their journey and shown the footage and their spontaneous reactions noted. Finally, a qualitative questionnaire was used to find out their awareness of the digital screens, brand recall and their opinion of the airport environment. The 20 participants mirrored the Heathrow Terminal 5 demographics: 55 per cent men, 45 per cent women; 33 per cent on business and 10 per cent on domestic flights.

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