

# VIRTUAL ADVERTISING

## THE FUTURE OF SPORTS MARKETING

 Viz Eclipse

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vizrt vizrt

**unfront**

# INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has completely transformed the advertising industry, giving brands the power to implement individual targeted campaigns on social media or streaming services. These ads can be forensically tailored to personal online behaviour or to broader target groups and regions in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago.

This innovation in the delivery and consumption of advertising has put the spotlight, and some pressure, on more traditional media formats. How can older generation platforms such as perimeter advertising boards at sports events compete against the efficiency and pinpoint accuracy of an individual banner ad on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter?

The reality is that all platforms, traditional and new generation, have a significant part to play in the current and future delivery of advertising campaigns. Each platform has its unique strengths, scope and purpose, and every brand and campaign has different aims and audiences.

The perimeter advertising board, in particular, retains a value beyond many platforms in the digital age given its iconic and eye-catching prominence at popular sports events that large groups of people want to watch in person, on television or online.

As technology develops, all available platforms also have the potential to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of brands and consumers, in effect providing a much richer array of options for reaching various types of markets and customers.

This is certainly the case with perimeter signage boards at sports events.

Until now, static and, more recently, LED boards have provided a formidable platform to speak directly to the fans in a stadium at a sports event, in a general way to a national or international audience during broadcast, or some combination of both.

There are clear limitations to the kind of message or campaign that might be able to work in an effective and efficient way for those diverse audiences at the same time. These limitations certainly seem like a far cry from the new-fangled targeted advertising available on social media.

For brands, static and LED advertising boards - with their range of simple to multi-coloured, animated messages - have a big role to play in any sports advertising mix. But the advent of new technology is transforming the possibilities for advertising boards. In turn, this technology is unlocking whole new worlds of delivery and, therefore, new revenue streams for signage.

The most exciting development has been the creation of virtual advertising tools that give rights holders and brands the power to reimagine the scope for campaigns using advertising boards during the broadcast of a sports event.

# WHAT IS VIRTUAL ADVERTISING?

Virtual advertising uses technology to superimpose auxiliary advertising graphics on to actual advertising or commercial surfaces during the television broadcast production of an event. It effectively replaces the physical design on the actual static or LED surface of an advertising board with “virtual” graphics on a viewer’s screen or device.

Virtual advertising has different applications for different commercial or advertising spaces, depending on the sport or event. Advertisements can be superimposed onto grass at Formula 1 or cricket events, for example, or layered onto panels in baseball stadiums.

One example with huge potential for varied application and revenue stream growth is to replace the actual advertisements on perimeter advertising boards seen by fans in a football stadium with virtual advertisements only seen by viewers watching the broadcast of the event on a television, smartphone, laptop or tablet.

The result is to create multiple feeds from the same event that can transmit different advertising on perimeter signage boards to multiple broadcast markets.

# HOW DOES IT WORK?

Virtual advertising solutions are either “intrusive” or “non-intrusive”, requiring the use of highly-specialised hardware or software technology applied during the broadcast production of an event.

Each technology results in the realistic creation of virtual signage boards with virtual advertising on screen for viewers tuning in to watch an event on television or any other device.

## **The “intrusive” solution for signage boards**

The hardware solution for virtual advertising is “intrusive”. It involves adapting existing advertising boards and broadcast cameras in the stadium with additional equipment. These alterations enable the boards to be detected, broadcast images to be manipulated and the virtual advertising solution to be applied. Its “intrusive” nature means it is limited in scope and difficult to expand on a large scale.

Because it requires specialised signage boards and cameras, this “intrusive” solution is relatively expensive and, therefore, limits the application of virtual advertising to a smaller number of clubs or events. The technology on offer only works with certain types of signage boards, manufactured by specific companies - again, restricting the options for most clubs or event organisers.

Because of the implementation cost and the infrastructure requirements, this technology is currently limited to two cameras (main and close up) of a broadcast production - in effect, limiting the application of virtual advertising to about 70-80% of a match or event. Any further expansion of this timeframe would require additional camera alterations and additional cost.

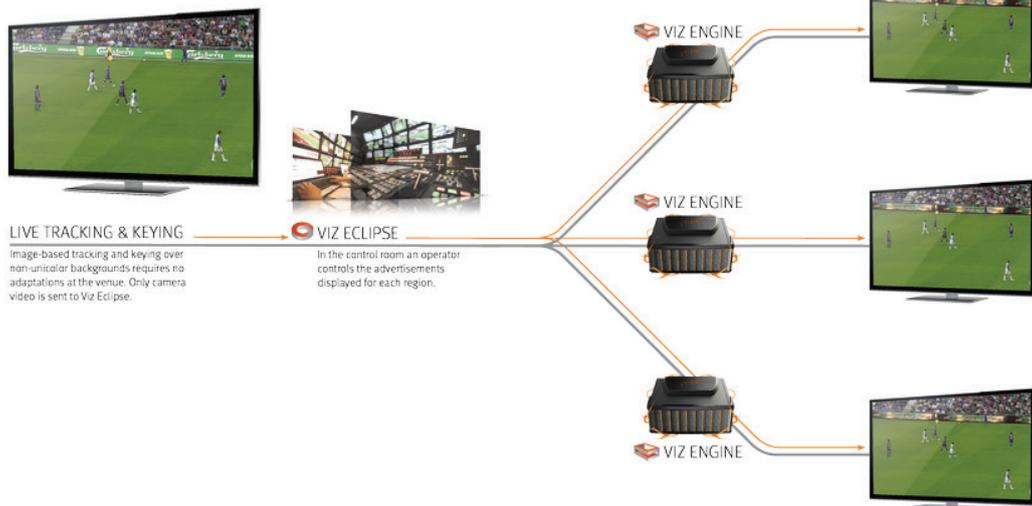
One provider of this solution estimates an upfront cost of between EUR 70-80,000 per match or event to install the hardware and deliver virtual advertising.

### **The “non-intrusive” solution for signage boards**

A software image-based solution is “non-intrusive” and involves the deployment of a 3D graphics software calibration process within the broadcast production chain. This software calibration takes place by running the image from a camera through the calibration process prior to a broadcast feed being transmitted to viewers in various markets. Based on the calibration procedure, the actual advertising boards can be tracked during a camera pan or zoom operation; the tracked area is then keyed (the process whereby foreground objects are identified and a “hole” is created in the tracked area) and ultimately replaced with virtual 3D graphics.

As a “non-intrusive” solution, the software route does not require any changes to stadium advertising boards or camera infrastructure, and it does not require a team onsite to ensure its delivery.

It is, therefore, a far more widely applicable and cost effective option for clubs and events.



## The ultimate “future proof” virtual advertising solution

While some leagues, clubs and rights holders have trialed early “intrusive” versions of virtual advertising technology, most have waited for the development of a viable, next generation “non-intrusive” solution that offers more flexibility, easier implementation and better value for money.

The world’s most respected full-service sports marketing company Infront and Vizrt, the world leader in advanced 3D graphics and sports analysis tools, have combined forces to deliver a virtual advertising tool that will change the face of the market.

Vizrt's virtual reality solution Viz Eclipse represents the ultimate "non-intrusive" method and delivers the kind of future-proof technology and process that supports the financial and strategic demands of the sports and marketing industries.

Unlike all other options on the market, it does not require alterations to equipment - either signage boards or cameras - and it can cater for static and LED boards with all types of imagery, including animation, depending on customer requirements and sporting or broadcast regulations.

Crucially, Viz Eclipse can be applied in real-time and set up remotely, therefore not requiring any physical integration onsite. This makes it extremely flexible and scalable to a wider range of rights holders.

Its software uses advanced 3D modeling and image recognition "keying" techniques to recreate completely realistic signage instantaneously as the actual images are filmed.

It is unaffected by any movements of players and officials in front of the advertising boards and automatically adapts the virtual image to environmental conditions such as changes in light and weather. As a software option, it can also potentially be applied to multiple cameras in the broadcast loop, meaning that more of the match can be covered.

Significantly, Infront has stated that its cost per match is currently well below the EUR 80,000 mark.



**Unlimited feeds** for targeted sponsor messages and regionalized sales

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

## **For rights holders**

Rights holders can benefit from a number of new opportunities thanks to the versatility of virtual advertising.

Various sponsor packages can be created, such as offering one brand multiple broadcast feeds to target specific markets, territories or countries. This can prove especially useful if different language or product campaigns are required for certain audiences.

Such packages could also be sold to more than one brand or partner so that multiple sponsors could target various global, regional or national markets via different broadcast feeds. Ultimately, this means being able to market the same advertising space multiple times and potentially to multiple partners.

Packages can also be tailored for different time segments during matches or for specific events such as a corner kick, a penalty, a substitution or a shot on goal, when certain parts of the perimeter signage are more visible to viewers than others.

For a replayed broadcast, a new set of advertising packages could be tailored and sold to create more revenue. The same applies to highlights broadcasts or compilation programmes.

## **For brands**

Advertising boards are a direct, powerful way to connect with consumers. Virtual advertising transforms the possibilities for

perimeter boards to unlock new revenue streams with more efficient, targeted campaigns for specific markets.

Through virtual advertising, brands could tailor global advertising campaigns to a national level using the correct language for each market.

A sponsor could market one product to a certain broadcast region and sell another service into a separate region.

Limited “call-to-action” messages or promotions could be integrated into national broadcast feeds to maximise the impact of a campaign.

Campaigns can now cater to the different types of advertising legislation, sports regulations or product bans in markets around the world, such as limitations on the use and type of animations on signage in motor racing or alcohol product bans.

Because of the growing range of options available through virtual advertising, brands can also now potentially pick and choose between the events and broadcast timeslots they want to harness to market their products and services.

### **For consumers**

In a crowded and skeptical space, consumers are more likely to appreciate and respond to relevant advertising that fits their outlook, lifestyle, spending choices and product preferences. Irrelevant or inappropriate advertising campaigns can have a negative effect on the profile of any brand.

Therefore, any effort to improve the relevance and focus of campaigns utilising advertising boards is to be welcomed. This is especially true when broadcasts of sports events can often result in large parts of the viewing audience receiving an advertising campaign in a foreign language or for a product that they cannot buy in their territory.

Viewers can now see campaigns and signage that are targeted for their market segment in increasingly versatile and intelligent ways.

## FACTBOX

### **CASE STUDY: Successful deployment of the Infront/Vizrt solution Viz Eclipse**

The IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship wanted to diversify their advertising rights offering to tap into larger revenue streams. At the tournament in Denmark in May 2018, Infront and Vizrt showcased the power, potential and versatility of their virtual advertising solution.

At the Royal Arena in Copenhagen, four perimeter rink boards - behind the goals and on the corners - were used to transmit bespoke messages for sponsor Fonbet to audiences in Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Fans in the arena saw one set of signage boards, while fans in those specific three broadcast markets witnessed a realistic virtual advertising campaign from Fonbet.

An analysis of a match between Slovakia and Switzerland on May 6th showed that two-thirds of the match was covered by the main camera with virtual advertising software successfully applied. This resulted in more than half of the match featuring Fonbet ads for their target market and just seven percent of airtime showing the actual arena boards.

Viz Eclipse has also undergone successful trials at football matches in Germany and Italy, with the technology now ready to roll out to all clubs and rights holders once full approval is received in each territory.



Can you spot the virtual advertising overlay?

# WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF VIRTUAL ADVERTISING?

With the advent of “over-the-top” services such as online streaming and social media innovations, and with more and more sports fans choosing to watch events online, virtual advertising during the broadcast production of sports events can unleash a brave new world of individually-targeted advertising.

As more sports, clubs, national teams and leagues embrace online streaming of events, with or without a traditional broadcast partner, the prospect of generating advertising revenue streams is also becoming more viable.

Thanks to Viz Eclipse, the signage board that once only connected brands to fans in the stadium could now empower brands to communicate with individual viewers, potentially via specific IP addresses.

This would unlock multiple packages for rights holders and almost unlimited possibilities for brands looking to maximise the value of their advertising investments.

Once that step is taken the traditional signage board could become as versatile, powerful and targeted as any personalised banner ad on social media that is based on search engine preferences and online purchase histories.

# CONCLUSION

The demand for an affordable, reliable and versatile solution for virtual advertising has grown to fever pitch in recent years, with rights holders and sponsors eager to unleash the revenue power of targeted and nimble campaigns during the lucrative broadcast of sports events.

The dawn of streaming services online has opened up even more potential for this technology, once the right solution comes to market.

Until now, existing virtual advertising tools have been intrusive and required expensive and complicated adaptations to stadium and camera infrastructure, which has limited the viability and scalability of this next generation technology for many players in the market.

However, thanks to a pioneering partnership between the world's most respected full-service sports marketing company Infront and Vizrt, the world leader in advanced 3D graphics and sports analysis tools, the sports marketing industry now has the virtual advertising tool it has been waiting for.

Viz Eclipse is the ultimate non-intrusive, software-based virtual advertising solution that can be applied at any sports event being broadcast and on any medium. Its simple, instantaneous application creates multiple possibilities for targeted campaigns and advertising packages. Its future-proof and affordable technology also means it can be harnessed by everyone in the market.

With Viz Eclipse now fully tested and ready for market, virtual advertising is taking a leap into the real world.

# #AllAboutSports

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