

Coming to a shopping centre near you: the TV advert on a T-shirt

By Renee Mickelburgh

It's either the most innovative form of advertising or the most infuriating: a beautiful young woman wanders around a shopping centre with a television on her T-shirt broadcasting non-stop advertisements.

The concept has been criticised by some advertisers as overly aggressive "guerrilla marketing" but has been a success with some shoppers who apparently find it hard to resist.

The T-shirts, which are reminiscent of the clothes worn by the Teletubbies on the BBC children's television programme, were developed in the United States and are fitted with an 11-inch flat screen, a hard drive and four hidden speakers.

They weigh just over 6lb each and cost about £550. Despite their expense, potential advertisers are reportedly queuing up to use them.

Twentieth Century Fox was the first to take advantage of them, using the T-shirts in America last month to promote *I, Robot* - a science fiction film starring Will Smith.

Models wearing the shirts, which played trailers from the film, strolled through shopping malls, theatres and beaches in different cities across the country. Jeffrey Godsick, the executive vice-president for marketing at Fox USA, said that his company had seized the chance to use the T-shirts after being approached by Brand Marketers, the company in San Francisco that created them. "It's a really unique medium, it instantly grabs people's attention," he said.

"They are totally mobile, so in terms of targeting your audience, you can pick places that you know either movie-goers are at or where people who are interested in a particular subject matter are.

"In this case, regardless of the exterior environment, wherever they go they become the environment and they draw people to them."

Fox will not be using the T-shirts to promote *I, Robot* in Britain when it premieres this week because of a lack of supplies, but, according to Kieran Breen, the company's British marketing director, it will soon be introducing them.

"At the moment, we cannot source exactly the same T-shirt television in the UK, but we are looking to use them in the future on an appropriate film," he said.

Adam Hollander, the 30-year-old, from San Francisco who invented the shirts, is also hoping to use them in Britain and is negotiating a distribution contract in this country.

"People just don't look at billboards and posters on the street any more. You have to be more creative," he said.

Bill Wilson, the operations director for the Outdoor Advertising Association, said that he believed that the T-shirts would have a big impact in Britain. "It's going to have a huge impact - if someone is walking around with a moving T-shirt people are going to stop and stare," he said.

Mr Wilson warned, however, that there could be a backlash if the shirts became too intrusive.

"There was a thing called the talking poster. It was amazing how many calls you got from people saying "I can turn off the television, I can turn off the radio, I don't have to look at a poster, but to have it blare out at me does cause me problems"."

Sandra Collins, the new business director for Mindshare, a British media planning agency, said that the shirts were an extremely aggressive form of marketing. "One of the benefits seems to be that you can communicate a much more detailed message," he said.

"It's certainly in your face. It's what we term experience marketing." "In more and more of our campaigns we are asked to literally engage consumers rather than just talk at them. It's stuff where consumers experience the brand personally rather than sit and watch it on television."