Billboards That Know You

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Does it sometimes seem as if the billboards you pass on your daily commute are targeted to appeal to people exactly like you? Well, depending on where you drive, it could be that the billboards are listening in on your car radio as you drive past. Using a specially equipped dish manufactured by Mobiltrak, a Phoenix company, advertisers are now able to detect which radio stations drivers are listening to and then alter the messages on their electronic billboards to match the demographic that clusters around those stations.

There are only a handful of these responsive signs in operation so far. Smart Sign Media, based in Sacramento, is using Mobiltrak technology on five billboards in California. One is near Future Ford, a car-and-truck dealership off I-80 in Roseville, Calif. Using the information collected by the Mobiltrak device, Future Ford knows that on weekdays that stretch of I-80 carries a lot of drivers who listen to country-and-western stations, so that's when the dealership advertises the Ford F-150, a popular pickup truck. Evening drivers, Mobiltrak has found, are more apt to listen to talk radio and adult contemporary, so they see ads for Tauruses and Escorts.
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