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Naming rights: Great public relations and marketing tool

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Why would anyone oppose the MBTA offering naming rights for stations? If the T sells 11 station names, it will earn \$18 million per year. For decades ads have adorned the outside and inside of buses, trains and stations.

On the T, advertisers get repeat views by a "captive" audience: 1.3 million riders per day, 250 days per year.) There's repeat visibility and reinforcement when the name is announced over the loudspeaker: "Next stop: State Street Bank State Street Station."

Selling naming rights will help the T narrow its budget gap, avoid fare increases, and make trips more interesting. (Note: Much of the T's deficit is due to one of the most generous pension plans anywhere, but that's for another column.)

Many financially struggling U.S. cities, transit systems and school districts offer naming rights. A cash-strapped high school near Philadelphia used a tongue-in-cheek naming rights campaign to raise money and awareness. The winner gets to name the school for a set period, a large pizza, a coffee mug, and an invitation to speak at graduation.

One of the first naming rights deals in 1972 enabled sponsorship of Buffalo Bills' stadium. The first sponsored college facility was Syracuse's Carrier Dome in 1979 (Carrier air conditioners). The Milwaukee Convention Center was one of the first public facilities to sign an agreement (Midwest Express Airlines, 1997.)

Loudspeaker voice: "Next stop: 'Always Fresh' Subway's Park Street Station."

Naming rights in sports is old news. At Fenway Park, every time you glance at the Jumbotron, there's John Hancock's signature. Check the pitch speed thanks to Citizen's Bank. The health care service is provided by Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital. Batter's gloves sport the manufacturer's logo. Baltimore will sell ads on fire trucks and naming rights for parks. Philadelphia transit tickets have ads for McDonald's. AT&T Station has turnstiles with AT&T's logo.

KFC once put its logo on manhole covers and fire hydrants in 3 states after paying to fill potholes and replace hydrants. The Littleton, Mass., police department helped pay for new cars with supermarket ads on cruisers. A developer client of mine is offering tenants naming rights on a planned building with signage visible daily to 100,000 drivers.

Loudspeaker voice: "Kenmore Appliances Kenmore."

Speaking of unusual naming rights: The Bronx Zoo once offered a Valentine's gift for those who caught the love bug: a chance to name one of their 50,000 Madagascar cockroaches after loved ones : \$10 each. They sold 1,000 names the first day. In 2009, Citi signed a 20-year, \$400 million naming-rights deal with the NY Mets.

Of course, common sense should prevail when accepting highest bids for ads: JetBlue Airport Station is a good fit. But some ideas won't work: Chicken of the Sea Aquarium Station, or "Next stop: Viagra Wood Island."

Maybe your company should consider some form of naming rights as part of a marketing/PR plan?
An experienced pro can create and implement suitable and affordable promotional opportunities.
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