

The advertising that lasts forever is the advertising nobody sees

An argument for buying an hour, made through the most famous permanent ad ever sold.

The Million Dollar Homepage

In 2005 a student sold a million pixels at a dollar each, promising to keep the page online for at least five years. He was paid, and he kept the promise. By 2017 Harvard's Library Innovation Lab found that a large share of the links on it were dead — domains lapsed, companies gone, pages redirected to parked advertising. The permanent advertisement outlived most of the things it advertised.

That is what permanence buys: a page nobody has a reason to return to, holding links to companies that no longer exist.

What expiry buys instead

Everything anybody actually competes for is temporary. A Super Bowl spot is thirty seconds and costs about \$8 million. A Times Square screen is sold by the day. Nobody buys those because the impression lasts. They buy them because for a defined window there is a fixed amount of attention and they own it.

\$8M

A 30-SECOND SUPER BOWL SPOT

2005

PIXELS SOLD "FOREVER"

1 hr

WHAT WE SELL INSTEAD

Banner blindness is a permanence problem

The Nielsen Norman Group's eyetracking work found people learn to not see the parts of a page that are always advertising. The mechanism is repetition: a thing that is always there stops being information. A board where every hour brings a different brand cannot become furniture, because it is never the same thing twice.

So we sell hours

Your slot expires. That is not a limitation we are apologising for — it is the reason the slot is worth anything. Sixty minutes of a page that changes hourly gets looked at. A permanent banner gets scrolled past for five years and then 404s.

Sources. The Million Dollar Homepage (Wikipedia) · Harvard Library Innovation Lab, "A Million Squandered" (lil.law.harvard.edu) · eMarketer on Super Bowl ad pricing · AdQuick on Times Square costs · Nielsen Norman Group, banner blindness eyetracking.