

## **A wee bit more than a gimmick.**

By Sally Jackson.

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AT last count, about 99 per cent of Australian homes had at least one television, but what happens when eventually you bring yourself to leave that home and turn off that TV? Thankfully, smart minds have been pondering the predicament and soon you will be able to continue watching the tube while sitting on the bus or tram, riding the elevator or catching a live footy game.

A lucky few can already keep tabs on their favourite shows even while taking a whiz. New Melbourne restaurant the Middle Brighton Baths has a wide-screen, Perspex-coated TV built into its men's urinal, usually showing sport. The idea is that if male patrons don't like what they're seeing they can vote with their, err, hand-helds.

Restaurant owner Jonathan Dixon says the idea for what is believed to be the world's first toilet TV came from AFL personality Sam Newman, who at one time was a partner in the restaurant. "People love it. And I don't know whether they get a little bit of a kink out of it, too."

Also in Melbourne, at Colonial Stadium, soon to be renamed the Telstra Dome, 1000 of the blue-ribbon seats at The Medallion Club have had small video-replay monitors attached to the armrests. During a typical AFL game, eight channels offer instant replays, various match statistics, player profiles, horse racing and news. Headphones provide stereo sound without annoying the neighbours.

But TVs in toilets and sports stadiums are little more than gimmicks. Where the electronic wallpapering of the world becomes a serious business - and where it will increasingly permeate all of our lives - is in ordinary places such as buses, trams and elevators.

For the past few weeks, a bus minus passengers and fitted with a screen has been trundling around Sydney in the first-ever trial of Transit TV, the brainchild of Buspak, part of Australian Provincial Newspapers. From October, the firm plans to expand the trial to 50 screens, probably in Sydney.

Buspak boss Steve O'Connor expects that by this time next year up to 700 publicly and privately run buses and trams in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane will be fitted out. Research shows the average commuter spends an hour a day on the bus, and with Transit TV passengers will have no opportunity to change channels or even take a toilet break.

Programming will include cut-down versions of lifestyle shows and static, regularly updated pages of news, sport, weather and financial information, interspersed with 30-second advertisements. APN estimates it will generate \$30 million in revenue over the next four years. Transit TV will be silent, but people can listen to the soundtrack if they want to by tuning any personal FM receiver, such as a Walkman or Discman, into the system's audio signal. They will also be able to buy special headset-tuners.

When the commuters get off the bus and enter their office buildings many are faced with a lift ride - and another TV-viewing opportunity. The typical office worker takes on average six lift trips a day, adding up to more than 80 minutes a

month. And many advertisers find office workers highly desirable people, typically well-educated and well-heeled professionals.

In order to get at this already securely captive audience, **Inlink** Media has, over the past three years, been signing 10-year contracts to install its lift TVs in the high-rises of most of Australia's leading property owners, including Macquarie, BT and ING Office Trusts, General Property Trust, AMP and Mirvac.

The Melbourne-based company installed its first screen, in a lift at 257 Collins St in Melbourne, about 18 months ago. It now has 100 throughout Melbourne and Sydney and is on its way to rolling out 750 altogether in those two cities and Brisbane.

"Once we do that we'll be reaching about 1 million office workers a month," says **Inlink** managing director Oliver Roydhouse.

The TVs are really digital display screens that show specially made - and silent - video content: news, sport, weather, financial information and advertising from companies including Nike, Gillette, Telstra, BMW and business magazine BRW.

It may not be the most scintillating viewing, but its inventors believe it sure beats having to make awkward small-talk for 14 floors with that guy from sales whose name you can almost remember.

Roydhouse says the vast majority of people like the screens. "Basically only 2 per cent found that their experience of the elevator was lessened," he says. And advertisers love it. As Roydhouse points out: "It's hard to think of a more captive environment than getting your audience and sticking them in a metal box."

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