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Square Biz

Consumer's Guide to Times Square

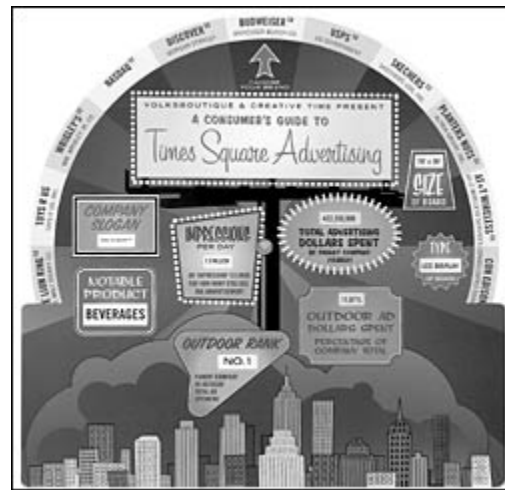
by R.C. Baker

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The rejuvenated, ever more suburban Times Square, filled with chain restaurants and mall stores, attracts 1.5 million rubes every day. Through sensory overload, corporate behemoths hope to make an "impression" on each one.

Working with Creative Time and the Times Square Alliance, artist Christine Hill has designed a retro-style die-cut wheel (available from creativetime.org) that displays various facts about the flashing billboards and gargantuan boob tubes that loom over the pedestrian throngs. For instance, Walt Disney spends over a billion dollars a year on advertising, and its 40-by-40-foot Lion King sign is made out of stretched vinyl. The Consumer's Guide to Times Square Advertising also reveals that NASDAQ's 10,800-square-foot picture screen is the largest LED display in the world and that "an 'impression' is lingo for how many eyes see [a given] advertisement."

On Wednesday, January 19, old-time cigarette girls will hand out the spinning wheels at various locations throughout Times Square in what Hill sees as an "aesthetic echo of the American dream and a mix of 1950s American corporate optimism." But wasn't it back in 1957 that Vance Packard was already warning us about the "hidden persuaders" behind the advertising racket? Half a century later, the corporate theme park at the Crossroads of the World proves that the media manipulators now hide in plain sight.



Christine Hill's *Consumer's Guide*

illustration: Courtesy Creative Time