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Video screens casually encountered, like these at a gym, are seen by more people than prime-time TV, Nielsen says.

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The Incidental Video Screen Is Seen by More Viewers Than Prime Time

By **STEPHANIE CLIFFORD**

A NEW report from the measurement company Nielsen shows that ads on outside-the-house video screens — in places like health clubs, gas stations and elevators — can reach many more people than ads on prime-time television.

The report, called the “Fourth Screen Network Audience Report” (Nielsen is calling it the “fourth screen” after television, the computer and mobile), is expected to be released on Monday. It researched 10 screen networks, from companies like NCM Media Networks and Screenvision, which run ads in movie theaters, to Gas Station TV, which places screens on gas pumps.

“If you took the 10 networks that we measured and put a spot on each of the 10” for a month, “you’d draw more exposures than having a spot on every one of the top 20 programs in prime time” in a given week, said Paul Lindstrom, senior vice president of the Nielsen Company.

The screens are part of a phenomenon of place-based advertising that has gained popularity as consumers move away from traditional media. The networks try to capture people as they are about to buy something, or when they are bored and undistracted — waiting for a movie to start, for instance.

The networks have been pushing Nielsen to create a standard measurement so that they can better sell their ad time to agencies.

“The agencies ask, ‘Why are you better, why should I take some money and not run it on traditional television or somewhere else, and run it with you?’ ” said David Leider, chief executive of Gas Station TV. “If there’s no legitimate measurement behind it, there’s no point for an agency or client to look at it.”

“They were measured all differently by each of the venues, so there was no consistency in

the marketplace and no third-party, independent view of it,” said Terrie Brennan, senior vice president for new business development at Nielsen.

To get the ratings, Nielsen looked at variables like how long people spent in front of the screens, and the proximity to the screen — “so in the health clubs, it’s not going to be everybody who swipes in, it’s going to be people in that cardio room that can see those televisions,” Mr. Lindstrom said.

It then interviewed viewers to get demographic information. The number of people interviewed per screen network was as low as 298, for the bar/restaurant TV network Zoom Media & Marketing’s Social Network, and as high as 26,052 for NCM and Screenvision.

Nielsen found that the screen networks reached a broad audience. For example, ads on Screenvision and NCM’s networks in October had 61.7 million exposures. That compared with an average of three million viewers 18 years and older for a typical prime-time commercial on broadcast TV in the same period. So an advertiser could either buy a monthlong series of ads on the theater networks, or about 20 prime-time commercials, to reach the same audience size.

However, some agencies and networks raised questions about Nielsen’s approach. Jack Sullivan, senior vice president and out-of-home activation director at Starcom USA, part of the Starcom MediaVest Group division of the Publicis Groupe, said he was not certain that Nielsen took into account all the differences in these networks.

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“A doctor’s office is different than a grocery store is different than an airport is different than an elevator,” he said. “So the consumer is different in every one of those categories, and the screens are different sizes.”

“There’s really no common denominator,” he said.

By measuring out-of-home screens with the same tools it uses to measure television, Nielsen lets these networks try to be included among the big broadcast ad purchases.

“More and more, now that we have these results, at least in 2010, we’re starting to get looked at from a broadcast budget,” said Scott Marden, research director for Captivate Network, which runs video screens in elevators. “The budgets, and the dollars, are really in the TV world.”