

## Port Columbus hopes new tech can provide lift to advertising revenue

Premium content from Business First by Adrian Burns, Staff reporter

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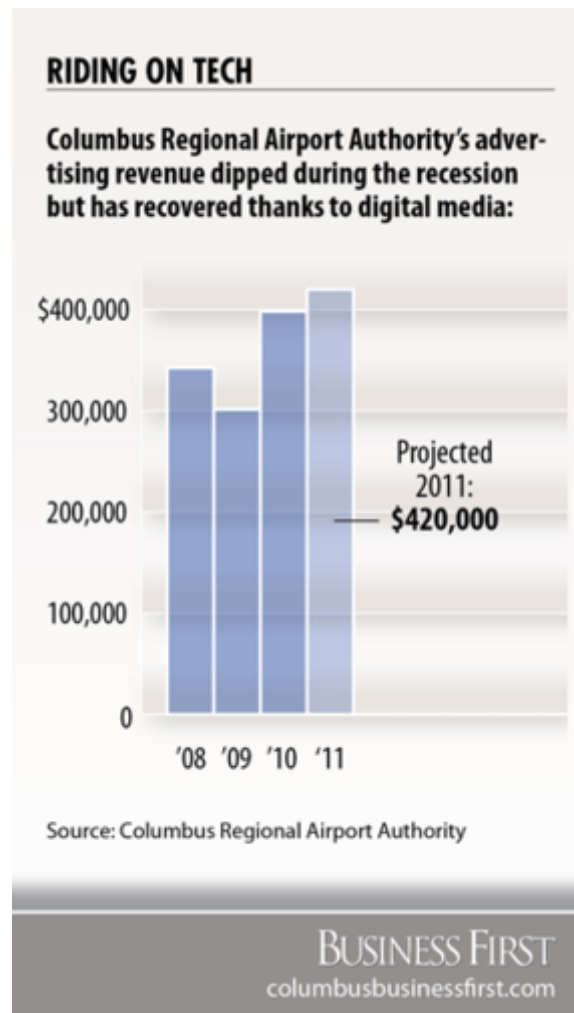
A new digital billboard and high-tech advertising upgrades in the terminal are expected to lift revenue at a Port Columbus International Airport looking to wring cash out of what it can.

A 25- by 10-foot digital billboard along International Gateway will rotate an array of ads and airport messages. The Columbus Regional Airport Authority, which runs Port Columbus, also approved a plan that calls for Clear Channel Airports, which manages Port Columbus' inside advertising, to spend more than \$700,000 to add monitors for advertising while upgrading other outdated media.

Though advertising revenue makes up less than 1 percent of operating revenue for the authority, contributing about \$400,000 last year, the focus on its growth shows how far airport officials are willing to go to boost income amid an economic downturn that has hurt its key revenue streams from passengers and parking.

The billboard alone is expected to bring \$37,000 next year, with other upgrades helping in the future, said authority Concessions Manager David Saleme, who oversees advertising.

“It’s a combination of upgrading and expanding into other areas,” Saleme said. “We want to make sure we’re bringing in the best (technology).”



Clear Channel Airports, a division of Clear Channel Outdoor Inc., is paying for the equipment upgrades. It also pays the airport between 40 percent and 57 percent of ad revenue, depending on the format.

### **Bigger, better**

New revenue from the billboard and other improvements is expected to come quickly. With new places for advertisements and better ad formats, the airport could grow ad revenue up to 10 percent in 2012 and 10 percent in 2013, Saleme said.

Ad messages have filled the Port Columbus terminal for years, but technology is driving recent improvements, he said.

“Clear Channel approached us with the idea,” he said. “While we have good advertising in now, the technology has a lifespan.”

For example, the airport uses scrolling signs that can hold 10 ads or messages, said Jon Abeln, vice president of business development for Clear Channel Airports. Clear Channel plans to replace them with 80-inch monitors, he said.

“With the LCD monitors you can have the same amount of advertising without any cost for graphic production other than graphic design,” he said.

Other upgrades will add new opportunities for advertising, Saleme said. For instance, static courtesy boards in the baggage claim area that feature hotel and transportation information will be replaced with touch-screen monitors that can also display advertising. Other additions are expected to include 70-inch overhead monitors in the concourses and the use of a high-tension fabric to display wall-size ads, Saleme said.

Then there’s the outside digital billboard. Five ads will be featured along with three airport-related messages, he said. So far the airport authority and Clear Channel have secured one-year contracts with Huntington Bancshares Inc., Columbus State Community College and the Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

Abeln would not disclose the cost of the billboard, which is expected to be operating this year. The other advertising upgrades are expected to be completed by the end of 2012.

Airports have taken aggressively to developing advertising since the 1990s, when they began to focus on other ways to make money in addition to charging fees for passenger travel, Abeln said.

“With that came a little bit of innovation when we thought about how to get these community airports to advertise to all of their businesses,” he said.

Advertisers have found airports are effective places to reach company decision-makers, said Jim White, media director with Columbus-based SBC Advertising.

“Obviously, the full spectrum of people filter through airports every year,” he said. “I think that people that do advertise in airports by and large want to reach C-level executives (and) business travelers.”

And airports, such as Port Columbus, are trying to squeeze out all they can from advertising, White said.

“More recently, I’ve looked at advertising placed on luggage belts,” he said. “They’re utilizing about every space they can take advantage of.”