Underground Ads: NFC Does It Again

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Advertisements parade the bustling world we live in. Billboards, magazines, buildings, websites, public transportation, even the oddest places, such as supermarket eggs, Chinese food cartons, and motion sickness bags on airplanes. For example, we've all stood (or sat if you're lucky) on a subway train, where we are engulfed by advertisements "decorating" the steel walls. Most of the ads are ignored by passengers, every so often catching a few eyes. However, advertisers in Tokyo have made a bold move that may just catch a few more.

For the past few weeks, commuters on Tokyo subways along the Ginza and Marunouchi lines have been seeing a mass of interactive smartphone ads. Thanks to a new product called Strappy [1]– created by a Japanese printing company, Shunkosha – advertisers gain access to millions of riders looking for distractions from their long, often crowded commute.

Strappy is a rectangular plastic covering that attaches to the straps hanging from subway car ceilings. Built into the covering is a reader that supports the FeliCA [2]NFC standard — the same contactless system behind Pasmo, Tokyo's rechargeable subway cards. When placing a smartphone over the blue boxes the browser is directed to a URL, where users will find ads, coupons and other

promotions.

The entire system requires a strong underground data connection, as well as a phone compatible with this technology. Fortunately for this system, data connection is no issue, as NTT DoCoMo, Softbank, and KDDI are in the process of installing antennae within Tokyo's subway tunnels. It also helps that more than 70 million people in Japan already have phones compatible.

The trial run will conclude this month and a positive reception could see the technology spreading to other lines in Japan. No word on whether Strappy will make its way to the U.S. anytime soon, but if it does – let's hope it brings some freebies!

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[1] http://www.shunkosha.com/
[2] http://www.felicanetworks.co.jp/en/