Video ads put to test on grocery carts

A console being developed by Microsoft and MediaCart for grocery carts helps shoppers find products in the store, then scan and pay for their items without going through the checkout. (PRNEWSFOTO/MICROSOFT CORP.)

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SEATTLE - Microsoft Corp is bringing digital advertising to the grocery cart.

The software maker spent four years working with Plano, Texas-based MediaCart Holdings Inc. on a grocery cart-mounted console that helps shoppers find products in the store, then scan and pay for their items without waiting in the checkout line. Microsoft’s acquisition of aQuantive, an online advertising company, last year for $6 billion shored up the company’s capacity to serve video ads onto these grocery cart screens.

Starting in the second half of 2008, the companies plan to test MediaCart in Wakefern Food Corp.’s ShopRite supermarkets on the East Coast. Customers with a ShopRite loyalty card will be able to log into a website at home and type in their grocery lists; when they get to the store and swipe their card on the MediaCart console, the list will appear. As shoppers scan their items and place them in their cart, the console gives a running price tally and checks items off the shopping list.

The system also uses radio-frequency identification to sense where the shopper’s cart is in the store. The RFID data can help ShopRite and food makers understand shopping patterns, and the technology can also be used to send certain ads to people at certain points – an ad for 50 cents off Oreos, for example, when a shopper enters the cookie aisle. Microsoft said it is still...
working on how it will present commercials and coupons.

Microsoft is also working with MediaCart and ShopRite to help advertisers reach potential consumers based on past purchases, which are logged when they swipe their loyalty cards.

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