

Free Advertising On A Stick

(NAPSA)—As ad executives log long hours—and spend billions of dollars—devising new ways to convince consumers to buy their clients' products, some companies have discovered the marketing and branding power of a simple foam ball.

"Antenna balls" first appeared on cars in the 1960s, but like mood rings, pet rocks and shag carpeting, they quietly disappeared into the annals of kitsch. In recent years, however, antenna balls have made a comeback as companies, amusement parks, sports teams—even presidential candidates—have discovered their economic and reputation-building benefits.

Like bumper stickers, antenna balls reflect a vehicle owner's personality and tastes. With the vast array of antenna toppers available these days—everything from disco balls to ice cream cones—car owners should have no problem finding one that defines them.

One of the companies responsible for the current antenna topper trend is San Diego-based Jack in the Box restaurants, which started offering antenna balls featuring the likeness of its fictional founder, "Jack," in 1995. The antenna balls have gone on to star in several of the fast-food chain's television commercials and have spawned numerous imitators.

"The antenna ball is an incredible marketing tool for Jack in the Box," said Greg Joumas, division vice president of advertising. "It has proved to be an inexpensive, but effective means of promoting our brand to the public. Our icon, Jack, has a faithful following, and the antenna ball provides fans with a fun token for their cars, while giving the company a mobile



From simple foam balls branded with a corporate logo to costumed revelers like this one from Jack in the Box, motorists can choose from a wide variety of antenna toppers to personalize their vehicles.

billboard that could possibly be seen by thousands of people."

Antenna balls have grown so much in popularity that they have even bounced onto the online auction site eBay, where on any given day hundreds of antenna toppers are available to the highest bidder.

As companies scramble to find new ways to get the most bang for their advertising buck, there's no telling where the antenna topper trend might lead. For now, though, antenna-top advertising is riding high.