



Boat towing billboards sputters into hot water

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An advertising entrepreneur's idea of floating marine billboards on San Diego Bay has sailed into controversy.

Airplanes tow ad banners, so why not have boats tow billboards? Such was the creative plan of Stuart Weintraub of Weintraub Media in Carmel Valley.

So, over Memorial Day weekend, Weintraub hired a boat to pull a pontoon-supported billboard promoting Time Warner Cable.

Sea Tow, the boater's version of a AAA service, towed the 36-foot-long, 14-foot-high, three-section billboard. Reaction, though mixed, was fairly negative, said towboat Capt. Bubba Severance, and he is opting out of the experiment because he doesn't want to anger clientele.

The local marine community newspaper, *The Log*, recently detailed the controversy and opposition.

Weintraub said he and Billboard Boats Inc., the Malibu company that manufactures the "billboats," believe they are providing a community service.

Weintraub recently received a letter from San Diego City Attorney

Michael Aguirre ordering him, as a commercial enterprise, to stop advertising on San Diego Bay without a permit. The San Diego Unified Port District has told him it won't issue a permit at this time and is reviewing the issue.

For now, Weintraub is keeping his billboards dry, but he says he is losing money each day of delay and hopes to resume business soon.

“I'm here to help other businesses get their messages out,” Weintraub said. “But I want to do it in a responsible way.”

He maintains that the billboards, stored at night so they don't pose a navigational hazard, can be valuable purveyors of public service and safety announcements, as well as wholesome advertising.

His venture may have a short life span, however. A spokesperson for the port district said its staff is drafting a proposal to ban floating billboards, which should be ready for board consideration in September or October.

That's the port staff's opinion. What's yours? Is this an idea that should float?

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