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Different Spin for Ads on the Bus

Massachusetts Firm Offers Commercial-Radio Service

By ROBERT TOMSHO

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Reviving the debate over advertising in public education, a Massachusetts start-up is seeking agreements with school districts to broadcast commercial radio programs, complete with ads, on school buses.

BusRadio, of Needham, Mass., said it aims to begin broadcasting to more than 100,000 Massachusetts students in September and to expand nationwide in 2007. The closely held company, which offers school districts a percentage of ad revenue, has signed contracts with districts in Massachusetts, California and Illinois, said Michael Yanoff, chief executive officer. Several districts said they will receive 5% of the revenue generated by the free broadcast service.

"Our goal is to be able to give enough money back to the school systems so that they can enhance their transportation systems," Mr. Yanoff said.

He said his company's custom-designed radio programs, which will be broadcast through bus speakers, are designed to tamp down misbehavior and reduce student exposure to inappropriate on-air programs. Advertising will account for about eight minutes of every hour of BusRadio broadcasting, he added. BusRadio will have different programs tailored for different age groups, with material varying from school-safety announcements to disc jockeys telling jokes and playing hits by the likes of pop singer Avril Lavigne...

Officials at an array of other Massachusetts school districts, large and small, say they are weighing proposals. Sandy Gifford, transportation director for the Barnstable Public Schools in Barnstable, Mass., said the district completed a two-week trial of BusRadio and hopes to have it in all of its buses by fall. "The feedback I got from our drivers was that they loved it," she said.