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MEDIA Matters

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FOX EXPLORES THE AD IMPACT BENEFITS OF ITS "REMOTE-FREE TV" CONCEPT

Although time buyers all too often ignore "qualitative" factors, more and more clients are pressing the TV networks to document the values of unusual presentation formats, especially those that dramatically reduce ad and promotional clutter. Last May Fox introduced "remote-free TV" to upfront buyers, selling the premiere telecasts of new series, such as *Fringe*, with *half* the normal commercial loads, at premium CPMs. The idea is that viewers would probably be more attentive and less likely to zap the ads in such telecasts, but is that true?

Conventional, after-the-fact research exists, by both Nielsen (dial switching) and AIG (ad recall, program content recall, etc.), but Fox decided to sponsor a study exploring the concept *before* the telecast appeared. Innerscope Research was hired to utilize its "biometric" approach for this purpose. One set of respondents was recruited to watch the pilot episode of *Fringe* with the normal (heavy) commercial load, while another group watched the same show with half as many interruptions. Their reactions were calibrated using devices that record heart rate, respiration, skin conductivity, and movements such as leaning forward and rocking back and forth—all indicators of involvement.

The findings revealed that viewers who watched ads in the less cluttered situation were considerably more "engaged" than those who saw them in the normal context. More important, a subset of viewers were "eye tracked" to record how much of the time they focused on the TV screen. As one might expect, the average commercial in a less cluttered break held viewer attention to a greater extent—in this case, 31% better—than one in an extended chain of ads. An unaided commercial recall study conducted with some of the same respondents revealed the payoff. Viewers exposed in the less cluttered environment were 2.5 times more likely to recall brand ads, than those shown the cluttered version.

Obviously, advertisers whose ads appeared in Fox's "remote-free TV" telecasts will require research that reflects real life, at-home viewer response, such as dial switching indicators and/or ad recall/motivation metrics, so they can evaluate the ROI values of such premium priced low clutter buys. The question is whether the higher CPM is justified by improved attentiveness and commercial impact. Hopefully, some sort of balance can be developed between the TV network's need to maintain its ad revenues through higher pricing and the advertiser's quest for improved ad exposure through less clutter, to make this option attractive to both parties. □

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MAGAZINE DIMENSIONS 2009

NIELSEN STIRS UP A RADIO RATINGS BATTLE, BUT IS THIS A STEP FORWARD?

With Arbitron's electronic PPMs showing much lower average quarter-hour audience levels for many stations, a hue and cry has started for a return to the "good old days" of less expensive (to the stations) rating measurements and larger "audience counts." Supported by two major station groups, Nielsen has now stepped into the fray with a new radio measurement service that will reportedly revert to the diary method in 50 markets. Larger samples are part of the equation, combined with a different system of developing a sample frame, recruiting diary-keepers, and the inclusion of some form of product usage data. As we understand it, the first surveys will be conducted next spring and one-a-year reports for each market will be available late in the summer.

Most of these are welcome refinements, but how does one explain the already noted disparities between the PPM and diary findings? The PPMs have revealed that radio audiences sample many more stations than respondents report as "listened to" in their diaries. The PPMs also find that participants spend much less time per station than is indicated in these same diaries. And what happened to the interest in the PPM's greater "sensitivity" over diaries in spotting the response to new radio formats, special event broadcasts, etc., as well as the timelier data they provided?

We acknowledge that both Arbitron and Nielsen are respected companies with long track records in electronic media audience measurement; however, the missing element in Arbitron's original PPM proposal and Nielsen's new diary-based initiative is the core issue of *validity*. Sample composition aside, how confident are we when a person wearing (or carrying) a PPM is counted as "listening" to a station, that this was actually the case? In contrast, how confident are we when a diary-keeper claims to have listened to a radio station at a given point during a day, that this truly occurred? In other words, which is the better *measurement instrument*, the PPM or the diary?

The only way we know to explore the validity question is by taking matched samples of PPM wearers and diary keepers, hold other variables constant, and test the accuracy of the findings. For radio, with its huge out-of-home audience, this is a difficult task indeed; however, the in-home component certainly can be explored via parallel telephone coincidental methods. For example, one phones a PPM "respondent" at a specific time and asks a number of questions to disguise the purpose of the survey. One question, however, is decisive: Were you just listening to radio and if so to what station? The findings can then be compared to what the same respondent's PPM noted. Similar validation tests could be conducted with diary keepers.

RADIO DIMENSIONS 2008

Radio Dimensions 2008 deals with the consumer radio industry, its ability to single out listeners with its unique formatting and to reach them both at home and away-from-home, as well as its overall effectiveness as an ad medium.

This fourth edition examines the most current issues facing this evolving medium, beginning with Arbitron's electronic PPM system. Advertisers and agencies alike will need to revisit the issues of commercial clutter, ratings and more "qualitative" data—ad exposure, ad recall or motivation studies, more ROI-style studies and detailed information about radio listener "engagement" or attentiveness patterns.

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◆Radio Ratings (from page 2)

Once everyone feels confident with the PPM or the diary as a valid measurement instrument, other issues can be addressed, such as cooperation rates, sample size, and sample balancing. But the fundamental question is which is the most accurate way to monitor radio listening, the PPM or the diary?

It will be interesting to see how Nielsen's revival of the radio diary concept unfolds and how the agencies will react. Certainly, the diaries will generate larger listening claims than the PPMs for most stations, but will this be enough to stem the downward flow of ad revenues to the medium? Frankly, we doubt it.

Hopefully Nielsen's entrance into the radio audience arena will stimulate an industry-wide objective review of the two competing methodologies, with the goal of finding the *best* way to measure this medium's audience. And by "best" we mean the most accurate, not merely the plan that provides the largest ratings or the most ancillary data. □

WHERE ARE THE ONLINE RATINGS?

Nielsen, reacting in part to agency concerns about contaminating its existing peplemeter rating panel with the added burden of an Internet audience measurement, has delayed this proposed enhancement until the spring of 2009. Although this move is a setback for the TV networks who were hoping to include Internet exposures for their TV shows as a basic component in their audience delivery "currency," it makes sense since it is vital that Nielsen gets this right.

Nielsen has been experimenting along these lines for a while now, with its so-called "convergence panel," composed of former peplemeter homes that agree to have their TV and Internet usage measured. This findings, however, are not considered projectable, due to questions about how representative the cooperating households are.

Nielsen apparently plans to roll out its new Internet measurements starting with a few hundred homes and then expanding until (we presume) all of the Internet-connected homes in its peplemeter panel are invited to participate. This is all well and good, but Nielsen needs to satisfy agency fears that the introduction of such measurements might disrupt the basic TV audience ratings by causing panelists to drop out of the sample, due to "privacy concerns." More important is the question of audience projections for the Internet portion of the panel. Here are some of the points that should be raised:

1. What percent of the peplemeter panel's Internet-connected homes agree to cooperate with the added Internet measurement?
2. If the proportion of those cooperating is low, how do we know that they are not atypical, perhaps including more heavy Internet users than is the case for a truly representative sample? In this event, won't the resulting Internet ratings be artificially inflated?
3. How will Nielsen identify who in the home is "viewing" the shows online? Are such ID's reliable?
4. What about out-of-home Internet viewing?
5. Do we know that online viewers are as attentive to program/commercial content as "regular" TV viewers? (This final point may be more of a network rather than a Nielsen issue.)

Hopefully the agencies will demand answers to such questions, as is their right, before another overlay of "audience" data is added to the current currency mix. □