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Healthcare	Technology	Media	Consumer	Public Affairs	Financial	Crisis Comms			

You are here: US > Search > [Channeling the right tools to reach your target](#)

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[Back to Results](#)
[RSS](#)

Channeling the right tools to reach your target

Craig McGuire - 7 Nov 2005 00:00

Many services can tell you what stations and shows people tune into. [Craig McGuire](#) discovers how to best use the tools to ensure your message doesn't fall on deaf ears

Anchoring your radio or broadcast campaign placement strategy on quality audience information is critical to ensure you get the most for your efforts. However, navigating the arcane world of audience research and digging through the data that is often indecipherable, if not downright misleading, can be a sticky proposition.

"Unfortunately, many in PR lack an understanding of how audience research works," says Doug Simon, president of DS Simon Productions. "This inevitably results in people making bad, costly decisions."

The more you know about the services and strategies available, the more effective your campaign will be.

It starts with subscription services. Without independent, third-party measurement services and tools, the radio and TV marketplace could not function effectively. Clients of these services use the audience research information to buy and sell TV time, as well as to make program decisions.

For radio, the major service is Arbitron, which measures network and local-market radio audiences across the US, surveys the retail, media and product patterns of local-market consumers, and provides application software used for analyzing media audiences.

As for TV, Nielsen Media Research provides audience estimates for broadcast and cable networks, television stations, national syndicators, regional cable TV systems, satellite providers, advertisers, and advertising agencies.

Nielsen People Meters are placed in a sample of 5,100 randomly selected US households to measure two things - what program or channel is being watched and who is viewing.

Meanwhile, Simon urges PR pros to consider enhancing their campaigns by using services such as the Television Bureau of Advertisement, a nonprofit trade association that provides a wide range of analyses.

"For example, we worked on a story about a scholarship program for people who wanted to go to historically African-American colleges, which was clearly of interest to African-American audiences," Simon says.

"By using these services, you see that while Norfolk, VA, is the 41st largest media market in the country, it is the 14th largest for African Americans," he continues. "Likewise, Jackson,

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MS, is the 91st largest media market, but ranks 24th for African Americans."

Once you compile your data, integrating it is the next step. Depending on what you might be looking for, you may have to do more investigative work through syndicated research, using companies like MRI or Simmons, says Gary Kagawa, EVP, director of media relationships, RTC Relationship Marketing, a Young & Rubicam Brands affiliate.

"This will help you gain more insight about the audience, such as lifestyle, media habits, and psychographics," he says.

Once you're in the game, you need to know the lingo. For example, do you know the difference between "Cume" and an "AQH Rating?"

Cume reflects the percentage of the population that listened to a program at least once during the week for any given day part. In contrast, AQH will show the percentage of the population that is listening during any average quarter hour for the selected day.

"AQH is more likely to be accurate as both the sample and time period [per quarter hour] analyzed is more targeted, whereas Cume offers less-specified numbers over longer periods of time [per week, month, etc.]," says Bill Cullo, MD of IQ Research and Consulting at Qorvis Communications.

"As such, AQH could be seen as more qualitative analysis or measurement, while Cume is more quantitative."

"Of course, there will always be some level of confusion in terminology," Kagawa admits. "It's important to leverage the knowledge of your appropriate buying team from your media agency. They will help define what the right elements are for analysis based on your particular goals."

You might ask how all this data can be integrated into a campaign. Peter Koeppel, president of Koeppel Direct, a direct response television media buying, marketing, and campaign management consultancy, provides some guidelines.

For a typical campaign, Koeppel says he will use MRI research to determine what networks or shows people in a certain demographic group watch with the most frequency that have purchased a product in a specific category.

"We also might pull a competitive media report that allows us to look at what networks or shows competitors are airing with the highest frequency," he says. "We then use our knowledge and database of what networks or shows perform best for certain products targeting specific audiences."

Koeppel will then look at Nielsen to assess the CPMs (cost per thousand viewers reached) and impressions for each network or station in the schedule and adjust the plan based on these measurements.

"This approach allows us to select networks and shows that have a high probability of performing," adds Koeppel. "Our software is linked into a satellite tracking system that also allows us to determine - in real time - how each network or station, day part, and spot performs."

While the ratings systems are widely used and fairly accurate for identifying who the audience is at particular moments in time (or the awareness level during a certain space in time), they don't offer comprehensive evaluation of audience perceptions and the direct effect of a message, interview, or ad, Cullo says.

"Translating the impact and effectiveness of your airing requires more thorough research and evaluation, including a before and an after test, and traditionally ending with the final measurement of sales or participation for overall effectiveness," Cullo says. "These final numbers, however, cannot always be directly attributed to one particular airing, nor are they always relevant. They also take weeks, sometimes months, to retrieve."

He adds that the internet now makes it possible to test immediate emotions, reactions, and perceptions invoked while watching or listening, offering the capability to more closely evaluate the effectiveness of every airing, interview, or placement throughout a campaign.

Technique tips

Do decide what core demographics you are targeting before you start your research

Do learn the lingo and understand the technical jargon and acronyms

Do follow up to measure and report on results after the placement airs

Don't accept audience statistics at face value, but understand exactly what is being measured

Don't rely on a single source of information. Gather data from multiple sources

Don't select a top-10 market if you can get comparable exposure in a smaller market with a high concentration of your target demographic

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