

## 10.4 How are we doing? A publisher's viewpoint

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Dick Desbrow who used to chair the Technical sub-Committee of our National Readership Survey — and now sadly departed this mortal coil — was wont to say, “until I hear myself speak, I don't know what I think”.

You might think that having had the unique opportunity of reading all the papers in advance of the meeting, I should be in a better position than most to organise my thoughts and reactions. The fact is that I am suffering from acute indigestion. I have many notes here — and I shall try to present them in some logical sequence.

First, let me say, along with the two previous speakers, that I speak as a publisher and not for publishers. It is no more possible for me to speak for all publishers than it has been for our US colleagues. I can say one thing, however. I do not think that the proposal from our Dutch friends, Joop van Vliet and Costa Tchaoussoglou, to delimit audience surveys to ‘hard-core’ readership, has much mileage among publishers! More of this later.

The impending growth of the electronic medium has given rise to a widely-held view that the consequent fragmentation of audiences will be to their disadvantage and to the benefit of print media. I have to say that I do not share this optimistic view. It seems to me that the fragmentation may well give access to smaller, more selective audiences that will encroach on the territory of magazines, and that the growth of electronic media in themselves may hit the purchase and readership of the newspapers and magazines. It behoves us therefore as a medium to get our act together, and that means positioning our research activities in the optimal promotional context.

Two recurring thoughts, in this connection, buzz in my head. Firstly, it is commonplace these days for groups of magazine publishers to assemble to discuss ways of promoting magazines. These discussions usually take the form of concentrating on how we can steal money that is going into television. But, we do not do nearly enough to reinforce our existing clients in the rightness of their decisions — let alone trying to persuade advertisers to move money from TV to the press media. This, it seems to me, is self-evident from the manner in which we allow advertisers to fill many of the spaces in our magazines and newspapers.

Secondly, I was much moved by Brian Allt's analysis of the three types of objective that need to be

accommodated and met in the planning of readership research studies. You may recall that he drew distinction between ‘decision-aiding’ objectives, objectives in modelling consumer-behaviour, and survey-design objectives. We need to concentrate our minds more closely on reader-behaviour models — in other words, on how readers use magazine advertisements, and what is it that magazines have to offer advertisers that other media cannot provide.

In my view, advertised products can be sharply divided between those for which consumers seek information, and those in which consumers have little or no interest. Television — as I said in the previous session — is an effective medium for the latter task because of its intrusive mode of contact, and because of its ability to deliver repetition. It is the best billboard medium yet invented. That is not to say that the press medium cannot do the same advertising job (as indeed it did before we had television, and as indeed it still can in special circumstances), but it is not what the press medium is really good at doing. The press medium has enormous power in offering readers the exercise of their own selective perception. Have you ever tried to find a news report for a client, which you read in the morning newspaper — only to be amazed at how obscurely it was signalled, and yet it got to you! Furthermore, the press medium has great capacity to effect large amounts of information-transfer in one dosage — greater than any other medium.

I cannot believe that these effects are not correlated with the number of occasions that the reader has an opportunity to be exposed to a particular advertisement. And yet the computer runs equate one reader with one opportunity-to-see. It upsets me greatly that the computer has led to an under-selling of the press media — newspapers as well as magazines. I know the bureaux will say that their models offer the opportunity to build in media weights to meet this criticism, but our experience is that it rarely happens.

So, one of my prime requirements, as a publisher, is for more information on page-openings and multiple page-openings within the single issue. And I want to see this for all titles in the National Readership Survey, and I want it freely available. The MPX study from the Magazine Publishers Association in the US is a step in the right direction, and I should very much like to see this extended to a wide range of individual titles.

# 10.4

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In the same way, I should like to see the National Readership Surveys provide a great number of qualitative measures of the titles covered. I do not wish to wait until these measures are 'connoted' (to use Colin McDonald's vocabulary) for their advertising value. I want as many as appear to be possibly relevant. My advertisement sales colleagues will judge how they can sell with them. The provision of more qualitative measures is important in my mind for two reasons.

First because they are needed to qualify total audience. It seems to me that the only fair and logical way to measure total audience for a large range of titles is to go for the optimum in terms of potential for advertising exposure. As Dick Lysaker said, we should not reject this objective unless we are convinced that it cannot be made to work technically. 'An exposure is an exposure is an exposure', and if there is opportunity for exposure we should seek to measure it. In my book it is then up to the survey or the individual publisher to qualify these total measures in what ever way is appropriate to the advertising objective for the campaign.

The second reason why, as a publisher, I am interested in tons of qualitative measures is because I think it is in all our interests to raise the level of sophistication in the selling and buying of advertising space. I wonder if some of you ever stop to think how arid is the world of target markets, cost-rankings and schedule-builds for the media representative; it is not exactly one of continuing refreshment. I am very envious of the range of qualitative measures mentioned by Timothy Joyce in his paper and provided by MRI. Who knows — if we can raise the intellectual level with more sophisticated data, we may be able to attract a better calibre of salesmanship.

Apart from data on multiple-page openings and more qualitative measures, I should also like to have more behavioural data about information-seeking consumers, and particularly moving target audiences. There are two points about moving target markets — not only are they moving (ie. they are not the same people) but they are often not the same type of people. This can happen because of economic circumstances, but also because of market growth. The profile of VCR buyers in Britain at the moment is very different to that of buyers 18 months ago.

The behaviour of readers in an information-seeking mode is another reason why I believe that total audience measures should be defined in the widest possible terms for potential ad exposure. We all know that when we are in the market, say, for a new motor-car, ads for cars seem

to be everywhere, and it does not matter at all which publication we find them in, and we shall probably find them in any publication that we happen to pick up on a casual basis.

Now let me make a point, which you may find curious in the light of this week's programme. As a publisher, I must confess that I am more interested in having the measures I have outlined above than I am in the pursuit of refining total audience measures against a yardstick of external validity — which in any case appears to be stunningly elusive.

That is not to say that I am uninterested. I believe we should continue to worry at this problem, and explore every attempt at every type and aspect of validation set out in Donald Monk's useful and excellent paper. We must build our confidence in the levels we find. We must continue to try to nail memory-decay, telescoping, confusion and replication to the wall. It takes time, but the stimulus of New Orleans has been evident in this meeting. The 'yesterday first-time reading' approach from Steve Douglas *et al* is encouraging — as is the launch of the Media-Scanner in the Netherlands. I look forward to hearing more from them and others. In connection with internal validity, I should also like to mention the contributions of Steve Douglas and Wally Langschmidt for their models on how readership generates from circulation. These are a start, and perhaps will stimulate further work. I am personally not so sanguine about the potential for diary panels because of the problems of representativeness, and the validity of diary-keeping, but it may be that panels can be employed with effect for some of the ancillary measures I spoke of at the beginning of this talk — as we saw from Dieter Müller in New Orleans.

One or two further points about the basic total audience measures.

Just because some readership levels are judged to be wrong, we should beware of dismissing them all. As Bob Schreiber said, do not let us throw the baby away with the bathwater.

I would also totally endorse Dick Lysaker's aphorism that untested changes should be outlawed. I would expand on that and say that even if individual elements have been pre-tested, the whole package with its possible internal interactions should not go main-stream until the package has been tested. Too many of us have sinned in that direction in the past.

In conclusion, let me emphasise that these are the views of one publisher. Others may share them or some of them, and others may not. They will now have the opportunity to say, if they wish.