DISCUSSION 10: ELECTRONIC MEASUREMENT OF MAGAZINE AUDIENCES

Alain Tessier (USA) asked Steve Douglas if he could say anything about the economic dimensions of his system – for example, sample sizes, cost of watches, overall cost.

Steve Douglas (USA) said that the system was still in a very early phase, being currently pushed out in terms of the needs of print, which was more interested than were the broadcast media. The cost of the watch was being looked at and refined in response to queries from several countries, while the cost of chips had declined. But the system now being looked at he would be surprised to see in test before 18 to 24 months, and that would be an operational test. They were looking at a system that was still a long way off.

Guy Consterdine (UK) raised with Bill McKenna the question of the representativeness of the sample prepared to co-operate on the panel, who were more likely to be the younger and the techno-keen. This might not be a problem with a relatively unselective medium such as television, but he felt it could be a more severe problem for a medium whose audiences were highly selective, as was the case with many types of print media – especially certain kinds of magazines. It was likely to be a problem in the short term where those electronic systems were new and exciting, exciting certain sorts of people but not others. Perhaps it would fade away a little as a problem in the longer term, but he wondered about even that.

Bill McKenna (USA) agreed with his concern, which he shared, and which had been taken account of in the Chicago design. In their initial recruiting they were going to control by age, sex, family size and ethnicity, so that they could represent the proportions they expected to have differential response rates. He had learned something about that from his experience with peoplemeter systems, where the same problem was found. But this was a little different, because with full family participation

there tended to be more enthusiasm up front. The technology itself had a level of intimidation, which had to be expected, and as they had already seen, would seem to be a disincentive – particularly among the older generation, or people of low income. So that had to be worked on, and they were setting up quotas: they hoped to learn more as they went along.

Ramesh Thadani (India) said that Bill McKenna had talked about both gathering behavioural data and conducting ad hoc surveys through the Viewtel system, and asked to what extent he felt that doing this would bias the panel members.

Bill McKenna (USA) said that most syndicated researchers would query the point of using ad hoc at all, instead of just using the syndicated measures. The answer was very clear: they could get the funding to set up 15,000 households by simply tapping in to ad hoc budgets, without having to displace Simmons or MRI or Nielsen or anybody else. What they had to give up was syndication, but that was not much to give up if they could sell exclusives to one heavy duty detergent manufacturer, one airline, one television network, or all the magazine database exclusively to one publisher. With reference to the question about the biasing effect, those sponsors would become the policemen of their own category, in terms of how they used the system. Suppose they had, in Chicago, for example, 1,000 households, and assume (just for argument's sake) that they could get a 75% response over 48 hours to a survey they had downloaded. Very few people were going to use 1,000 interviews for ad hoc research, and what most of their potential clients had said was that they would set up four or five replicates within that 1,000 and rotate those over time for ad hoc surveys. Generally speaking, when they did that sort of survey research the net respondent sample, the people who showed the behaviour that they wanted to ask about, was generally in tab at a level of around 125-200 respondents. That could be got from

the panel without necessarily contaminating it by asking the same question more than once, and there would still be four or five different replicates to work with. And a national rate of 15,000 would give them even more flexibility.

Bruce Goerlich (USA) asked whether the Chicago sample could be split into control and test calls: if not, what good would it do a marketer to ask the ad hoc questions?

Bill McKenna (USA) replied that ad hoc did not relate to cause and effect, as in a laboratory: it was primarily a planning tool, with the media data disassociated to some extent from the ad hoc data. That was because an advertiser who launched a product or watched a competitor launch a product, either nationally or in Chicago, was simply going to say 'I want to talk to users of this type of product – how many do you have on the panel?' and when told from the computer that there were 200, from whom 140 responses might be expected, would instruct them to go ahead. He would download the questionnaire to them, they would download the parameters into the machine overnight, and he would get the answers to his question – basically, a piece of free-standing ad hoc research. The single source data he was going to use were over in another compartment, and hopefully the two would not contaminate each other.

Jochen Hansen (West Germany) asked, first, what were the response rates from Toronto and Chicago? His second question was who normally responded – one person in particular, everybody in the household, or one person in respect of everybody? And his third question was whether, since a lot of topics were involved, these produced different response rates?

Bill McKenna (USA) replied that they had not yet got the data which could be analysed to answer the third question, but it was certainly going to be necessary to deal with differential in-tabs in terms of non-respondents for particular protocols. He expected the problem, and anticipated it from a software point of view. Regarding the response rates in different demographic segments, what they had seen in the Toronto pilot was that they should expect the same sorts of biases that were a problem in the peoplemeter systems, where there was a down-scale tendency. The technology had its own psychic rewards: it was easier to recruit singles and young people, and more difficult to recruit poorer families or larger families, retirees or whatever. He had been shocked after working with diaries and plain tuning meter systems, where older people would be over-recruited, to find that, as soon as they switched to peoplemeters, all of a sudden the young people wanted to use it and the older people did not. After a lot of research they had found that the older people had been intimidated: once trained, over a period of time, they became the most faithful performers, but initially they were difficult to recruit. In Toronto they had ended up with response rates in the mid-30s, which was not what they wanted: they wanted to get as high as 50%, so as to be competitive with the television metering systems. They were definitely going to have to control by family size and age.

Steve Douglas (USA) commented that this was one of the problems that the design of the meter system had to try to get round. There was going to be more variability in television information because the response rate there was not as good as it should be, and with increased fractionalisation there were going to be a lot of TV numbers wandering about all over the place from period to period, in the United States in particular. He thought that that, again, stressed the need for the goal of a single system.

Wally Langschmidt (South Africa), deducing from the details of Steve Douglas's patent specification that the transmission of the publication was via the release of pressure, asked whether people who folded over the magazine

would not release the pressure. Further, he asked how it would be possible to record the reading of visitors to a household who did not possess a watch but read a copy of that household's magazine, and how recording would take place in public places.

Steve Douglas (USA) said that the contact switch was still in test: the terrible problems of folding, and of other kinds of human behaviour, would have to be systematically tested and reported on. He reminded the Symposium how long were the time-spans involved in such systems as Teleskopie and peoplemeters: they were going to have to face the same sorts of difficulties, and if the going got tough there might even be Star Wars. The way technology was going, he thought that the mechanical issues could be dealt with, but this was not absolutely certain, and he was not going to try to oversell. The issue of the visitor to the household was going to be a tough one: they were going to have to work on it, but had not got very far on that phase of the design. But out-of-home reading was very simple, because every magazine would have a chip in it – which was why the cost of the chips had to go down. What was also important was that it would be possible to get out-of-home television viewing and radio listening, which were becoming very important. In the United States television receivers, as they would be measuring in the public place magazine audit, were starting to appear in doctors' offices, tyre repair shops, and any place where there was waiting time and it was an irritant for customers to have to wait. He therefore thought that out-of-home measurement was going to become increasingly important, which was another thing having a tendency to be a problem for the in-home system. He wondered if Bill McKenna would want to comment on that.

Bill McKenna (USA) commented that, since they were not metering the TV sets in the home, it had become very convenient for them to collect both in-home and out-of-home viewing for primary family members. So, for both radio

and television, they were capturing numbers which differed from the in-home numbers provided by the peoplemeter systems, and validation would of course be able to factor that in. Another point was that before Viewtel became national – and he thought that was at least a year and a half to two years away – even with a module as small as 5,000 they would probably have from five to ten customed applications running for a particular customer. That could become very useful if the application was not as broad as that described in his paper. That was particularly so if it was a low-incidence sample or a particular data collection need: that type of technology made it possible totally to avoid the coding and editing problems that were characteristic of pen and pencil panels.

Jean Haukatsalo (Finland) said that Bill McKenna had mentioned the enormous database for scanning, or the bar-code databases. He needed these not only for himself, but also in each panel home, because he was prompting for purchases, brands and sizes. He wondered how this was going to be handled, and updated daily. He would also be very interested to hear how much time was spent in asking people questions, and how this would affect television viewing through the same TV set.

Bill McKenna (USA) said they would not want to install and train families which did not anticipate being in the same household location for six months, and no limit was put on their participation, even though they expected to rotate everybody out by the end of two years: he thought the average life of the panel could be somewhere around a year, or maybe a little longer. He had not had the chance to talk about the screens, or about how many magazine titles there were, or how many product categories. On the master menu there were going to be 75 product categories, all heavily advertised ones, as there were in the Chicago purchase panel. These were not milk, butter and eggs – they were items for which they had potential buyers in terms of the database. In effect what they

were looking at was transaction activity at the household level, but even for a household of say three or four persons that was probably going to involve only five, or at the maximum six, entries per week.

The database was easy to organise: they simply listed the master menu, and listed the categories and the databases one to one with their code file, and it came right out. It was far simpler to do it, having managed and established the scanner database, because they were not relying on the retailer who assigned a code at whim. They assigned the codes, and therefore knew what they were; they knew the translation, and even for a client who was going to end up having access to the database (which he expected several of them would) they would provide a translation file as well as the raw data. On print, they were collecting 110 titles: he did not know if they could collect more – they had really not attempted that – but those 110 seemed to be the ones of interest to their particular customer base.

Marian Confer (USA) commented, in respect of Wally Langschmidt's question about pass-along readers, that if there was a random or representative sample wearing the watch, would not pass-along readership be picked up? So far as concerned the question of folding over, while the chip shown by Steve Douglas was almost the size of a subscription insert card, there had in the last few weeks been an ink developed that would activate a chip and which could be printed right on the pages. That would prevent people tearing it out, and would certainly eliminate the folding-over problem. It could also conceivably be printed on every single page, so that readership could be picked up by page or by ad. Finally, Steve Douglas had said that the watch would probably take two years for development. Was that right?

Steve Douglas (USA) said that the technology was currently moving very fast. The watch could be here in six months, but it might be two years. But the development was at a very fragile stage, and the worst thing to do was to make overclaims for it. There were a lot of basic issues, and they had not even done operational tests. He was not being facetious in saying that this was a Star Wars type of project: it was like putting the Shuttle together: something wrong with the O-ring – a little piece of rubber on the side – and the whole thing blew up. It was not quite as bad as that, but on some of the other technical and electronic devices it was going to be very important. In the survey areas they were going to have problems similar to those met by Bill McKenna, or anybody else, in terms of recruitment, though these were straightforward and much more was known about them. But with the technical problems of design and manufacture he would bet that they would be going through several generations. How many versions of the ScanAmerica meter had Bill McKenna gone through?

Bill McKenna (USA) said that the patent for ScanAmerica had been filed in 1982 or 1983: it got into its first test market in 1986, and it had just been announced that it would roll out of Denver, Colorado, in June 1989, and would not be national until 1992. That was ten years, from start to finish, for something they had thought was pretty well thought out in 1982.

Rolf Speetzen (West Germany) wondered what that magic chip was made of. Had consideration been given to the environmental problems that would arise in disposing of millions of copies of magazines with chips in?

Steve Douglas (USA), after observing that the state of New Jersey was about to outlaw McDonalds' wrappers, felt that there could be environmental problems with the chip if plastics and some other components were put out of reach.

Bryan Bates (UK), in closing the session, remarked that in England they already had trouble in wrapping up takeaway fish and chips, let alone electronic chips.