

INCREASING RECOVERY RATES IN A QUALITATIVE SERVICE

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Summary

Scarborough Research, is a jointly owned company of both The Arbitron Company and VNU. Scarborough is a local market syndicated study that measures retail behavior, media usage, demographics, and lifestyle data. This information is collected in 60 DMA's across the United States from persons that are 18 years of age and older. It represents approximately 73 percent of the U.S. population within that age group. Scarborough collects local media and consumer behavior data from a single respondent in a multi-phase process. The first phase is a telephone interview from a random respondent within the household. Upon completion of the telephone interview, a respondent is mailed a consumer behavior booklet that averages approximately 28 pages, and a one week personal television diary.

In 1995/96 Scarborough was faced with a number of methodological issues that needed to be addressed. These included changes in sampling procedures, moving to year round measurement in every market (as opposed to measuring four months out of the year), modifications to premiums, respondent burden, and the internal challenge of an organization going through an accreditation process with the Electronic Media Ratings Council.

In order to meet these challenges, Scarborough tested a number of methodological changes as well as incorporating a number of procedural changes that had previously been adopted in the media research community. The focus was clearly on improving the representativeness, proportionality, and recovery rates of the study.

Introduction

Scarborough began 25 years ago as a local market newspaper ratings study. Today, Scarborough has a diverse client base that includes radio, television, cable, advertisers, and agencies. This diversity is somewhat unique in the world of local market multi-media within the United States. The radio and television side have become the largest in terms of revenue for the business. Even with a two phase approach to collecting the information, the task that the respondent is asked to participate in is formidable. This two phase approach utilizes an ascription procedure to account for those persons that complete the first phase (telephone portion of the study), but do not participate in the mailed phase of the study. This creates an even greater incentive to increase recovery for the booklet portion of the study.

After a substantial number of meetings in 1994 which included staff from Scarborough Research, members of The Arbitron Company Research Department, and included consulting from Dr. Donald Dillman, Scarborough ran a number of small scale tests in 1995 to determine the appropriate approach to take when making the change in procedures in 1996. These tests were designed to determine appropriate incentives, test out necessary changes in production procedures and software design, and to gear up an interviewing facility for the task of a year round data collection process.

A number of sample administration changes were also made beginning in 1996.

Sample Administration

Random Samples across the Designated Marketing Area (DMA)

Utilize more proportional sampling frame

More rigorous call back procedures

Call through all the replicates until completion

Special ethnic procedures for African-American and Hispanics

Changes were first made to the sampling frame of the Scarborough study. Scarborough changed to a procedure which selected numbers proportionally among listed and unlisted telephone numbers. The past procedure had been somewhat more biased towards the selection of listed telephone numbers. The known demographic differences between listed and unlisted households as well as other characteristics of listed households, and the traditionally higher recovery from these types of households, meant that Scarborough was starting out with new procedures from which one would expect a more representative sample, but an even lower recovery than those that existed with prior procedures.

A second procedural change was to provide for a more rigorous callback approach. Scarborough increased the number of attempts it was making each originally designated piece of sample from 10 to 12 attempts. The calling sequence is now eight attempts to determine whether there is a warm body at the other end of the line, with four additional attempts made to the household, for a total of twelve attempts. Calling procedures were also enhanced to provide for more rotations and a third attempt to convert a refusal was implemented.

Calling procedures for replicates were also modified. Beginning with 1996, replicates that were opened now were required to be called through until all standard procedures had been applied against the replicate. This meant that even if the sample target was achieved for a weighting area, that calling continued for the opened replicate. Therefore, to the extent the previous procedure allowed for easier to reach respondents or demographics to be part of the final in-tab, current procedures should yield a more representative sample.

A final sample administration change, was the introduction of High Density Areas for African-American and Hispanic geographies. These areas are zip codes based sampling units that carry their own target in-tab, separate from the balance of the county. All respondents, regardless of race or ethnicity within these geography's, are eligible respondents. The rationale for these areas, are to provide for a more racially and ethnically representative sample, resulting in less sample balancing and therefore less variance around the final results. Scarborough systematically rolled out High Density Race/Ethnic Areas in 1996. For High Density Black Areas (HDBA's), the sample areas are comprised of zip codes that are 35 percent or more African-American. For High Density Hispanic Areas (HDHA's) they are comprised of zip codes that are 25% or more Hispanic. This type of procedures has been utilized by Arbitron for over 15 years and has proved to be very successful and helping to provide for more proportional in-tab representation.

Changes were also made to the process of contacts to the household. Beginning in 1996, Scarborough moved to a five step process. This included the initial telephone interview and placement call, followed by the mailing of a thank you letter to the respondent. This mailing was new in 1996 and followed the initial telephone interview by 2-3 days. Within a week of the telephone call, a product booklet and separate TV diary is mailed to the respondent. The separation of the booklet and the TV diary was made for 1996. This allowed a respondent to complete the booklet and mail it back, without having to wait for the completion of the 7-day diary. Along with these items was the cash incentive that will be discussed in a moment. Within a week of receiving the booklet is a telephone reminder, followed shortly thereafter by a reminder postcard. The end result is a five step process. The use of both a telephone reminder and postcard also followed previous Arbitron practices of using multiple modes of attempting to reach a respondent within a relatively small window of time.

RESPONDENT CONTACTS

AN EXPANDED FIVE-STEP PROCESS

- 1. TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**
- 2. MAIL "THANK YOU" LETTER**
- 3. MAIL CONSUMER BOOKLET AND TV DIARY**
- 4. REMINDER TELEPHONE CALL**
- 5. REMINDER POSTCARD**

The incentives used to elicit a return of the consumer booklet and TV diary was also changed for 1996. In the past, Scarborough utilized a \$1 incentive that was mailed with the booklet in most markets. A number of months later, a second mailing was made to those respondents that did not return a booklet with a promise of \$5 upon completion. The change to incentives was to utilize a higher incentive with the mailing of the booklet based on historic market recovery. Additionally, the second mailing was eliminated (in some measure to pay for the implementation of higher premiums). A second feature added, was the introduction of Differential Survey Treatment (DST), which had historically been used on the TV/Radio side of the business with Arbitron and Nielsen, but had not been utilized until much more recently in the print/multimedia side of the business. The initial implementation of DST was focused on race/ethnicity and historical market recovery.

INCENTIVES

BASIC MARKETS

- \$5 African-Americans and Hispanics
- \$2 All Others

LOW RECOVERY MARKETS

- \$7 African-Americans and Hispanics
- \$5 All Others

SPECIAL MARKETS

- \$10 All Respondents

Findings

Not all of the changes in methodology had been tested on the Scarborough product, but different features had been utilized in media research for a number of years and had proved to be successful. The question for Scarborough, is what were the results on sample representation and on the phase II booklet recovery.

Let us start with the telephone proportionality. Across all markets, telephone proportionality among African-Americans increased from 79% in 1995 to 90% in 1996. 1996 was the first year that this procedure was utilized for African-Americans. A smaller increase was recorded for Hispanics. Part of the reason for this, was in selected markets, this procedure had already been incorporated in prior years.

RACE/ETHNICITY TELEPHONE PROPORTIONALITY

	1995	1996
AFRICAN-AMERICAN	79%	90% +11 PTS
HISPANIC	92%	94% +2 PTS

Additionally, telephone cooperation rates remained stable between the two years. This was somewhat of a surprising result, given the additional calls required to reach targets that were set for race/ethnic sampling areas, and the additional calls to hard to reach respondents as a result of calling through the replicates and increasing the number of attempts to the household/respondent.

TELEPHONE COOPERATION

1995	1996	
48%	48%	-0-

As for consumer booklet recovery, the new procedures resulted in an overall increase of five percentage points. In 1995, booklet recovery was 41% and in 1996, the average was 46%. This increase of 5 percentage points is a large increase, especially in the context of declining overall recovery rates in survey research.

BOOKLET RECOVERY

1995	1996	
41%	46%	+5 PTS (12%)

The following chart includes a market by market rundown as to the changes among 1995 and 1996. The direction was predominantly up, market to market. In all, seven markets went down, with the biggest decrease being 7 percentage points for Los Angeles. However, Los Angeles had previously received a special premium that was removed from the market before the 1996 study. Beginning with 1997, the previous \$10 premium for Los Angeles was restored. The remaining markets all experienced an increase ranging up to 10 percentage points.

BOOKLET RECOVERY RATE CHANGE**1996/1995**

Albany	4.5	Fresno	8.6	New York	3.0
Albuquerque	.9	Grand Rapids	3.8	Norfolk	1.2
Atlanta	9.1	Greensboro	1.5	Okla City	0.5
Austin	New 1996	Greenville	1.3	Orlando	2.4
Baltimore	7.6	Harrisburg	(1.8)	Philadelphia	6.8
Birmingham	10.1	Hartford	3.6	Phoenix	(1.9)
Boston	6.0	Houston	8.0	Pittsburgh	6.0
Buffalo	1.2	Indianapolis	5.2	Portland	6.0
Charleston	New 1996	Jacksonville	New 1996	Providence	(2.2)
Charlotte	6.1	Kansas City	2.1	Raleigh	(2.6)
Chicago	6.3	Los Angeles	(7.1)	Sacramento	4.9
Cincinnati	10.0	Louisville	4.1	Salt Lake City	(1.2)
Cleveland	4.7	Memphis	2.0	San Antonio	7.8
Columbus	1.8	Miami	1.2	San Diego	6.4
Dallas	5.8	Milwaukee	5.6	San Francisco	8.3
Denver	3.8	Minneapolis	1.5	Seattle	1.5
Des Moines	5.9	Nashville	6.3	St. Louis	5.3
Detroit	6.6	New Orleans	5.9	Tampa	1.2
				Tulsa	9.0
				Wash DC	3.6
				West Palm	7.6
				Wichita	2.1
				Wilkes Barre	(0.5)

Futures

One rule of thumb to follow when looking at the direction of cooperation/response rates is that, without continuing to implement new ideas or concepts, recovery rates will go down. Beginning in 1997, Scarborough introduced a number of programs to continue the momentum on increasing cooperation/recovery. This included:

- Increasing the number of telephone follow-up calls in top ten markets to persons of African-American and Hispanic origin in markets that qualify for special ethnic procedures.
- Redefining the markets that qualify for higher incentive levels. Incentives were only increased and in no instance were market incentives lowered.
- Utilize a postcard mailed 28 days after the booklet providing an extra incentive of \$10 for those persons that have not yet returned the product booklet/TV diary.

While some changes are being made without formal tests, other improvements require more systematic and standard research testing. Scarborough currently has 11 percent of the total sample that completes the telephone interview but does not complete a product booklet. This translates into 11 percent of the sample that has no opportunity to return a booklet, while appropriately counting against our recovery rates. Among those that receive a booklet, we recover usable booklets from approximately half of the respondents. To get more respondents to participate in the second phase, we will be doing a test of our telephone script, including moving the question that gets at address towards the front of the telephone script, as well as mentioning the cash incentive that will be received with the mailing of the booklet/diary.

In addition, a second 1997 test will be returning to a procedure used by other suppliers that have consumer booklets and utilizing a systematic approach of pay for performance. This means a small premium with the mailing of the booklet, and differential premiums provided on the return of a usable booklet.

In conclusion, I want to come back to the theme of the importance of cooperation/recovery rates as a building block to the quality of the research. It is truly one of many quality measures of the goodness of the data being provided to users. It requires continued attention from both the supplier and user communities.