

# WEEKLY MAGAZINE AUDIENCE DATA - WHAT'S TO BE DONE WITH THEM?

**Helen Johnston, Grey Advertising**

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## Background

It is usually considered obvious that a magazine released only at intervals (weekly, monthly, quarterly) can have a prolonged “issue life” – i.e. the time it takes to get all of its audience, and that the content of a magazine can have great influence on its “issue life” (TV listings have little interest after the fact; home decorating ideas are of interest any time).

Little research has been done to quantify this in the U.S. Some sketchy measurements were done decades ago, deriving little data for very few books.

Clever work was done from these measurements to develop “audience accumulation curves” for individual titles, which produced reasonable looking data, but they were based more on intelligent theory than data. These have been used relatively little by Media Planners. They were predicated on so little hard data that they could be called alchemy rather than estimates. They also were not particularly actionable.

- One would be loathe to use these estimated accumulation patterns as a reason for choosing one magazine over another.
- Little could be done about when the audience occurred. Some limited rearrangement of scheduled insertions was possible and the estimates were sometimes used for that.

Today, there is new interest in these data – enough to warrant doing measures of the week by week audience of an issue of a magazine. This is an extremely complex undertaking. Much will be said about these complexities by others at this conference – the problems of sample size, respondent compliance, the enormous amount of data that will be generated, and the mechanics of determining when an issue life starts (On sale date? before?) and when it ends. My purpose here is to discuss how Planners will use these data once these complexities are dealt with by researchers and the measures are available on a regular basis.

There are a number of reasons for the renewed interest in these data.

- **Accountability** is generally thought of as having to demonstrate that advertising did, indeed, work. But it also has the somewhat more mundane aspect of stewardship – reporting what delivery was planned and what actually did occur. This is being demanded in greater detail.
- **Media Mix** There is a new willingness to think of all advertising, regardless of the medium, as communication and to examine the ways the media work together. Print needs this weekly detail to take advantage of that.

These reasons will dictate the models and systems the Planner will need to best use these data.

I have done an informal survey of Media Planners at Grey, working on a variety of accounts – Package Goods, Consumer Service, Electronics.

The purpose was to ascertain their interest in having such data; how they would use it; what kinds of Computer Systems or Models they would use to get maximum use of the data.

There was universal interest. All acknowledged awareness of the magazine audience dynamics and were able to cite occasions when such data were critical and they were forced into making assumptions about the start and duration of a magazine issue life.

All could foresee uses to which such data could be put, ranging from the relatively clerical (data reporting, plan execution) to the more complex issues of media planning.

All could describe, in detail, the kind of computer systems they would like to have to work with these data.

The applications these Planners commented on, fell into a few general categories:

**Data Reporting**  
**Plan Administration**  
**Media Mix**

## Data Reporting

Currently almost all Print flow charts report Print weight in the month/week corresponding to the cover date of the issue bought, even though reading occurs both before and after that time.

**The first system requirement Planners mention is that flow chart programs be changed to reflect this – a straightforward undertaking.**

Such a program will not only be used to provide more precise data on when advertising weight occurs. It will also be used to improve the input now given to marketing mix models. Most of these demand weekly weight estimates. Now, Planners meet that demand with varying levels of precision – none good. Some simply put in an “average week” for each of the time periods bought. Others use available estimates of accumulation patterns by magazine, or magazine type.

It remains to be seen how having estimates based on current measurements will change any of the conclusions advertisers are forming from these models.

## Plan Administration

The next level of practical utility of these data is scheduling.

**Having chosen a plan (i.e., magazines; number of insertions), how might it be best scheduled to meet weight objectives?**

There was unanimity that this should be a system for which the input would be the detailed plan and, the objectives (e.g. constant pressure, or equal weight, throughout the campaign; heavy up at certain points, etc.).

The system would then look at all possible combinations of the insertions chosen, and indicate those which best fit objectives.

This is far more advanced than what is currently available, current systems allow the Planner to make a change, examine the results, than make another, etc. – a task analogous to playing with a Rubik’s Cube.

Most were hesitant to allow a scheduling system to change the plan (i.e. the books chosen or the number of insertions in each). None wanted a system that would choose one magazine rather than another simply because of its estimated audience accumulation pattern.

At this administrative stage, all that was required was computer assistance in doing the tedious chore of scheduling the plan the Planner has chosen – a simple system for alleviating a time consuming clerical chore and doing it better.

All agreed however that such a scheduling device should be multi-media. It is clear that planned media must be looked at together – that scheduling each medium individually to fit objectives is not necessarily going to result in the combination being a “best” or even good fit.

This means Planners are open to the idea of rearranging the more flexible Broadcast schedules to accommodate Print’s distribution patterns.

## Media Planning Models (Media Mix)

Part of the magazines’ interest in getting weekly audience measurement is to have greater comparability to broadcast. This in turn, has generated interest in multi-media planning models, especially optimizers.

Consensus disappears when this subject is broached with Planners. Opinions range from extreme skepticism to more moderate willingness to allow some computer involvement, as long as there is complete Planner control.

Some pointed out the differences, between what is planned and what is implemented as a result of negotiations and cautioned against too much detail. That is solutions giving specific vehicles (TV Programs, Magazines) at the planning stage are not readily implemented. If such detailed solutions were produced, alternative vehicles, with some measure of their suitability, would have to be provided.

Broadstroke solutions would be favored.

All were certain that the Planner should have control to avoid impractical solutions. That is, detailed descriptions of objectives; constraints on vehicles examined; and levels in each; etc..

There was, however, no resistance to the idea of **intermedia** planning. The idea of being able to assess data for all media in one place was welcome.

## Research Issues

If Grey is typical, we, the research community, should not have any difficulty in finding out Planners needs. If we are to meet these needs there will be some research issues that have to be settled.

## Reach & Frequency

It is clear in these discussions that reporting gross weight (target GRP) is not enough. Planners need estimates of the Reach of an advertising schedule over a period of time (week, month, etc.).

To do this certain issues will have to be resolved:

### Magazine Duplication

Current systems, that provide weekly audience estimates, assume the same duplication rates between any pair of books at all points in time in the issue life.

But it is quite possible that the early readers of each of two books will duplicate differently from the early readers of one and the late readers of the other.

Will the measurements being made provide insight into this?

It so, will it be necessary to assume different duplication between books at different points in their issue life, in order to estimate the Reach in any one week? Or, is it likely that the numbers we're dealing with will be so small that such a refinement will make no difference?

### Intermedia Duplication

In the U.S. it is the custom to assume that the audience to one medium duplicates randomly with the audience to another.

Since the Planner has chosen, in each medium, those vehicles directed to the target, isn't it likely that duplication will be greater than chance?

Is this likely to be even more the case when we are dealing with relatively low weekly Reach levels?

These are important questions. We will have to be doing a great deal of work to get them answered.

## Single Source vs. Data Fusion vs. ?

Available Single Source Data (MRI) will allow for only fairly broad evaluations of Broadcast – probably not at the vehicle level. Print data would be available in as much detail as needed.

But MRI data for Radio and Television bear little resemblance to the data used for buying and planning these media (Arbitron and Nielsen).

Can an adequate system be built which simply replicates what is being done now without the aid of the computers – using data from disparate sources in combination? Or it will it be necessary to attempt to reconcile these data with elaborate estimating techniques? If so, how is this modelling of data to be done and by whom?

Planners do not seem to have much enthusiasm for a highly specific, detailed planning model. At the planning stage, one does not think about specific vehicles, nor specific scheduling strategies.

But they do want a highly detailed system for administering the recommended plan – reporting weekly weight levels; scheduling specific vehicles at specific times; posting what actually ran, etc.

It follows, therefore, that the solution is a system that will do both – one which can provide estimates of weekly detail by vehicle for all media but also will be able to aggregate such detail in a meaningful way to allow the Planner to look at alternative approaches by combination of media and, within media, by vehicle type.

This means that all of these research issues have to be addressed – study of the issues; discussion; attempts at consensus and implementation are the very big tasks set out for us.

Perhaps we'll be able to report back on progress at the next conference.

