RADIO IN THE MEDIA MIX: PLUSES AND MINUSES

It goes without saying that radio offers most marketers many worthwhile benefits as an advertising medium. Chief among these is its ability to target audiences at any time of the day or day of the week, thereby capitalizing on situations when the consumer may be most receptive to a marketing sell or will shortly be shopping at a grocery, drug or convenience store, at a mall or some other location. In this regard, radio's advantage over television is significant. Consider the case of an electric shaver marketer whose best prospects are men who shave every morning but are not satisfied with the quality of their current product's performance. You can't reach these consumers at 6am, 7am, or 8am via television because the only fare on the on-air networks is news/talk shows, which attract small and mostly over 50 viewerships at high CPMs. Cable offers more options, at far better CPMs, but on the whole it has relatively modest reach potentials at this time of day. So the answer, either on its own or in combination with TV, is radio, which generates the largest audience of any medium of younger and middle-aged men between 6-9am.

There are many other cases where radio's timing flexibility, coupled with the location of its listenership present unique mindset linkage opportunities. For example, is there a better time for a Midas Muffler ad to reach a consumer than when she is driving and is painfully aware that her muffler isn't working like it should? Radio does just that. And what about a weight-loss program? Studies show that most dieters decide to finally do something about their weight during a weekend of indulgence. Sure, TV has lots of programming on weekends, but most on-air network fare consists of high CPM male-oriented sports programs or news/talk entries that draw geriatric audiences. Again cable is a low-cost alternative to on-air TV, but many channels are clogged with infomercials in the mornings on Saturdays and Sundays, and while other programs are available, it is hard to maximize reach on a single day or weekend solely on cable. So why not add weekend radio to the mix and double your reach on those most pivotal diet decision days? Furthermore, since the decision is usually that the diet will start on Monday, be sure to include AM drive in the mix. We don't mean to belabor the timing/location aspect, but this is such a critical aspect for so many marketers that it needs to be explored more aggressively.

Radio offers other advantages that can also pay powerful dividends to advertisers. One of these concerns demographics, particularly for youth-oriented marketers. It is well established that Generations X and Y are difficult to target with TV. Of course there is MTV and a number of other cable options, and in primetime the WB and UPN networks skew toward a much younger audience than the major networks. But radio, which is often overlooked, has the capability to single out significant numbers of 16-29s or 18-34s via music-formatted stations, hence if one wishes to maximize short term reach against such hard-to-wow consumers, why not add radio to whatever kinds of television you are using to attain this goal?

As shown elsewhere in this volume, radio, if used properly, can also be a great frequency leveler, taking those seemingly elusive light TV viewers and capturing their attention with selective radio formats that they prefer instead of the tube. And let's not forget radio's "image transfer" capabil-

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ities. When care is taken to properly exploit this angle, radio ad exposures can effectively rekindle a consumer's recall (and positive reactions) to a TV ad campaign, creating a synergetic or complementary effect of great value.

In view of these clear-cut advantages, why isn't radio used more often and with greater force by national marketers? There are a lot of reasons, some logical and others much more questionable. First and foremost is the way radio presents itself to the advertiser. Here is a major medium with a limitless national presence that offers a bewildering array of markets and submarkets to evaluate, usually in a metro area rather than a TV DMA context. As spot TV sellers have found, much to their discomfort, the apparent advantage of geographic flexibility often turns out to be a negative since too many advertisers have a "think national" outlook that favors network-style TV options and national magazines over "local media." Shocking as it may seem, a substantial proportion of national marketers do not really have a handle on which markets they should heavy up in, or whether such add-on weight really pays off. Others launch ad campaigns in national media or rely on their dealers, franchises or the stores to take care of their local market needs.

Compounding these issues, radio continues to live with archaic audience measurement systems that provide somewhat questionable data at a snail's pace relative to network television or spot TV's metered markets.

As if these problems aren't enough to worry about, spot radio continues to shoot itself in the foot by discouraging the use of shorter, cost effective ad units, like :30s and :15s, which are universally available on network TV. Rising promotional clutter is also a negative at many stations and even radio's once huge CPM advantage over TV no longer applies, thanks largely to the national cable services with their buyer-enforced bargain basement pricing meters.

Further complicating matters, radio disseminates relatively little information about itself, especially on dimensional aspects, and consequently media decision-makers at advertisers or ad agencies are woefully under-informed about the medium's capabilities and how it stacks up to others. Instead, time-honored but hopelessly outdated axioms continue to rule, usually without effective updating or rebuttal by radio advocates.

Two other issues also need to be addressed. One is radio's merchandisability relative to TV and, to a lesser degree, magazines. Many advertisers are extremely concerned about the look of their media buys, whether they impress the trade, promotional tie-ins, and other non-audience or CPM issues. It's a big deal for a marketer to sponsor the NBA Finals, the World Series, an annual primetime special, or a weekend golf tournament, no matter how high the CPMs. Radio needs to do a lot more to improve its merchandisability via event sponsorship and other creative approaches if it wishes to compete with TV.

Finally, there is the question of advertising impact. Most marketers who ignore radio or use it sparingly think that TV offers them far greater attention-getting and motivating power. Additionally, they believe they understand how TV advertising works, based in part on a huge body of evidence on ad awareness, sales motivation and results in the marketplace. By

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comparison, radio is a vast wasteland. Very little data are available on how radio commercials function, what types of executions perform the best, to what extent radio ads generate sales, etc. Earlier in this volume we presented a piece based on Radio Recall Research data, which is thought provoking but barely cracks the surface on this vitally important issue. Much more U.S.-based research is needed about how radio commercials communicate their messages. Without it, client and ad agency executives who are afraid to take chances can always veto a media planner's initiative about including radio in the mix by saying, "radio hasn't got the selling power of TV." Unfortunately few media planners have an effective rejoinder.

What can radio do to repackage itself more attractively and place itself in contention for a larger share of national ad dollars? The answers are obvious:

1) Create special task forces. Talk to agency clients. Get into the marketing minds of advertisers; don't just wait for the time buyers to call.
2) Create more viable unwired national networks and sell these to advertisers as complements to TV, based on timing, locational, and demographic targeting attributes. Make these turnkey operations with valid post-buy monitoring, guaranteed nationwide CPMs, etc.
3) Reduce in-break commercial clutter and sell shorter ad units at fair prices relative to :60s.
4) Seriously consider, and hopefully adopt, Arbitron's Personal Peoplemeter, at least in the top 50 markets (plus a nationwide "network" sample) to provide a timely and more accurate picture of radio audiences. Such a move will also enhance radio's image tremendously.
5) Start funding more research on radio ad effectiveness, but not self-serving studies. Really dive into what works and—let's be frank about it—what doesn't. Make sure that everybody sees these findings.
6) Seek out ways to create national "events" on radio (possibly multimedia) events. Try to make these major sponsorship- and result-oriented opportunities. Organize and sell them well in advance (up to a year before the event) so the client has time to fully promote his/her buy. Then monitor the results.

In other words, think *big* (national), like network TV and magazines. Emulate these media if you want to be on the same playing field.