

TV VS. MAGAZINES: IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT REACH

One of the more common forms of intermedia comparisons used by magazine people and some agency research gurus, purports to show that magazines have more reach than television. At first glance the approach seems reasonable enough. If you take the top ten primetime TV shows and compare the average telecast reach to that of the top ten magazines, the latter wins, hands down. Isn't that a valid indicator of each medium's reach capability?

Unfortunately, the answer is no.

To begin with, the statistical process utilizes audience estimates that aren't comparable. For magazines, the data are derived primarily from recent reading surveys that require the "reader" to accurately recall if s/he saw or read an issue of a given publication in the past week (for weeklies) or the past month (for monthlies). This is assumed to produce the equivalent of an average issue reader estimate, though it is conceded that many readers (up to 25%) may not actually see an average page in the issue, and that much of the audience is acquired months after the publication hits the newsstands.

In contrast, the network TV projections used in this form of intermedia analysis are derived from Nielsen's national peplemeter panel and comprises *average minute* viewing estimates; therefore, the TV audience figures come from a far more precise methodology (meterized set usage coupled with an as-the-activity-occurs viewing report). What's more, average minute viewing is far more comparable to an average page's audience for print than the total issue audience for any and all page. A typical one-hour TV show reaches 25-30% more viewers for 5 or more minutes than it does for any single minute.

If one really wants to avoid the "apples vs. oranges" critique, the fair procedure would be to take "recent viewing" measurements, available from MRI, Simmons, et al., and compare these results to recent reading data for magazines. The problem is that the resulting TV audience estimates are far higher than Nielsen's average minute findings, thus ruining the comparison for print media advocates.

To demonstrate this point, we took Next Generation Research LLC's (NGR) 2003 Advertising Receptivity Index, which used a sample of 15,000+ adults, and compared its recent reading and recent viewing levels for the top 10 magazines and the top 10 primetime shows. NGR's study was

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conducted by mail and utilized the recent reading method, sans the interviewer aspect. Respondents were presented lists of randomized weeklies and monthlies and asked if they had read/seen any issue of each magazine in the past six months. If they answered yes, they were asked whether they had seen any issue in a recent time frame (past week for weeklies; past month for monthlies). The resulting average issue readership claims were generally about 8-10% higher than those of MRI.

For TV, the process was even simpler: randomized lists of primetime shows (and the networks airing them) were provided and past week viewing claims were obtained.

How do the top 10 audience tallies look when "recent viewing"—not average minute viewing—is compared to recent reading? As shown in the accompanying table, TV, not magazines, is the clear winner.

We are not advocates of the recent viewing approach. Indeed, far from it. Respondents can't recall past week viewing accurately and are prone to confuse older exposures with those that occur recently. In addition, major problems arise because of the presence of so many of those shows as reruns on cable and local stations, as well as their similarity (NBC was airing three variations of *Law and Order* when the study was conducted). As a result, "recent viewing" audience claims are bound to be substantially inflated, relative to Nielsen.

Rather than quibble about research methodologies, what we should note is that TV's ability to deliver short term reach for specific ad schedules at various GRP levels has declined somewhat over the past few decades. What's more, many of the formulas used by the agencies on this score tend to be dated. Still, a primetime network TV schedule delivering 400 average minute GRPs over a month will probably attain a reach of 75-80%. This is perhaps 5-8 points higher than a mass magazine schedule delivery the same number of recent reading rating points can expect to attain. If the TV buyer uses a mix of dayparts (not just primetime) as a cost saving device, its reach may decline a few points, bringing the two mediums even closer in line. In short, reach isn't really the issue. Other factors—ad effectiveness, audience receptivity, timing, demographic selection, merchandisability, etc.—are more important considerations for the media planner. ■

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TOP 10 MAGAZINES AND PRIMETIME TV SHOWS: ADULTS REACHED PER ISSUE OR PER TELECAST

MAGAZINES		PRIMETIME TV	
1. Reader's Digest	24%	1. CSI	42%
2. People	18	2. Everybody Loves Raymond	36
3. Better Homes & Gardens	18	3. Law & Order	32
4. TV Guide	16	4. Law & Order: Special Victims Unit	31
5. Good Housekeeping	16	5. Friends	30
6. National Geographic	15	6. America's Funniest Homevideos	29
7. Family Circle	15	7. Law & Order: Criminal Intent	29
8. Time	14	8. E.R.	27
9. Woman's Day	14	9. 60 Minutes (Wallace)	26
10. Newsweek	11	10. Dateline NBC	24
<i>Average</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>31</i>

Source: Next Generation Research, LLC., Advertising Receptivity Study, 2003.