

THE REACH & FREQUENCY CONCEPT FOR MAGAZINES

When magazines first became an advertising medium, and for a long time afterwards, it was assumed that each publication had a core audience consisting of subscribers or single copy buyers, which was best reflected by monitoring the size and quality of its circulation. Once magazines began to be audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations in 1914, their claims about the number of paid copies could be accepted. This, coupled with primary audience surveys conducted by Starch and augmented by magazine subscriber studies, seemed to be all that was needed. It was believed that each book reached its core audience with virtually every issue, hence the principal decisions in building a multi-title magazine schedule were the size and composition of the largest (or most preferred) publication's primary audience, and the degree of reader duplication with the next most preferred magazine. Once this was determined, a third book could be added, then a fourth, and so on until the ad budget was exhausted, or the required reach level was attained.

A critical constraint—and one that shall be discussed later in this chapter—was the concept of “continuity.” Since it was believed that each magazine reached its primary reader base issue after issue, the prevailing view held that a certain insertion frequency was required in a publication to expose its audience “effectively” to an ad campaign before another magazine was added to the schedule. The second book, in turn, also had to maintain its continuity requirement before a third magazine joined the list. Typically, advertisers felt that their ads had to appear in a minimum of half of a magazine's yearly issues to be effective. So for monthlies, the typical schedule started at 6 pages and often rose to 12 for advertisers that could afford it. For weeklies, 12 insertions were regarded as the minimum, and schedules involving 18, 24 or more ads (based on the continuity principle) were not unusual.

Despite this, it was evident to anyone who reviewed circulation data that the subscriber base for most magazines was constantly turning over due to cancellations and new recruitments, while single copy buyers were obviously less frequent readers. Nevertheless, the core audience idea persisted until the early-1960s, despite mounting evidence that it was outmoded. Most of this evidence came from so-called “total audience” studies which had been conducted by Alfred Politz for **Life** magazine and other mass circulation publications in the previous decade. These used the visual recognition, “through-the-book” method in personal interviews with national probability samples to determine how many persons recalled looking into or reading specific issues prior to their contact with the interviewer. All readers were counted, regardless of how they came into possession of the copy or where they happened to see it.

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The early total audience measurements revealed that vast numbers of “secondary” or “pass-along” readers were reached by mass circulation magazines like **Life**, but at first these findings were regarded with skepticism and seen as promotional ploys used by publications to foster their own interests. Still, the total audience concept was nurtured, largely by **Life**, and its scope was expanded to include multiple issue measurements. The results were spectacular, for it was evident that large numbers of people who did not happen to read a particular issue did see other issues of the same publication. Thus the total audience concept identified pass-along readers for single issues and, extended over time, noted a further reach buildup as successive issues of a magazine were circulated.

One of the studies conducted by Politz for **Life** illustrates the significance of this concept. During 1952 and the early part of 1953, samples of respondents aged 10 years and older were interviewed and reinterviewed in predetermined cycles in a manner that allowed each person to qualify as a reader for up to six issues of the magazines studied. Having obtained an actual measurement of the audiences for six issues of each publication, Politz fitted curves to his data, producing estimates of further reach development for as many as 13 issues. The following two tables summarize Politz’s findings for **Life**, **Look**, **The Saturday Evening Post** and **Ladies’ Home Journal** in the 1952–53 study. The first table indicates the percentage of persons aged 10+ who read or looked into an average issue of each magazine, and the subsequent buildup of reach as multiple issues were measured. For example, 22.1% of the population read an average issue of **Life**, but by the time six issues had been measured, the magazine’s reach had expanded to 50.6%. The second table made two important points by breaking down the 1–6 issue reach for **Life** into frequent (5–6), moderate (3–4), and light (1–2) frequency groups. The first was that only a small proportion (17%) of the 6-issue reach consisted of frequent readers, while most of those exposed to the publication saw only one or two issues (58%). The second concerned demographics. Frequent **Life** readers were primarily subscribers, augmented to some extent by single copy and regular pass-along audiences, so they tended to be more heavily concentrated in the 30–54 age group (51%) and the upper income segment (42%) than those who were infrequent readers. The latter—virtually all pass-along readers—were somewhat younger and more likely to come from middle- to lower-income households.

The early Politz studies were customized projects, sponsored by publications who used them as sales positioning tools relative to direct competitors, therefore only a few mass circulation books were measured and it was apparent that there were limits to the application of the interview/reinterview procedure. It was extremely expensive and time consuming, and the design could not be readily applied to small circulation magazines with harder-to-find audiences.

The advent of syndicated total audience surveys in the early-1960s resulted in broad agency support for reach and frequency measurements and pressure mounted to include as many magazines as possible. Acclimated

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BUILDUP OF REACH FOR 1–13 ISSUE SCHEDULES

1952–53

NO. OF ISSUES	% OF 10+ POPULATION REACHED BY:			
	LIFE	LOOK	SAT. EVE. POST	LADIES' HOME JOURNAL ¹
1	22.1	15.1	11.8	15.1
2	32.4	23.9	17.8	22.2
3	39.1	30.0	21.8	26.8
4	44.0	34.8	25.0	30.2
5	47.7	38.6	27.5	32.9
6	50.6	41.8	29.6	35.1
7*	53.0	44.5	31.4	36.9
8*	54.9	46.9	32.9	38.5
9*	56.6	49.0	34.3	39.8
10*	57.9	50.9	35.4	41.0
11*	59.1	52.6	36.4	42.0
12*	60.2	54.1	37.3	42.9
13*	61.1	55.5	38.2	43.8

**Note: Data beyond six issues were calculated by statistical extensions from 1–6 issue survey findings.*

¹*Data are for females aged 10+.*

*Source: Study conducted for **Life** by Alfred Politz Research, Inc.*

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DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF LIFE'S 6-ISSUE REACH BY FREQUENCY OF READING

1952-53

	1-2 ISSUES	3-4 ISSUES	5-6 ISSUES
TOTAL			
Persons 10+	100%	100%	100%
SEX			
Male	47	53	54
Female	53	47	46
AGE			
10-19	23	22	15
20-29	17	21	17
30-39	20	20	19
40-54	24	23	32
55+	16	14	17
H.H. INCOME			
Lower ¹	36	26	19
Middle ²	41	41	39
Upper ³	23	33	42
<i>% of 6-issue Reach</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>17</i>

¹ <\$3,000.

² \$3,000-4,999.

³ \$5,000+.

Source: Study conducted for *Life* by Alfred Politz Research, Inc.

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The Reach & Frequency Concept For Magazines - Continued

to such concepts by their experience with TV, many of the larger agencies were starting to make intermedia comparisons for the first time. Much was also made of Nielsen Media Service, Simmons and Brand Rating Index data in evaluating the reach of single and multiple issue combinations of magazines and how these interfaced with network TV schedules.

From the mid-1960s until 1994, Simmons surveyed an increasing number of publications via the through-the-book method. As hosts of small circulation, selective books were added, however, Simmons was obliged to limit its measurements to only two issues per magazine per respondent. Once a pattern of actual 1- and 2-issue reach and frequency development was determined, Simmons extended its data via statistical curve fitting, to produce multiple issue estimates. Additional formulas permitted Simmons to use audience duplication patterns noted between books in its measurements to provide multiple issue reach and frequency projections for extended multi-title schedules. While projections that went beyond two issues were estimates, not actual findings, most observers believed that the system used by SMRB produced reasonable enough data for basic media planning purposes.

Effective in 1995, SMRB ceased to use the through-the-book, issue-specific method of measuring magazines. It and the other syndicated survey companies, Mediamark Research & Intelligence, LLC. (MRI) and Ipsos Mendelsohn, have chosen to rely instead on reading claims made by respondents indicating how many of the last four issues they believe they have read or looked into for each publication. Utilizing such data, statisticians have developed formulas that estimate reach and/or frequency patterns for any combination of publications over any length of time.

With small schedules involving pairs of magazines, the degree of audience duplication is critical. Obviously a combination of books with similar editorial thrusts or ad reader constituencies will generate higher duplication levels with reduced reach potentials. Pairings involving magazines with different editorial matter and reader bases will emphasize reach over frequency. In both cases, as schedules are expanded to include multiple issues of the same publications, the percentage of duplicated readers (those reached by both magazines) rises dramatically.

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The Reach & Frequency Concept For Magazines - Continued

For advertisers interested in maximizing reach at relatively modest expenditure levels, scattering buys among titles, with relatively few insertions per book, is the most common solution. The following table illustrates how an adult-oriented schedule utilizing 10 selective monthly magazines, all with small constituencies, builds its reach across a 1- to 12-month period. As the table indicates, although on average these publications reach only 2% of the population per issue, with the largest book reaching 4.3% and the smallest only .7% (first column), when a single insertion per book for all titles is used, their reach is 13.7% with an average frequency of 1.5 publications read. This in turn means that roughly 60% of those reached saw only 1 of the 10 magazines on the schedule (bottom row).

REACH AND FREQUENCY BUILDUP FOR MULTIPLE ISSUE SCHEDULE UTILIZING 10 SELECTIVE MAGAZINES¹

MAG.	NO. OF ISSUES PER MAGAZINE				
	1	2	4	8	12
A	4.3%	6.0%	7.8%	9.6%	10.7%
B	3.0	4.5	6.2	8.0	9.1
C	2.7	4.0	5.3	6.8	7.6
D	2.0	2.8	3.6	4.5	5.0
E	1.8	2.5	3.3	4.2	4.6
F	1.6	2.4	3.4	4.4	5.0
G	1.6	2.3	3.1	3.9	4.4
H	1.5	2.1	2.8	3.5	4.0
I	1.3	1.9	2.7	3.5	3.9
J	.7	1.0	1.3	1.6	1.8
TOTAL REACH	13.7	17.8	21.8	25.6	27.8
<i>Avg Freq.</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>6.4</i>	<i>8.9</i>
<i>% Seeing Only 1 Magazine</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10</i>

¹Base: Adult reach.

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.

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The Reach & Frequency Concept For Magazines - Continued

As more issues of the same magazines are added to the buy, reach continues to build but at the expense of duplication. A two-issue schedule in these 10 books attains a 17.8% adult reach with a 2.3 frequency, meaning that the average person reached saw 2.3 of the magazines. In fact, however, 70% of the schedule's readers are now duplicated; just 30% see only one of the 10 books.

Obviously, if duplication is to be minimized and reach maximized at a set budget level, the solution is to purchase the fewest insertions in the same magazines, while expanding the list as much as is feasible. Advertisers who buy into this philosophy rarely schedule more than four insertions in the same magazine per year, relying on anywhere from a dozen to as many as 25 publications to expand their reach.

The other side of the coin distinguishes between high and low velocity publications, suggesting that certain magazines, by virtue of their massive multiple issue reach buildup capabilities, should get extended schedules while other books are used on specific occasions to top off the "core reach" magazines, delivering a reach "lift" as needed. Possibly as many as four or five magazines thus might get 8- or even 12-time schedules, while upwards of 10 additional titles are used more selectively—say twice each—to pile on added reach when this is really needed (the start of a new ad campaign, a key holiday sales period, etc.).

An example of such a core reach schedule as it might look for a women's-oriented marketer is shown in the next table. Here, a selection has been made including two women's service books (Magazines A and B) plus three women's interest magazines from the fashion and home service areas. These books were selected because of their minimal duplication patterns and highly cost efficient ad rate structures.

As is evident in the table, the core reach magazines provide a monthly reach base of 34% (first column) and over a full 12-insertion schedule, reach 61% of all women. If the advertiser needs to expand his/her short term reach on two or three occasions during the year, an added single issue overlay of non-core books would accomplish this purpose without producing the excessive multiple-issue audience duplication "wastage" inherent in giving all publications the same insertion schedule. ■

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REACH AND FREQUENCY BUILDUP FOR AD SCHEDULE USING MULTIPLE ISSUES OF FIVE WOMEN'S INTEREST/SERVICE MAGAZINES¹

MAG.	NO. OF ISSUES PER MAGAZINE				
	1	2	4	8	12
A	17.5%	24.0%	30.7%	37.1%	40.6%
B	10.9	14.6	18.3	22.0	24.0
C	9.8	13.6	17.7	21.8	24.1
D	6.4	8.7	11.0	13.3	14.6
E	3.8	5.5	7.4	9.4	10.6
TOTAL REACH	34.1	42.8	50.5	57.3	60.8
<i>Avg. Freq.</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>6.8</i>	<i>9.6</i>

¹Base: Women.

Source: Media Dynamics, Inc.