



Don't Count Out Traditional Media Metrics

> > > Whats the Buzz

BY Pamela Parker

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The days when a traditional marketer could blithely wonder which half of his advertising budget was wasted are over. CEOs and CFOs are turning to CMOs and demanding the same accountability they require of their logistics and supply chain managers. The unspoken agreement not to question the emperor's choice of wardrobe has been broken. The hocus-pocus days are over. A new age of accountability in all media -- brought about in part by the rise of digital media and measurement technology -- is arriving.

Signs of disgruntlement are all around. Last week, radio giant Clear Channel loudly and publicly chastised market leader Arbitron for its diary-based radio ratings system, issuing an RFP for "a state-of-the-art radio ratings system what will accurately and credibly represent radio's true performance and value for advertisers."

In the television world, the "bathroom dilemma," not to mention the "DVR conundrum," are alive and well.

"Why am I buying a program rating when what I really need is a commercial rating?" asked Bob Lidoce, president and CEO of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), in a conversation with ClickZ. "Our measurement systems on that basis tend to be weaker than what one would expect. It's getting better, but Jesus, it's 2005. Wouldn't you think we'd be doing better by now?"

The print circulation scandals that have erupted over the last few years speak for themselves. Certainly it's clear a system is broken when law enforcement must remedy matters, as in the Newsday/Hoy case. Tales of woe at Belo and Gruner + Jahr aren't much more heartening.

Just last week, a survey of senior marketers released by the ANA found only about half intend to keep spending in magazines and newspapers at current levels. In fact, 26 percent plan to shift dollars away from magazines to other media, and 21 percent are doing the same with their newspaper budgets. Meanwhile, the majority of those marketers (54 percent) said they're only "somewhat satisfied" with current measurement. They also said they thought it was "very important" measurement services improve the accuracy of their reporting (45 percent) and include more detailed information about user engagement and interaction (51 percent).

Noting marketers genuinely *like* advertising in print, the ANA's Liodice, issues this warning: "In too many instances, the good feelings about print are actually gut feelings... gut feelings just don't cut it anymore. Marketers need print publishers to elevate their attention to marketing accountability -- right now."

What's driving all this? One hint is the main beneficiary of those redirected print budgets will be the Internet, according to 74 percent of study respondents.

My gut feeling is interactive media -- and digital in general -- raised the bar in terms of measurement. As much as we denigrate click-through rates as a meaningful measure, they certainly tell you *something* -- something about a real, actual campaign, not about a proxy.

But this game is not over yet. No matter how excited marketers are about interactive media, they're not about to give up tried-and-true vehicles such as print, radio and TV. They shouldn't have to! We must develop a holistic view of audience members interactions with all forms of media and advertising.

Users (and therefore advertisers') interactions in traditional media are likely to change in coming years. We're going to see more :30 spots that let a viewer click to learn more, see more video, or sign up for an opt-in e-mail program. We're going to see addressable set-top boxes that allow for the precise targeting of message to audience. Enhancements like these will inherently create new opportunities for measurement, but even "old school" media styles will become more measurable, because advertisers will expect it.

"There is a great deal of sophistication coming about lately because marketers are demanding it," confirms Liodice. "We need a greater degree of accountability. The entire supply chain is growing more sophisticated. Are we there yet? No. But are we getting there, are we comfortable that the wheels are in motion? Yeah, we are."

Sure Arbitron Portable People Meter has been in development for what seems like forever, but it's been a huge job. Add to that the Homescan data from fellow VNU company ACNielsen, as promised by "Project Apollo," and things begin look a lot brighter for traditional media. (The devil's in the details, however. I'm endorsing the *ideas*, not the implementation behind these projects.)

Where does interactive media fit into these new measurement schemes? Though I'm told the "long term vision" of Project Apollo will include both streaming media and Web surfing, they sound like an afterthought, not a priority. Like my ClickZ colleague, Jeremy Lockhorn, I believe omitting interactive media would be a grave mistake.

What should interactive marketers do? Keep innovating. Keep looking for ways to learn more about the true value of media. Work with players like VNU to ensure interactive is measured accurately in their new projects. Sure, it's the traditional marketers who are disgruntled these days. But they got that way by being complacent for years. Let's not make that error ourselves.