

Examining local delivery of national magazines

Media viewpoint

Like any other national medium, magazines overdeliver some markets and underdeliver others. Here are some tips on how to compensate

Much has been written recently about how national advertisers are becoming more cognizant of regional and local sales skews for their products, as well as a corresponding need for increased local advertising. There are a few reasons for this:

(1) Advertisers are becoming more skilled at understanding geographic variables through more sensitive measurement techniques.

(2) PRIZM, ClusterPlus and Acorn have done much to sensitize advertisers to geographic rather than just demographic issues.

(3) Increased local competition in many product areas has forced many advertisers to identify and then protect important sales territories.

For many years network television advertisers have evaluated the local delivery of their national schedules. A relatively simple computer run will tell how a given national television schedule will perform in selected ADIs. Once under-delivered areas are identified and the extent of the shortage quantified, advertisers will often add local spot television to make up the difference. This is standard procedure.

What isn't standard, I suspect, is the evaluation of national magazine schedules on a local market basis. It is common for agency media people to evaluate the regional delivery of national books, but local market analysis is, I believe, rather rare.

To do this, major national print advertisers should avail themselves of published or on-line local market Audit Bureau of Circulations information. This source includes, for 144 national publications, the ADI, DMA, metro and county coverage, circulation and percent circulation for each of these geographical areas. Total audience numbers are not provided, and either the same ADI reader per copy as for the full, national run must be assumed, or one can stick to circulation alone.

The advantages

The benefit of this kind of analysis is that you may better understand why, on a local basis, your sales skew as they do. This procedure can also be used as a media selection



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tool. For example, after isolating highly developed brand or category markets, the on-line system can determine which combination of magazines provides the best numerical coverage of those areas. It is well-known, for instance, that Time and Newsweek overdeliver in the bigger ADIs or A & B counties. U.S. News & World Report, on the other hand, is strongest in middle to large ADI's or B & C counties. Therefore, if a product has better sales in selected B & C counties, U.S. News, in conjunction with Time or Newsweek, might provide better coverage than just Time and Newsweek.

Moreover, the knowledge gained from this kind of analysis is beneficial for its own sake. If advertisers want to buy compensatory print weight as they do with television, it is very easy to buy local ADI or metro editions of major national publications, local city books or newspapers to make up the shortfall. Local magazine space is not as efficient as national space, but neither is spot TV compared to network TV. Magazine advertisers who buy four-color pages could switch to black-and-white magazine ads, or to half-page, black-and-white newspaper ads, and quite possibly lower the national print CPM.

This idea may seem rather odd at first, but I'm hard pressed to think of reasons why it shouldn't be adopted. After all, it's the same concept used by TV, just in a different medium. Years ago, the pre-Romantic poet Thomas Gray said, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." In this case, he may just be wrong.

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