

Media Professionals

Warns of growing clutter on independent stations



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Gene Willhoft, an associate media director at Ally Gargano/MCA, recalls that between December 1979 and August 1980, the Association of Independent Television Stations “spent nearly \$400,000 for a Burke commercial recall study,” comparing commercial recall scores for independent and network affiliated stations.

Willhoft notes that three day parts were analyzed, early evening, primetime and late evening, and that the results turned up a 19 per cent to 16 per cent independent recall edge in early evening, a 22 per cent to 24 per cent affiliate edge in primetime, and a 15 per cent to 12 per cent independent recall edge for late evening. The results, he adds, “pleased independent station operators greatly and the findings were widely publicized throughout the industry. The INTV Burke Study, along with a 1983 INTV-commissioned Simmons study on product use by station type, became the backbone of independent television’s march to respectability.”

But today, says Willhoft, “I suspect that recall scores between independents and affiliates may no longer be as balanced as they were seven years ago.

More specifically, I wonder if, in certain dayparts, independent commercial recall scores are now below those of affiliates.” His questions, he notes, are “based on my observation that at least in the New York market, independent operators are cramming more and more advertising units into an hour. I detect what appears to be at least a four-to-five minute commercial break between many program segments, roughly twice the break duration on affiliates. The areas where I see this happening most often are during primetime movies and on weekend afternoons.”

Willhoft also points out that, “It is a fact that re-call scores decline as people are exposed to either more commercial messages, or more complex messages. The commercial density on independents in 1979 and ‘80 was nowhere near where it is now. Isn’t it possible that today’s independent recall scores, on those stations with extra heavy clutter, are lower than they were years ago, and are now inferior to those for affiliates? And if they are, how much lower?”

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