

Television

by Gene Willhoft

*Vice President, associate media director,
Ally Gargano/MCA Advertising, Ltd.*



SPOT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The spot tv system -- planning, buying, trafficking and accounting of spot television schedules -- has become a standard practice to all personnel involved. It seems to be working, from industry supplied cost-per-point data for planners, to computerized avails to buyers from representatives, to computerized invoices from stations, to the logging of those invoices by agency accounting people.

But does the current system work as well as it can? In my opinion, one area needing much improvement is the performance of the stations. I wonder if each station gives fair treatment to all advertisers, and if it is providing a high level of quality control to the scheduling and stewardship of each media buy. There are four issues, in particular, that I feel need a greater focus of attention by station management.

Equal rotations: Many advertisers buy spot television time on a broad daypart or run-of-station basis - Monday- Friday daytime 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., or Monday-Friday prime, 8:00-11:00 p.m. The agreement is that a fair spot rotation will be given by the stations. They will see that commercials are placed throughout the

day, in high, medium and low-rated programs.

This type of buy makes sense, however, only if spots are rotated fairly. Equal rotations don't occur all the time, and it's very hard to monitor exactly when spots air. To get the true picture, the buyer or accounting person must wait for the station invoice. Only after an invoice is analyzed, and spots are lined up by hour, can unfair rotations be noticed and acted upon. If purchased spots didn't air properly, either makegoods or credits should be taken by the agency.

Unfair rotations can hurt the stations, the agency and the advertisers. From an economic standpoint, stations will lose revenue if agencies take credits on spots unequally rotated. The agency can lose because, if it can't or won't take makegoods and wants credits instead, it will not get commissions on the credited spots. The client loses because his brand may not get the desired amount of media weight (GRP's), and sales and awareness may not be as high as expected.

Advance warning on preemptions: Another area I think needs improvement is in the communication to agencies of missed spots and non-cleared buy orders by station representatives. This communication problem can only lie in one or two areas. Either the station isn't constantly updating the rep of the exact buy situation, or the rep isn't properly informing the agency of changes in the plan.

Frequently, buyers do not find out the status of the buys (whether or not all spots ran as ordered) until after the invoices arrive and are entered into the accounting system.

This is no small matter. Knowing exact status of buys is critical to understanding media or creative tests. It can become a nightmare to direct response advertisers, who are forced to go to lengthy investigations to determine why response has dropped off (if spots are missed) or why response has picked up (if spots are run out of rotation). All stations and their reps should make a greater effort to transmit accurate information in a timely manner.

Airing the wrong creative: In many cases we know that incorrect creative was aired. I suspect that agency traffic instructions are either misread or ignored in many station traffic departments. This is also a tough one for agencies to monitor. It's impossible to have local agency-or client personnel physically situated in each spot market to police the buy.

The best way for agencies to determine if copy has aired correctly is to examine the commercial codes on station affidavits. Even then, however, you can't be sure the creative hasn't been tampered with. A few years ago we heard of a situation where a major city station had, unknown to the agency and client, added a super which stated "only available in certain areas." The spot ran for six months before anyone realized the tampering. A \$250,000 makegood was the eventual result.

Competitive separation: This concept seems to be completely ignored by some stations. On New York outlets, especially during early and late local newscasts, I have seen as many as six automobile ads in a half-hour program. Too much is too much!

Most stations have guidelines for competitive separation, but I suspect these guidelines

are quickly forgotten as buy order upon buy order arrives. Asking the stations to turn away advertising dollars is an idea that will meet with much resistance.

Instead, I believe stations should concentrate on doing a better job of informing the buyers when dayparts/programs are saturated with competitive ads. The buyers can then decide if they still want to buy the program or not. True, it is not in the stations' interest to do this, but in the long run they will benefit.

This is a time when more and more local broadcast advertising opportunities are being created (public television availabilities, local cable, low power tv). The spot people should learn from the network situation. As soon as alternative areas to network matured, like cable and syndication, advertisers re-directed their dollars to these media forms. We all know the problems the networks are having now. Unless the spot suppliers wake up, they could be headed for the same problems.

If you agree that these are meaningful problems, make some noise about them. Let's face it - the only way these situations will improve is if we make them improve. **Ex nihilo nihil fit**

This article was printed from:



Absolute Media Inc.

100 Prospect Street
Stamford, CT 06901

Phone: 203-327-9090

Fax: 203-323-1899

Email info@absolutemediainc.com

Web site: www.absolutemediainc.com