

"A Day In The Life Of An Arbitron Diary"

By Rhody Bosley

Editor's Note: Not everyone gets the opportunity to see in person an enormous operation such as Arbitron's. We felt you might be interested in seeing the step-by-step process of a diary.

With more research companies doing ever more evaluations of America's listening patterns, one thing remains constant: the methodologies used by other researchers are always compared to the industry standard - the Arbitron paper diary. The diary continues to be the most personal and portable means of collecting information stations need to make programming decisions, and advertisers and agencies need to figure out where to buy.

The diary is also accountable. Because Arbitron listening estimates come through only one source - the diarykeeper - there's no chance for interviewer bias or misunderstanding between the interviewer and the respondent. And because the diary is a written record of one respondent's listening, stations and advertisers and agencies are able to see and confirm actual entries made.

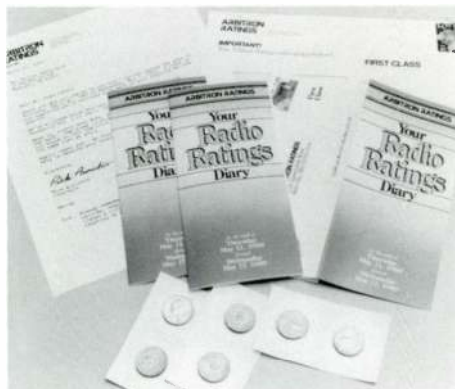
Every day, hundreds of Arbitron employees work to ensure the reliability and accountability of the diary process. For these employees and the nation's Arbitron diarykeepers, every day is a "Day in the Life of a Diary."



Arbitron's centralized Interview Center places over 5,000,000 phone calls annually. Interviewers speak with potential diarykeepers to collect demographic information and determine their eligibility to participate in an Arbitron survey. On the average, 79 percent of those asked, consent to filling out a Radio diary. (This number is Arbitron's Consent Rate.)

Once surveyed participants are selected, coded, addressed labels are mass produced and placed on each diary to be mailed. When the diaries are returned to Arbitron, these codes are helpful in sorting diaries and as a data entry reference.

An Arbitron worker oversees the insertion of labeled diaries, premiums and letters to survey consenters as they are inserted into the Radio diary package. The Arbitron Company mails 1,525,782 diaries to survey participants each year.



The 'Radio diary package' consists of: one diary for each member of the household over the age of 12, a letter thanking the participants in advance of the survey, and a cash premium for each participant. Each diary is stamped and pre-addressed for quick, effortless return to Arbitron.

The 'Hispanic Radio Package' consists of: one bilingual diary for each member of the household over the age of 12, a bilingual letter thanking the participants in advance of the survey, and a cash premium for each participant.





Potential survey participants receive a pre-placement letter from The Arbitron Company that explains who and what the company is all about and informs the participant that one of Arbitron's interviewers will be calling in the near future. This introductory letter also serves to legitimize the survey, by explaining that Arbitron is not trying to sell anything and by encouraging skeptical households to contact their local business information service to "check us out."

There are over a half billion Radios in the United States today. Like Radio, the Arbitron Radio diary is completely portable and can be filled out anywhere that you listen to the Radio, whether it be in the kitchen, preparing a light dinner or at your desk anticipating a long night with just your PC and Radio for companionship.



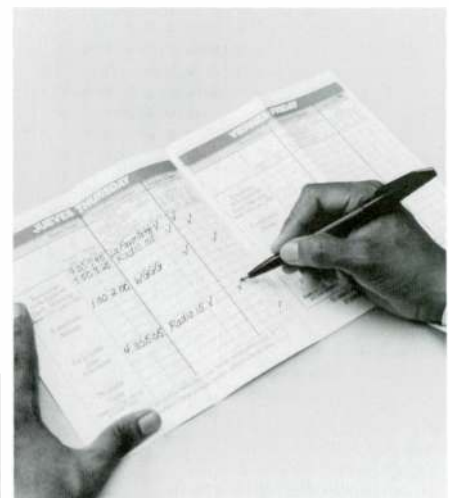
Completely portable, Arbitron's diary can go anywhere you and your Radio can. Statistics show that 75 percent of all Radio listening takes place away from home. Your Arbitron diary can come with you on a boat or to the beach. We do, however, draw the line at shower stalls with water-proof Radios.



Four percent of all Radios are located in the work environment. Arbitron's compact diary is easy to complete, even in the midst of a busy office. To accommodate the 58 percent of adult listeners who listen to the Radio in the office, Arbitron's diary is unobtrusive and takes just seconds to fill out.



For the 90 percent of adult listeners who tune in to Radio while in their cars or trucks, Arbitron's user-friendly diary is convenient enough to be filled out even on the longest road trips.



Survey participants jot down what station they've tuned in, how long they've listened, where they are at the time and whether the station is on the AM or FM band for each diary entry.



At the end of the survey week, Arbitron survey participants check that all the appropriate information is included and simply seal the self-closing, pre-stamped diary and drop it in the nearest postal box. Over 90 percent of those diaries tabulated by Arbitron are returned by the sixth day after the completion of the survey week.



With a successful diary return rate of 51 percent, Arbitron diaries arrive by the crateful to the company's Beltsville, MD, facility where they are hand-sorted by county and pre-designated market groups.

Errors or clarifications are clearly marked in red ink by the Arbitron editors so the data entry specialists can note any adjustment or correction made to the diary to assure that only the correct information is entered into the system.

Seventy-six percent of all stations are correctly identified by station call letters. In Arbitron's special edit area, the remaining 24 percent of diaries with specific station identification problems are sorted, and exact frequencies, slogans or numeric entries are credited to the proper station and are re-entered by station call letter. Ten percent of the diaries in "special edit" have call letters as well as the station's frequency or slogan, three percent list just the frequency and another 10 percent just a slogan. The remaining one percent are labeled by program, personality or sporting event.



Arbitron's general editing staff checks diaries to assure that they are, first and foremost, complete, and that proper Arbitron dayparts are matched with the time of day that the respondent listened to the Radio. Also, chronology of time are checked at this stage.

At the data entry level, those diaries that are considered suitable for tabulation, (roughly 85 percent of all diaries returned to Arbitron can be tabulated) are keyed into the system to be processed by Arbitron's mainframe computer that generates the final Local Market Report.



Data entry specialists carefully review each diary to assure that only the correct information is included in Arbitron's main database.




Arbitron's mainframe computer in the Virginia Manor, MD, facility tallies the audience estimates that are collected from the Radio diaries.

Once Arbitron's computer produces a master copy of each Local Market Report, the copies are sent to printers to mass produce them. The Local Market Reports are produced outside due to the enormous number of books sent out to Arbitron clients and sales staff.



Arbitron's mailing center in Virginia Manor, MD, coordinates orders and packs the actual Local Market Reports for shipping directly to subscribers.



Once the "books" are mailed to subscribers, Arbitron clients are invited to the Client Service Department in Laurel, MD, to personally review the actual diaries used to make out their Local Market Report. In 1989, 1,556 Radio stations took advantage of this unique Arbitron plus. 

I'm An Arbitron Radio Diary

I am an Arbitron Radio diary. I won't be wearing a red carnation when I arrive at your home, but as diaries go, I am a handsome and easily-identifiable specimen.

Each week of the survey I am a different color and on my cover, the specific week of the survey is listed. My folded up size is 3 1/2 inches by 7 3/4 inches, that's about letter size. So, folded up, I fit easily into a pocket or a pocketbook. Just like Radio, I am both personal and portable.

On my inside I have simply written directions. These instructions are prepared for a sixth grade reading level. There are seven pages, one for each day of the week. Each survey starts on Thursday and ends on Wednesday. I ask these few simple questions on each day's page: Did you hear a Radio today? If you did, what station was it tuned to? Was it AM or FM? What time did you begin listening? What time did you stop? And, finally, where were you when you were listening (at home, in a car, at work, or anywhere else)?

On the last page I ask how old or young you are (we won't tell anyone else), whether you are male or female, where you live, and whether you work outside your home. I also provide a space to write your opinion about Radio. Anything you'd like to tell us can be of use to our clients.

