

GOODBYE, DEMOGRAPHICS

Multimedia Qualitative Data Define Future Use Of Media

By Bill Engel

FM radio's mid-'70s emergence as a viable mass medium brought a revolution greater than the one heralded by TV's introduction in the early '50s. Almost overnight, most markets saw the number of competitive stations double. In retrospect, the fragmented radio audience revolution was a forerunner to the '90s and media's future.

What was once the age of mass media has given way to a period of "micromedia." Both print and television are experiencing a revolution of greater choices and narrower targeting. What does the future hold for media choice? Let's examine some radio history for a look into the twentieth century's closing act — an act we could title, "New Dimensions In Media Evaluation."

According to George Armstrong, co-founder of Storz Broadcasting and a leader of the independent radio revolution in the post-TV era: "Radio became largely a local medium to combat the loss of network revenue." It's no surprise that both network TV and forms of mass media print have seen some national dollar erosion during these early stages of micromedia.

Radio has struggled during the past 15 years, with varying amounts of success, to better quantify the medium's dimensions.

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Westinghouse Group W's pioneering use of radio's reach and frequency as a selling technique in 1968 helped define the medium in terms other than a multiple impressions vehicle. But just as planners became comfortable using the medium for strategies that required market reach



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(cume), along came the FM explosion. Fragmentation — a description that doesn't fit the concept of market reach — caused more havoc than TV's introduction ever did.

The '70s and early '80s were dominated by large broadcast groups which employed consultants to build huge market shares. The mid- to late '80s saw greater ratings parity as new and stronger broadcast groups emerged to challenge existing powerhouse stations. One buyer in Los Angeles recently asked, "What do I do now that everybody has a two share?"

Reach, Frequency Decisions

How do you define the radio medium? It's reach-capable if you buy the right combination of stations. It's frequency-capable if you buy the right combination of stations. It segments the market if you buy the right combination of stations. Let's take them one at a time.

Greater segmentation has meant more cross-station duplication as listeners continue to tune in to more than two stations per week, on average. This

clustering of relatively similar stations allows frequency impact when the stations are paired in a tactical sense.

At the same time, the clustering properties that aid the building of frequency can be reversed. The pairing of two or more dissimilar stations will build target-market reach. The strategy of balancing clusters of duplicators with clusters of dissimilar stations can achieve the impact of a solid schedule frequency combined with an acceptable target-market reach.

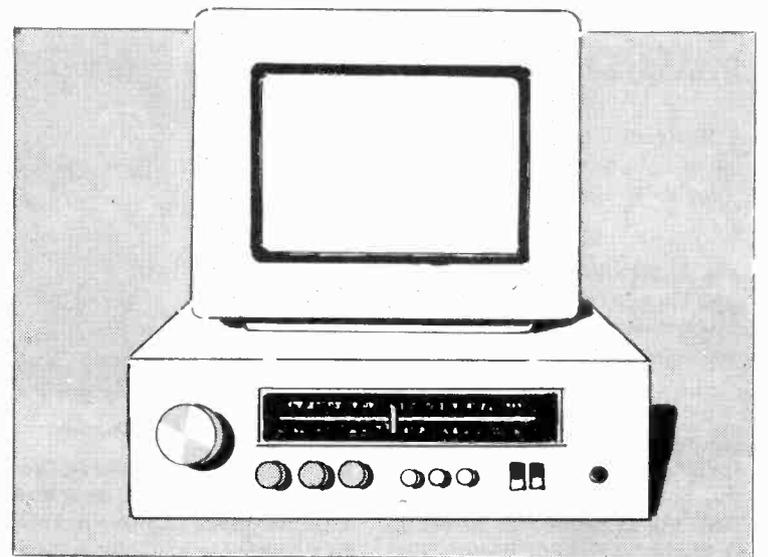
While the strategic uses of the medium are clear, it's in attempting to imple-

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ment those strategies that users flirt with nervous breakdown. Where quantitative estimates were once enough, the complex media strategies of the '90s defy classic age/sex descriptors.

In "The Clustering Of America," Michael Weiss devotes a whole chapter to "The Myth Of The Average American." He writes: "In the last generation, American culture has become in-megatrend process that noted author and lecturer John Naisbitt calls decentralization. The mass market has split apart, shatter-

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ed by such shifting demographics as double incomes and divorce rates."

Quantitative estimates were fine in the days of concentrated lifestyle groups within narrow sex/age demographics. But, says Bob Galen, former Director/Research of Blair Radio and the RAB, "Today . . . 25-54 in most households is a family reunion."

Incorporating Segmentation Stats

The segmentation of radio has brought with it an explosion of information in the form of extended demos, product usage, retail shopping data, and cross-station duplication. While this audience segmentation information has been available on a syndicated basis for the past five years, few had incorporated the data into their media plans before this year.

Available only in printed form until recently, the sheer volume of qualitative information prevented its regular use within media plans. The emergence of microcomputer systems for qualitative audience data in late '89 has opened the data to systematic usage as a regular part of a radio strategy. These sophisticated delivery systems enable a planner or buyer to evaluate multidimensional radio strategies and tactics, test reach/frequency hypotheses, and create buys that use both quantitative and qualitative data.

Multiple station reach and frequency against proposed schedules are now possible against high-income owners of foreign cars who live in a specific set of zip codes and have a propensity to shop at Neiman-Marcus.

While radio has pioneered the use of qualitative data to carve out market niches, the same data is available for newspapers, TV, and certain national magazines. The strategies developed to use the fragmented radio medium to its

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best advantage can — and will — be used to deliver target-specific markets for both print and TV/cable. Microcomputers' delivery of multimedia databases already allows cross-media comparison and scheduling. As demand grows, so will the complexity and variety of the systems.

We have learned much from our use of radio over the years. It's now time to apply those strategies to each other medium individually, and all media collectively, with respect to target delivery. As Weiss says, "In their effort to reduce the nation to an average American household, market researchers have whittled away the variables that truly define the American character . . . the statistical average is often a vacant place in space."

Say goodbye to demographics — and hello to multimedia qualitative data in the new age of micromedia!

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