News

August 19, 2007

New Approach to Media Buys Could Correct Under-Delivery of Young Demos

Reaching Out Beyond TV Screen

By Mark Dominiak, Special to *TelevisionWeek*

Not that long ago, a common television planning practice was to assess the delivery of national buys across spot markets and fill in underachieving markets with spot heavy-ups.

That practice was especially important for markets that had high brand development but were underserved by network or syndicated impressions. Cable buys could complicate matters even more.

As an interesting comparison, planning groups have rarely considered assessing under-delivery from the perspective of demographics, a planning parameter that may be more important than geography. Under-delivery across age breaks can become a real problem, especially if the desired target happens to include younger demographics. Under-delivery across a demo also can underscore a much larger issue, which is the declining relevance of the old television paradigm to key demographics.

Younger vs. Older

Planners will readily acknowledge conventional TV impression delivery tends to skew to upper ages of demographic breaks. Yet it's a rare occasion for a planning group to conduct a pointed audit of impression delivery across the demo to determine real proportions of delivery. Most planning groups seem to accept that if a planning target has a younger skew, the buying target also should skew younger, ensuring appropriate delivery of younger demos. That simple fix unfortunately does not readily solve the problem.

For example, say you have a brand with an average consumer around age 38 or 40. Perhaps it's a new technology brand or even something like an entertainment property. While something like a 25 to 54 demo places the average target consumer near the middle of the age break, you know the buy probably will skew older instead of younger. Therefore, to ensure solid delivery of the younger end of the demo, you instead opt to buy 18 to 49.

That logic seems to make good sense. If 18- to 24-year-olds are included in the buy, it is assumed that doing so will cut down the presence of consumers 55-plus in the delivery and place the brand's messages in programming that has a younger feel more consistent with the technology or entertainment brand. It seems like the mission has been accomplished.

However, if an impressions audit of even an 18-49 buy is conducted, it will invariably show dramatic under-delivery of the younger portion of the demo and a very skewed over-delivery of the older portion of the demo. In an impression audit, it is not uncommon to see 18 to 24s index at less than 50 and 25 to 34s index under 75. Surprisingly, even with a skew to 18 to 49, it is not unlikely that the 65-plus demo will index at more than a 250 when a buy is analyzed.

This can present problems both in managing client expectations and in executing a plan with the level of integrity intended. A client who has become accustomed to certain delivery levels of a demo like 18-49 can become a bit jumpy when presented with a new reality that markedly reduces TV ratings points or impressions. They can become more edgy when they realize the cost per point has increased, fostering an idea that they may be receiving less for their dollar even though the fewer impressions are in much more effectively reached key demos.

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Further, even fastidious crafting of the buy can't fix the problem entirely. Employing smart, well-targeted youthful networks like The CW, Fox, MTV and Comedy Central or options like late night, syndication or weekend only closes the gap. Delivery across the demo will start to even out, but overall impressions still will favor the older end of the age spectrum.

Changing Video Rituals

Acceptance of the under-delivery phenomenon underscores a much deeper reality that needs to be actively embraced by planners; Namely, the old television viewing paradigm has little relevance for younger generations who are creating their own video viewing rituals. A number of solid insights from Deloitte's 2007 Media Democracy Survey bear this out.

Deloitte classifies younger generations as Millennials (Trailing 13 to 18 and Leading 19 to 24) and Generation X (25 to 41). Older generations of Boomers (42 to 60) and Matures (61 to 75) complete the universe. Covered in Deloitte's study are areas concerning multitasking, DVR attitudes and commercial behaviors.

Millennials and Gen Xers cite themselves as highly developed multitaskers. Millennials claim they engage in 5.6 activities while watching TV, a level 56 percent higher than Matures and 40 percent higher than Boomers. Reading, writing and sending e-mails along with talking to others on cell phones are among the highest Millennial and Xer multitasking activities. In some of those areas, Millennials may be as much as twice as likely as Matures or Boomers to engage in those behaviors.

Xers lead all generations in DVR penetration, with Millennials not far behind. Of those young DVR owners, 59 percent of Millennials and 73 percent of Xers report at least half of their viewing as coming from the DVR, well in excess of Matures and, to a slightly lesser degree, of Boomers. Not surprisingly, one of the leading best uses for DVRs as cited by younger viewers is the ability to skip commercials: 61 percent/63 percent for Millennials/Xers versus 54 percent/38 percent for Boomers and Matures.

Non-DVR younger users are more likely to flip channels to avoid commercials than their older counterparts. Further, Xers especially are more likely to fast-forward through commercials on other devices such as VCRs. When commercials are actually on, the younger viewers are less likely to watch and listen to the content than are older viewers.

Deloitte's data demonstrates that younger viewers don't much care for the paradigm of waiting until a television program airs and docilely viewing it from beginning to end. They are more inclined to view what they want when they want without anything they consider superfluous getting in the way.

In that light, concepts like making up for under-delivery of a network television schedule become far less critical than simply finding valuable viewing occasions and leveraging them accordingly.

Planning Implications

1. Television plans need to become video plans. The old paradigm of buy nationally and tweak to compensate for deficiencies is fading. National television should still be a solid foundation of most plans, augmented liberally with target-relevant non-network video components, even more so as the core target demo is younger. Non-network components such as online, mobile and cinema are highly relevant.

According to Deloitte, 34 percent of Millennials and 28 percent of Xers frequently or occasionally watch TV shows online. Further, 48 percent and 52 percent will visit TV show Web sites, presumably for additional information or content.

Mobile video content should be considered a viable option. Forty-six percent of Millennials and 29 percent of Xers use their cell phones as an entertainment device. A similar 46 percent/35 percent frequently or occasionally use digital video features on their phones. From Internet connections over the cell, 29 percent/14 percent of Millennials and Xers watch videos. As devices evolve and content offerings expand, these usage numbers are likely to increase.

Cinemas also should be viewed as a video channel. In-theater ads have the benefits of a captive audience and larger-than-life context for a message. Beyond that, one doesn't need to go much further than multimedia research to determine that a significant majority of rabid first-week and overall moviegoers belong to younger demos. Tailoring of efforts to particular markets or even chains may be possible.

2. Video content is important to young demos. Just because conventional over-the-air video seems passé to younger generations, that doesn't mean television content isn't important. Intriguingly, Millennials and Xers use their favorite shows or promising new shows as a way of building relationships with those around them. Discussion of content is a strong social currency. Favorite shows are discussed by more than 80 percent of Millennials and Xers, who will recommend content they enjoy to almost 18 other people, almost twice the average rate.

Millennials and Xers are in fact so particular when it comes to video that they want even better options and control than is now available. A whopping 64 percent/52 percent would like to connect their TVs to the Internet and manipulate content. And 53 percent/43 percent would download even more video for viewing if only speeds were faster.

3. Hit them across a platform. Favorite content is consumed across a variety of platforms. Younger demos will surf and talk on the cell and discuss online while viewing shows. Why not take advantage of potential synergy benefits by having brand messages prepared to meet viewers as they hop from delivery platform to delivery platform? Perhaps message elements can be designed to move viewers from one platform to the next.

Video viewing habits are rapidly evolving away from conventional national TV paradigms. Younger demos, an increasingly critical target for many brands, are leading the charge and disproportionately forging new paths in their viewing rituals. It is incumbent upon planners to understand those new video rituals and deliver impressions to the best contact points accordingly.

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Posted on August 19, 2007 9:00 PM | Permalink

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