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## Get Them Before Bed, After Rising

Early Morning and Late-Night are Effective, Often Overlooked Dayparts

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Special to TelevisionWeek

Media planners are always looking to build innovations into their plans to better connect with target consumers. These days most planners are looking to new technology or media forms for that innovative silver bullet.

But sometimes innovations that help deliver messages to consumers in substantive ways can spring from surprisingly mundane places.

Two television dayparts often considered as afterthoughts can serve as opportunities for innovation in the mundane. Those dayparts are early morning and late fringe. With so much emphasis on prime time, sports, hot cable properties and streaming Web video, early morning and late fringe may be Rodney Dangerfields when it comes to getting respect, but in their own right

can offer wonderful avenues in which to implement innovation in media plans.

Here are three sources of evidence of untapped efficacy in early morning and late fringe and by extension, their potential for innovation:

- MRI data
- Qualitative consumer conversations
- Nielsen minute-by-minute ratings

## **MRI Data**

Have you ever gone through the exercise of running an MRI crosstab against your target, assessed the television dayparts included in the run and realized that just about every daypart had an index of under 100? How many were far below 100?

One thing that usually does become evident, and even more so when targets like busy parents or active young people are assessed, is that early morning and late fringe often will have the highest indices of the spectrum, on many occasions cracking the 100 index mark. In spot dayparts, late news performs similarly.

Leno, Letterman, Kimmel and Conan, along with "Today" and "Good Morning America," all invariably have indices over 100, sometimes above 110 or much higher. Weekend programming also consistently will show favorable skews.

If MRI suggests that television dayparts as a whole tend to underperform but these programs with some consistency buck the trend, it also suggests that there must be some rationale for why.

## **Consumer Conversations**

Talking with consumers during qualitative research interactions provides a good deal of insight as to why early morning and late fringe provide opportunities. Whether research straightforwardly asks consumers about behavior or whether learning comes from exercises like having consumers map out a day's or week's worth of media activities, there are consistent patterns of behavior that result for busy people. There's no magic insight here, just good old-fashioned logic.

When the target happens to include people with a lot on their plates, they in fact do recount the hectic breadth of activities in which they participate. As such, they don't have as much time available to drop down in front of the television and take in an hour or two of programming. Returning home from work or errands in the evening means that dayparts from day through early fringe don't hold much opportunity.

Busy people will start to demonstrate television behaviors during prime access, and it may appear that the opportunity to reach them begins there. However, television at that point is really a backdrop to dinner or chores. It is not the focal point of attention. Cooking, mail, homework, household chores and the like take up far too much consumer attention for television to be a priority.

As chores are completed or children are put to bed, consumers will talk about the television becoming more of a focal point than a backdrop, but the transition doesn't substantively happen until around the last hour of prime time. That tends to be when the feet go up and consumers can really divest themselves from the concerns of the day and actually try to enjoy a bit of entertainment.

While some consumers opt for bed around this time or shortly after prime, many will stay with the television through the news and into late-night. In fact, the more qualitative conversations you have over the years, you'll realize many consumers talk about the news and Letterman or Leno almost ritualistically.

The first hours of the morning are somewhat similar, but in a sort of a reverse of the night time behavior. As consumers shake themselves out of sleep, early-morning programming often provides the grounding they need at the start of their day. As their minds awaken and the day's needs press in, the television moves from a focal point to the background.

### **Minute-by-Minute Tracking**

If your agency has this data and you've ever had a chance to see the minute-by-minute ratings for programming, there is consistency in the raw data with what is reported in MRI and what consumers tend to recount in person. For example, prime time more often than not builds literally by minute until it peaks approaching or within the last hour of prime. Consumers come to the screen in greater numbers as the evening progresses.

There do tend to be drop-offs after the end of prime, but by and large, late-fringe minute-by-minute ratings remain respectable until about 45 minutes after late news, when they start dropping like a stone.

Why is this important?

The smaller ratings in early morning and late fringe may, along with the programming choices available, not seem to be all that exciting for your brand, but there is one very good reason to buy into the insight of this data and think about using these two dayparts. At the end of the day and at the beginning of the day, the minds and attention of consumers are likely to be less fragmented than they are at all of the aperture points between.

At the beginning of the day, all of the tasks to be done and items to be remembered have not yet started to exert their stress on the consumer's mind or body. If the consumer's mind is not yet encumbered by the demands of the day, it stands to reason that the environment may have more possibilities for engagement.

During the late-news and late-fringe time periods, the demands of the day may have been largely dealt with and put aside for tomorrow or dispensed with altogether. If that is the case, the opportunity to more directly engage the consumer's mind may be better than at other times of the day.

Another opportunity that exists as an outgrowth of this environment is described by the "last in, first out" principle. If you just make it into a busy subway car before the door closes, you'll have a chance to be the first one out when the door opens. A message delivered at the end of the day, when the mind's burdens are being shed, may have a better likelihood of sticking in the consumer's mind than one delivered four hours earlier. It also possibly stands a better likelihood of being remembered upon waking in the morning. McDonald's has successfully promoted breakfast specials in the late-fringe daypart for years.

Here are some closing thoughts that might be helpful in leveraging these dayparts into innovative ideas for your brand.

Early morning and late fringe have a cost advantage over prime time and sports. As such, a really quality idea in either daypart will not eat up resources faster than you can blink. Doesn't it kill you to have a great idea, implement it in prime time and then, poof, it's gone? There is a good chance an idea can be executed multiple times in a week, month or year in early morning or late fringe for the same dollars that would evaporate in the more expensive dayparts. Further, if you decide to engineer the idea to be executed over time, you will be able to take advantage of both reach build and frequency.

The Monday-thru-Friday strip nature of programming within the dayparts is another aspect that could be used to innovative advantage. Because many viewers return to the same programming multiple times weekly, an idea can take advantage of those multiple exposure opportunities. That's something that can't be done with prime time or sports. As a planner, you don't really know where prime-time viewers will be tomorrow. You may have to wait for next week's episode for a relatively sure exposure opportunity.

In a way, these dayparts have that kind of "Back to the Future" karma. Product integration is a hot topic again and when you consider that platforms like "The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson" used to be masters of product integration years ago, there's

no reason they couldn't provide such opportunities again.

Humorously, a recent episode of NBC's "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip" wove this very notion into the plot. Profitability needs drove the show to figure out a way to creatively weave in product integration. The solution involved revising a cityscape backdrop to incorporate sponsor billboards on the skyline. Doesn't it make you wonder whether any current properties are facing that reality? If your product fits into the environment, maybe it's worth a phone call to your rep.

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