

Frequency with PPM

Hi Roy,

I'm sure that you receive this question often, but I didn't find your personal response to it online. How do you believe the reduction in frequency realized through the implementation of PPM should affect media planning? The obvious response is that PPM derives a more accurate measure of TSL, and therefore these "new" metrics should now be the benchmark...but what does that say about the "old" 3.0 frequency? Previous studies showed the "old 3.0" was effective. In the end, the PPM 3.0 is clearly a safe bet for results...but the question is whether old schedules, previously deemed effective, should be shifted to reduce reach and increase frequency...and whether that change will further enhance results or not.

Thank You!

Ashley Alexandra Testa

Ashley, you ask a good question.

For those who aren't completely up-to-speed on Arbitron's new Portable People Meter (PPM) technology, here are the basics:

1. Arbitron respondents now carry a device that knows which stations they're *actually* listening to, not just the ones they *think* they're listening to.
2. This means your station gets credit for *actual* listening time rather than just how well your programming staff drives home your station IDs.
3. Consequently, lots of "favorite" radio stations are being revealed to have smaller audiences than was previously believed, while lots of second and third-favorite stations are finally able to prove what they've always known: listeners were listening to their stations and then reporting they were listening to the "brand name" leader.
4. The average person listens to a larger number of different stations than they realize.
5. This makes it harder than ever to achieve frequency.

Now back to Ashley's question, which was, effectively, "Since PPM reveals the schedule that yielded a diary-based 3.0 frequency yesterday yields only a 2.5 today when measured with PPM, should we start targeting a 2.5 frequency instead of 3.0?"

The short answer would be "Yes" if short answers weren't so dangerous. Our dilemma lies in the premise stated in your note: "In the end, the PPM 3.0 is clearly a safe bet for results..."

A 3.0 frequency is not, and never was, a safe bet.

Results in radio are based on three things: (1.) Relevance. Does the listener care? And if so, how much? (2.) Credibility. Does the listener believe the claims made by the advertiser? (3.) Repetition. (Frequency) How often is the listener exposed to this message?

Relevance without credibility is the definition of hype. Credibility without relevance is the answer to a question no one was asking. A message with high relevance and high credibility for a product or service with a short purchase cycle is the perfect Direct Response ad. For such an ad, a frequency of 1.0 will work just fine.

Insufficient frequency will definitely kill a radio campaign. But radio people often blame poor results on insufficient frequency, saying, “The advertiser just didn't spend enough money,” when the real problem was in the ad copy: it had low relevance or low credibility or both.

Here's another problem with that sacred 3.0 frequency: Is a 3.0 spread over a month the same as a 3.0 delivered in 1 week? How about a 3.0 delivered in just 1 day?

Again, a short answer: The less sleep between repetitions, the better. Sleep erases advertising. But when relevance and credibility are sufficient, depth of memory goes to the message given the highest repetition within the fewest nights sleep.

The “old rule” of a 3.0 was simply this: “The *average* message must be heard by the same listener at least 3 times within 7 night's sleep to give that message any chance of being remembered.”

Generally speaking, the shorter the product purchase cycle, the sooner the ads will start working. The longer the purchase cycle, the longer it takes for the ad campaign to gain traction.

High-impact ads for products with short purchase cycles work less and less well the longer you air them. Memorable ads for products with long purchase cycles work better and better the longer you air them.

If you want to have a lot of fun in radio, write high-impact ads for products and events with very short purchase cycles. Talk loud and draw a crowd. Advertisers will treat you like a rock star.

But if you want to make a lot of money selling radio, I mean a real fortune, write memorable ads for advertisers who have long purchase cycles. Tell these advertisers the truth: the same listener needs to hear the ad roughly 3 times a week, 52 weeks a year for the advertiser to become a household word. The technical term used by cognitive neuroscientists for the process of creating involuntary, automatic recall of an advertiser is to move the message from short-term, electrical “working memory” to mid-term “declarative memory” and then finally on to long-term, chemical, involuntary “procedural memory.” This takes time and repetition *but it's most easily accomplished using sound*. Radio and television work best.

Create procedural memory and the listener will automatically think of you when they finally need what you sell. Better yet, they'll think of you when any of the 250 people in their personal 'realm of association' need what you sell. Procedural memory is the basis of word-of-mouth.

Bottom line: It's okay to use a PPM 2.5 frequency as "the new 3.0" if you understand that frequency is just one, small reference point in a highly complex equation. The bigger question is whether the advertiser will achieve this frequency with enough consistency for it to become permanent, procedural memory. Consistency is the frequency of the frequency. Does the advertiser have a long-term plan, or are they just "testing the waters?"

Find yourself some advertisers who have the courage and patience of their convictions. Partner with these people. Together, you can take over the world.

Good luck, Ashley.

Roy H. Williams