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Focus Keeps Targeting's Aim True

Planners Can Significantly Impact Communication Plans by Ensuring That Audience Meets Marketing Definition

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In today's world of fragmented brands and media, the most important decision a planner makes is choosing the target against which the media plan should be directed. From that decision, every other aspect of the media plan is eventually determined: media mix, weight levels, timing, market selection, et al.

Many would argue that media planners have no influence on the determination of target, and that the target has already been set further up the advertising food chain by the brand's marketing or account team.

When the planning team enters the process, it will be given target direction as part of a briefing.

But from a planner's perspective, no direction should be taken at face value. The likelihood is that targets established by others prior to the media planning process do not give the planners a solid enough foundation from which to establish media strategy. The situation presents a tremendous opportunity for planners to positively impact the communication plan.

Avoid Initial Traps

Taking advantage of the opportunity starts with being sensitive to and navigating around inappropriate initial direction. The target is typically communicated as "users of Brand X" or "users of Brand X's category" or some broad demographic user description.

The communication team's expectation is that planners will go to MRI, place brand, category or demographic user descriptions into columns and do behavioral dump runs against them.

Runs will be analyzed and best-skewing media behaviors will be included in the consideration set for planning.

While this expectation may be understandable, it's a trap. First, a broadly defined target of "users" won't mesh well with desired marketing objectives. Second, it assumes all users are created equal. They are not.

Therefore, if planners opt to fulfill team expectations based on broad user definitions, the brand will end up shortchanged on potential marketplace impact. There are two keys to avoiding traps and unleashing media potential:

- Better mesh target definition with the brand's marketing objective

- Strive for target focus; eschew generic user profiles

Identifying Real Intentions

Planners need to approach the targeting exercise with a marketing mind-set first, applying media thinking later. The best course of action is to dig into objectives and gain a powerful understanding of what the advertising really intends to accomplish. That understanding will lead to clarity in target selection.

Not all users of a brand or category will be influenced in the same way by messaging designed to prompt particular consumer responses. Targeting user segments more open to the crafted message, rather than users in general, will increase the chances of marketplace success.

User Behavior

A broad spectrum of behaviors can be found among common users of a brand or category. Of those behaviors, the best insight for planning can come from analyzing:

- User relationships to the brand/category

- User consumption behaviors

- Geographic skews of user populations

Relationship to Brand

A quick look at the Encarta definition for "relationship" gives a sense of why connections between users and brands are an important consideration in a targeting exercise: "The connection between two or more people or groups and their involvement

with each other, especially as regards how they behave and feel toward each other and communicate or cooperate."

Put simply, not all brand users feel the same about the brand as any other brand user. In human interactions, our relationships run the gamut from acquaintances to loyal ties. So too do we have relationships with brands.

Some brands are nothing more than transactional need fillers. Others are part of rituals. Among common users of a brand, user relationships to the brand can vary dramatically and should greatly influence how a planner designs a media plan to meet marketing goals.

If increasing brand awareness is the goal, does it make sense to target all users, including highly loyal users, in the plan target? Loyal brand users already demonstrate great awareness. Why waste impressions if awareness among them has already been accomplished? One could argue it's important to maintain good will with loyal users and therefore those impressions are important. Then the plan should attack two objectives, increasing awareness and maintaining good will.

If the goal is truly to increase awareness, nonloyal consumers need to be the plan focus and loyal users must be excluded from analytic work. Why? It is possible that behavioral quirks endemic to less loyal users might be masked by loyal user behaviors if all users are lumped together during consideration. When superfluous target segments are eliminated from analysis, robust core target insights are more likely to be uncovered.

Learning on user/brand relationships can be obtained from qualitative research the team should have on hand from the account planning group. If loyal user behaviors become an important planning consideration, much can be learned about consumers' loyalty to media types with a little digging.

For television, MRI asks many attention-level-paid questions at the program level. Planners with access to deeper levels of Nielsen data or SRI can also uncover a wealth of loyalty behavior data for dayparts and programs.

Digging Into Volumetrics

Differentiating users based on brand consumption is basically the 80 percent/20 percent rule in action. The majority of volume comes from relatively few, loyal users, while relatively little brand volume comes from many transactional users. Volume visualized is the inverse of user population, with brand relationship links stronger at the top and weaker on the bottom.

But any data is not as cut and dried as all that, especially when one digs deeper into lighter brand-user information. As would be suspected, the lighter user pool (the 80 percent) is so large that there are typically many differences among them as well, the chief difference being category involvement.

A given brand's user may be relatively disloyal to the brand, but very active in the category. If the user is active in the category, why? It may be that they are loyal to a competitive brand or that the user jumps between brands frequently in the category based on price or other considerations (i.e. "switchers"). In either case, this category of users may be an opportunity target for the brand because they represent a potential source of volume.

On the other hand, the brand's user may demonstrate rare consumption occasions simply because he or she happens to be an infrequent category user. This user may not be a good prospect because of poor volume potential.

Whatever the level of brand loyalty or category involvement, understanding which user is the focus of the effort is important, because the different characteristics and behaviors that drive them will likely translate to a unique array of media behaviors as well.

Volumetric data becomes the source from which planners identify these user segments. MRI data can be extracted to determine brand/category users, sources and magnitude of volume. Thoughtful crafting of cross-tabs will enable a planner to lay out possible user segments by other types of behaviors, including other brand/category usage and media habits, including television dayparts and programming and demographics.

Geography Matters

The final behavioral characteristic to consider is residential. Where do the possible targets for the brand's communication effort live? Planners are well versed in the metrics that can help identify potential target geographies. For current users, it's brand development index, or BDI. It's expressed as the market's percent of total brand users divided by the market's percent of aggregate population. For category users, it's CDI, using the category's percent of users divided by the market's aggregate population.

Here again, the problem of "not all users are alike" crops up. It's possible that a range of user types exists in any market, so care should be taken not to jump to conclusions. For example, a market may have a lousy BDI, but upon micro-review, something like PRIZM data may highlight pockets of very productive geography imbedded in the overall poor market. With tactics like cable headend targeting available, it may be unwise to write off geographies out of hand based on the more generic metrics.

Also, planners should ask about any underlying reasons for particular development results. Is there full distribution in all markets? Did a competitor depart from a market? Planners should feel comfortable asking as many questions as is practical for the circumstance.

Broadening the Pond

How can planners take insights gained from marketing goals, brand relationships, volumetrics and geography and merge them all together to determine the best direction for a media target? One good tool planners can use to help identify best targets is called the 2X2. It's a tool made popular by Ram Charan and Noel Tichy and featured in their 1998 book "Every Business Is a Growth Business: How Your Business Can Prosper Year After Year."

The 2X2 is a simple quadrant using axes of needs and users, segmented by universes of existing and new.

The power of the tool is that it encourages a marketer to find sources of volume growth by outwardly identifying consumer needs a brand's current or future offerings might fulfill, not by inwardly seeking ways to gain share points. The tool is easily applicable to media planning's target exercise as well.

A classic 2X2 example Mr. Charan and Mr. Tichy cite in their book is that of Coca-Cola's volume growth revelation from the '80s. In short, Coke was falling into the trap of focusing on tiny share increases in a mature market (constantly focusing on category users). Not until Roberto Goizueta, the new CEO at the time, asked, "What is the per capita rate of global fluid consumption?" did Coke experience a paradigm shift.

The answer was 64 ounces. Coke's global per capita consumption was only 2 ounces, a global fluids share of around 3 percent. In a mature domestic soft drink market, there's not much room to "broaden the pond," as Mr. Charan and Mr. Tichy put it, even for a category powerhouse like Coke. But redefining the nature of their pond, total global fluids versus U.S. domestic soft drinks, opportunities for volume growth became easier for Coke to envision.

The 2X2 is an excellent tool to help facilitate this type of visioning exercise. It provides balance to traditional targeting exercises by focusing more on consumers and needs then on current volume (the mature pond) and competitive volume sources.

It's easy to imagine how the other areas of target learning can be overlaid with the simple notion of a 2X2 to provide a complete view of the targeting exercise, meaning:

- Draw in the initial brand pond.

- Add in an arrow representing the intended goal of the communication effort to demonstrate in which direction the pond broadening will occur.

- Write in the possible target groups existing in the areas traversed by the communication effort arrow.

- Include volume potential for each of the target groups.

- Finally, lay in any important geographic or expansion considerations.

The budget might not be large enough to cover all potential target directions. Which groups represent the best potential? Prioritize, or recommend attacking as many as the messaging can appropriately influence.

In setting target direction for media efforts, planners should never accept direction as given. They should take a step back, immerse themselves in target-relevant marketing and behavioral information and apply insights gained to establish a focused target definition. Focused targets are key to achieving media plan innovation and marketplace productivity.•

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