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## Map Behavior for Brand Messaging

**Dig Deep, Be Enterprising With Research Resources to Form a True Picture of a Target's Traits, Preferences**

By Mark Dominiak

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Story continues below...



Two weeks ago we discussed in this column the importance of being diligent in establishing a focused target as a foundation for the media planning process. But as important as target diligence is, it is still only the first step of a process commanding yet more attentiveness from the planning team in subsequent steps along the line.

After a focused target has been established, the planning process begins in earnest. The next phase can be referred to as behavioral mapping. In this phase, media planners endeavor to paint as accurate a picture of target behaviors as possible to find the best communications environments available for brand messaging. The most accurate picture requires planners do three things:

- Deeply mine secondary quantitative research resources for behavioral information
- Frame up information in a meaningful way
- Augment secondary data with primary research learning

## **Mining Secondary Data**

We are all familiar with secondary sources that provide quantitative data for media planning:

- Nielsen, primarily for television behaviors
- MRI, for product usage, magazine and many other behaviors
- SRI, for multimedia time spent behaviors

Most media planning professionals are highly skilled at digging into these data sources. It doesn't take much more than a few quick cross-tabs or programming runs to identify properties with high potential for reaching target consumers.

It is important, however, not to jump to conclusions too quickly in identification of best potential media properties. If media planners stop the assessment process after the initial information dig, thinking they've identified the best communication environments, they may miss quite a few other or better opportunities simply because they didn't dig deeply enough.

## **Be Complete**

The key to not missing potential opportunities is to be complete in the data gathering process. Here are a number of additional suggestions for places to look for consumer behavioral insight. Uncovering learning can be as simple as including the additional coding into cross-tab runs.

For television, don't just consider best-skewing programs or networks. Also look at daypart detail, quintile and tercile data.

For radio, don't just look at format. Look at networks, quintiles, dayparts and interactive listening as well.

For magazines, there's plenty of data to pick through. Don't be satisfied with simple title selection. Do a deep dive into other readership characteristics, such as time spent, number of issues read, etc. Get as strong a sense as possible of reader commitment to particular books.

For newspaper, don't just look at quintiles or weekday/ Sunday readership. Also look at Sunday magazines and supplements, and don't forget to include behavioral questions for coupon clipping.

For outdoor, don't stop at quintile information. Dig into data on miles traveled. Also, don't forget about the host of other out-of-home environments that carry advertising that provide messaging opportunities: grocery stores and other retailers such as Wal-Mart or Best Buy, bars or even theme parks such as Six Flags. It's also possible to get a sense of when activities such as grocery visits tend to occur.

Remember to look at movie attendance. How often does the target attend and when? Do they attend opening weekends or later? If you're using MRI, you may be able to look at film genres or titles depending on the study used.

Consider looking at other leisure activities as well—things like attendance at live theater or music events, sporting-event attendance, video-gaming involvement or any other number of activities. While it may seem irrelevant, these environments have great media opportunities to leverage. Playbill, event sponsorship or sampling, arena signage or in-game placement are just a few possibilities to mention.

Finally, use standard mainline quantitative media-research resources only sparingly to get a sense of how consumers interact with the Internet medium. In many respects, the information available to planners on the Internet is more robust and certainly fresher than traditional main-line secondary research. Choose Forester Research, Media Metrix or proprietary interactive behavioral information the brand may already have on hand to paint a truer statistical picture of target consumer Web behavior.

## **A Meaningful Framework**

Skill in mining secondary data sources won't necessarily paint an accurate picture of target consumer behavior in and of itself. Secondary research tells a great deal about what consumers do, but not much about how or why.

To get a sense of the how and why behind target consumer behaviors, planners need to place data gathered into a meaningful framework. One good framework paradigm is the schematic of a weekly behavioral grid. Days of the week are laid out across the top of the chart and times of the day down the left side.

Assume for a moment that a planner has procured the depth of secondary data previously suggested. It's fairly simple to lay out that behavioral data onto the grid in the particular place at which it occurs. As the behavioral grid takes shape, it becomes easier for a planner to identify the most opportunistic environments for media placement.

## **Primary Learning**

The third and final activity in painting the target behavioral picture is obtaining primary research from target consumers. This activity is incredibly important for a number of reasons.

First, while wonderful, the secondary data planners rely on so heavily for consumer insight are inherently flawed, each with its own particular problems.

Nielsen data is tremendously rich, but along with it come realities like button-pushing fatigue, fault rates, DVR measurement questions and seven-day aggregate ratings among others. With MRI, the data is inherently old, survey fatigue may also be an issue and, in the end, data is based on a respondent's perceived behavior as opposed to actual respondent behavior.

Secondly, all of these wonderful secondary research tools look backwards in time, offering a statistically valid but imperfect snapshot of consumer behavior in the media world as it once was.

Finally, the majority of secondary research used by planners to form media strategy are quantitative in nature. They are left-brain biased and provide little insight into the more emotional aspects of consumer behavior.

The reality is that the world is changing at an ever-quickening pace. Marketplace activity is much more dynamic than the mainline data planners use to assess it. Compounding the problem, consumer behavior adapts to the changing marketplace much more quickly than do many media research paradigms.

Media people can fill information gaps, confirm quantitative assumptions, keep current with consumer behavior and gain qualitative insight by forging forward into the brave frontier of primary research. There are two very useful types of primary research media planners should attempt to acquire as part of the planning process.

- Behavioral research, to learn about lifestyle and media habits idiosyncratic to their particular target consumer, both quantitative and qualitatively;
- Accountability research, to benchmark how consumers feel about the brand prior to the media effort, providing the basis from which to later measure whether or not the media effort was effective at meeting its objectives

## All About Context

When done appropriately, primary media research should enlighten the planning team's understanding of how and why target consumers are drawn to particular messaging environments. It is important, therefore, for media planners to design primary research initiatives specifically to uncover insights about media environment context. Well-designed research initiatives will attack two areas:

- What the target consumer's life is like
- How the target consumer uses media

The best way for a media planner to learn about what a target consumer's life is like is to take a lesson from the account planning team: Go out and meet the target in his actual life environment. When planners can interact with the consumer literally where they live, a visceral understanding of what the target really deals with every day can start to be understood. Studies should be geared to meet with consumers in their homes, work environments or other places where significant time is invested.

It is smart to invite a manageable number of peers to join in to the discussion as well. Friends of the focal consumer provide for a larger sample than just one and a discussion environment with more than one person generally prompts deeper sharing and truthful relating of information than when individuals are interviewed alone.

Take a good amount of time beforehand to lay out a discussion guide for upcoming sessions. The focus of discussion should be to understand how life unfolds for the target in the environment the planning team is interested in learning about.

What do you do in the morning? When do you leave home? Where are you typically going? What do you do on the way there? What do you do for a living? What's your workplace like? A media planner should be listening for insights that suggest where opportunities exist to reach through the daily grind and connect messaging to consumers.

Any particular session should be conducted by at least two members of the planning team (two memories are better than one, and having two members also makes it easier to take notes or tape discussions).

Also remember to do an audit parallel to the actual discussion guide. Arrange to arrive at the location beforehand. For example, if discussions are occurring in a home environment, check out what kinds of products and technology are present in the home. If the television is on, what channel is it tuned to? Flash back to the prior channel for more perspective. Request to see which sites are bookmarked on a computer. Are there magazines or newspapers around the home? What are the titles? Where are they found?

If driving, what stations are listened to? Which routes and what type of outdoor is present? In a grocery store, what types of messaging programs are evident?

Observe what goes on in the environment while the discussion is taking place. During one discussion, our team was interviewing two parents and a number of their friends, and Grandma was in the kitchen watching the kids. We could see her from the living room watching "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" with the children while sitting at the family's PC playing along with the program. If Grandma and the kids could multitask, what must the parents be like?

Another good way to understand target consumers in environments is to go to environments endemic to particular brand occasions, maybe walking through airports and talking with road warriors or talking with moms as they go about grocery shopping or day-care routines.

Media planners also should not be afraid to simply strike up conversations with people while out and about. Working in the frozen pizza category years ago, I noticed a cart in the checkout line with literally 20 boxes of the brand I worked on in the cart. Nothing else was in the cart, just the pizza. I struck up a conversation with the couple responsible for the cart and discovered they were in from out of town, didn't have good restaurant pizza back home, had discovered how good my client's brand was and wanted to share the experience with their extended family.

Also take the opportunity the discussion setting provides to specifically ask the respondents about their life behaviors. Have them construct their own versions of weekly behavioral grids. Or try something like pie charts for time spent with different

media. When all the discussion groups are finished, overlay the results with the secondary research map already constructed, carefully looking for behavioral themes that may emerge.

There's also nothing to prevent a planning team from doing primary research to obtain quantitative data. But it's important to marry the research with the context. Ask questions about Internet with Internet surveys. Find out about magazine behaviors with mall intercepts or focus groups where target consumers can see, touch and interact with particular books. Call respondents during dayparts of interest to ask about television behavior. There's a better chance of getting useful information when it's fresh.

When possible, monitor the fielding of the quantitative research. Listen in on phone interviews. With something like mall intercepts, sit behind the mirror if you can. Read any verbatims included in the surveys. Much can be learned from a consumer's verbal tone and manner that cannot be gleaned from tabulated responses.

Once a focused target has been established, it is incumbent upon media planners to appropriately immerse themselves in research to uncover the insights that will lead to strong media strategy. Appropriate immersion goes well beyond quick dives into secondary research.

Planners must take special care to be complete in their assessment of available research, place relevant learning into a meaningful framework and augment secondary learning with primary research as practical to truly ensure that media plan strategy is on the right track to create marketplace impact.

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