

Media Metrics

by Hadassa Gerber, February 2007 issue

Emotional Connections

Consumer engagement is all about connecting with people in settings that allow advertising to break through. Advertising doesn't start out on an equal playing field, nor does it advance on one. Viewers bring their own attitudes and perceptions to the viewing experience; it's part emotional, part rational. As an industry we have become quite adept at measuring the media metrics of reach and ratings, quantitative markers of an advertising exposure. But the opportunity to enhance this exposure lies with qualitative factors that emanate from the viewers themselves.

To better understand what contributions and impact the viewer has on the advertising environment, our team at the Syndicated Network Television Association looked at some of the emotional connections and rational, time-based decisions people make before, during, and after they invest in a program or commercial.

>> **Emotional Buy-In: Associating Commercials with Positive Viewer Emotions.** Beyond program content, each viewer's emotional investment in a program is intertwined with the program's personalities. These personalities imprint the viewing experience and spin program content from straw to gold, weaving the fabric that surrounds the advertising message. Positive emotions make for positive associations.

Dimensionalizing the emotional component of viewer engagement is a complex task. E-Poll, an independent research company, conducts a weekly "E-Score survey" that measures consumer emotions toward more than 3,000 celebrities. Each individual celebrity report has 1,100 respondents and measures 46 different attributes in addition to awareness. For our study, we analyzed the affinity attributes most relevant to engagement, including trust, influence, and self-identification with the celebrity. In order to measure the positive relationship that syndication personalities have with viewers, our analysis compared their scores to E-Score's norms for television.

It comes as no surprise that syndication's TV hosts have tremendous awareness scores. With a daily presence, viewers are on a first-name basis with Oprah, Ellen, Tyra, and Judge Judy. Awareness scores for these hosts are more than double the norms of other television stars.

Trust, influence, and self-identification are areas where syndication's stars demonstrate the deeper connection that they have with viewers. In all major genres of syndication - entertainment news, talk, court shows, sitcoms, and dramas, syndication personalities scored well above average for these key attributes. These favorable scores are embedded in the emotions that viewers bring to their watching and that enhance the advertising message. They attest to syndication's strength in connecting with viewers' positive emotions.

With emotional engagement connections this high, one would expect that there would be a level of transference of the program to the message. A Next Generation Research study found that the average adult syndication audience was 20 percent more likely than all TV viewers to be an "ad receptive product user" for the 189 categories surveyed. In contrast, network television's prime-time audience was 4 percent less likely to be ad receptive product users. With 18 first-run syndicated shows that have been on the air 10 years or more, the emotional bonds that viewers have with syndication's personalities are not transient. Likewise, syndication's off-network programs are established hits that have had the time to build lasting, positive relationships with their viewers.

>> **Time Spent Watching: Live TV, Commercials, and Avoiding the Clutter.** Today, with all the opportunities to tune out the commercials, viewers are more likely to engage with syndication "live," an assurance against commercial-skipping. Nielsen data for October 2006 show almost nine out of 10 adults 18 to 49 in DVR homes watched syndicated programming "live" - a guarantee the commercial message is delivered in the intended environment and time frame.

Once viewers record the programming, "when" and "what" they play back is on their terms. While just more than 10 percent of the DVR audience time-shifts syndicated programming, these viewers play them back with more immediacy, the majority within the same day. The combination of syndication's high percentage of "live" viewing

and fast playback provides a potent tool for advertisers looking to engage their consumers in a timely fashion. According to data just released by Nielsen, syndication's "live" + playback reaches 95 percent of its total viewership in the same day. This is a significant advantage over network viewership, where just more than half the viewers watch the program live; and it takes network four days to get to syndication's 95 percent level!

In households with DVRs, it's no wonder that syndication's commercial retention is far higher among viewers than on network TV. Nielsen NPower data for October 2006 indicates syndication commercials retained 94 percent of their program ratings during commercial breaks, a 42 percent advantage over network prime time, where one-third of the audience turns elsewhere during the break. One explanation for this is syndication's low-clutter environment.

Syndication combats clutter, one of the greatest concerns facing advertisers today, with shorter pods and more A/B positions. Both of these advantages lead to higher recall of the advertiser message, according to a study by the Cable Advertising Bureau and Nielsen. In a fall 2006 SNTA member survey, we learned that the average pod length of syndication's Monday-through-Friday strips averaged two minutes and 18 seconds, while exclusive national breaks are even shorter, less than a minute and a half. In general, national syndication commercials lead the pod (even those that run on cable). In sitcoms, 96 percent of the positions run in the A/B positions, while in entertainment news, 94 percent of national commercials run in these desired positions.

Low clutter isn't a problem for some prominent advertisers on network or cable TV, where several brand schedules were analyzed for pod size and positioning. Even the best schedules in network and cable have a high proportion of their commercials running in pods of seven or more and a minority of their announcements in A/B positions.

>> **Personal Investment.** Viewers invest more of their emotions and time with syndication shows and personalities. In the near term, this personal investment pays off for advertisers with increased awareness and affinity, better recall, greater receptivity and commercial retention, and viewing immediacy. Ultimately, far beyond traditional measures of ratings, reach, and frequency, understanding how viewers invest their time and emotions will let us fully embrace engagement and redefine superior advertising value.

*Hadassa Gerber is director of research and systems for the Syndicated Network Television Association.
(hgerber@snta.com)*