

Preparing For PPM: Success Is Not An Accident

Later this year, 15 more markets will convert from diary to Portable People Meter, completing Arbitron's 50-market rollout of the ratings methodology. Broadcasters who have successfully made the transition to PPM have shared some best practices, and the most important rules to observe are:

Start early (and that means now!). And: Be prepared to make adjustments.

When your market converts from diary to PPM, reported radio listening will change. But keep this in mind: Real radio listening has not changed! While it may sound overly simplistic, it is important to remember this fact.

Programming laziness or too much clutter may not have negatively impacted your ratings in a diary world, but they will hurt you in PPM. The rules for how you're being judged have changed, and the margin of error has been dramatically reduced.

Be Prepared

Those who will become PPM winners don't wait

until they receive their first market data to act. They don't even wait until the first day of pre-currency surveying. So how do you get started?

First, learn as much about the PPM as possible. While some basic information needs to be understood by everyone, your education plan should be customized to meet the specific needs of sales, programming, promotions, and even engineering.

Start at the source: Arbitron. Through their dedicated PPM website (www.arbitron.com/portable_people_meters/home.htm) and their online training series, everyone at a station can learn the PPM basics.

But don't stop there. Remember, 34 markets have already been competing in a PPM world. Does your group have stations in those markets? Do you have colleagues or consultants in those markets? Talk to people who have already gone through the PPM transition and ask them to share their lessons learned.

Don't work in a vacuum. Join with other stations in your market to hold a seminar to introduce the PPM to the advertising community. Again, this is best done before any market data is available. It is extremely important to get your advertisers and local agencies involved now. It's up to you to get PPM on their radar screens, as they will be deeply affected, especially if they're not prepared. And



when dealing with agencies, don't stop at the buyers. For an agency to successfully make the transition to PPM, both planners and account executives need to be involved. Planners will need to adjust their cost-per-point and buying criteria, and the account team will need to explain the transition to clients.

What To Do With Pre-Currency Data

The PPM pre-currency period is your pre-season. Until your market goes currency, the pre-currency estimates are technically to be used only for observation; indeed, Arbitron's license agreements prohibit the use of PPM data for any transactional purpose (buying, selling, posting, etc.) before the official conversion.

But that doesn't mean the data should be ignored. On the contrary. While estimates may change between pre-currency and currency, the early data is a fair indication of what is to come, and it should be reviewed, analyzed, and understood.

You should ask:

- **Engineers:** Is the encoder working on your primary signal, as well as Internet and HD multi-casts? How will we know if the encoding goes down?
- **Programming:** Where are we winning? Where are our opportunities for ratings growth?
- **Promotions:** Do promotions increase exposure to the radio station, or are they on-air clutter that chases listeners away? Remember, when listeners go away, the meter knows it.
- **Sales:** How do you need to adjust your positioning, pricing, and packaging?

Once your internal analysis is complete, talk to the advertising community about the audience estimates. Now is the time to establish your station as the PPM resource. Let them know objectively what happened in the pre-currency book. And a little sales pitch won't hurt, as long as the information is valuable.

Most importantly, don't slam the PPM just because you had a weak debut. A lot can happen in the two months before

PPM ROLLOUT 2010

Market	Currency Release Date
Charlotte	October 8
Columbus	October 8
Milwaukee	October 8
Orlando	October 8
Austin	October 11
Indianapolis	October 11
Nashville	October 11
Norfolk	October 11
Providence	October 11
Raleigh	October 11
Greensboro	December 31
Hartford	December 31
Jacksonville	December 31
Memphis	December 31
West Palm Beach	December 31

currency, and the new survey methodology is not going away. All you will do is discredit yourself and make radio look bad to the advertiser.

You've Gone Currency. Now What?

If you have prepared properly, this is the easiest part of the transition. As the currency data comes down, it is important to recognize whether there were any major audience shifts from the pre-currency data. If so, you'll need to find out why.

The PPM estimates are now the pricing tool in sales negotiations. Have agencies and advertisers adjusted their buying criteria to reflect the change in methodology? Typically, advertisers will:

- Raise their cost-per-point to reflect the change in reported listening levels
- Reduce the frequency goal
- Rely more on non-drive dayparts

Remember, you've gone from four books a year to 13. New ratings data will be released every 28 days. What is your strategy for handling this new volume of data?

For your entire radio career, the diary has been your report card, but very soon it will be the PPM. By starting early, planning, learning, and communicating, you'll increase your odds of winning in a PPM world. ■■■

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