

AMPS, ABCs and the elusive pass-on rate

In today's media universe, Media24's tabloid, Daily Sun, is reportedly passed on from family member to family member, and then to the neighbour's family, possibly more than once, and even likely to end up as a keepsake in some homes. The pass-on rate for the tabloid in taxis is likely to be even higher.

ABCs and AMPS are the lifeblood of any sales arm in the print media industry, and also a source of never-ending controversy. To compound the problem, certain titles have a significantly high pass-on rate which is sometimes questioned by media planners and strategists.

Baleseng Dlamini, Ads24's business manager for Emerging Markets, says that RPC (readers per copy) for Daily Sun rises at times as high as 17. Paul Haupt, CEO of SAARF (South African Audience Research Foundation), puts the current AMPS RPC of the title at 15.3, and doubts whether AMPS (All Media and Product Study) would under-read the readership of a paper which is so widely read.

"AMPS uses a locally-adapted form of the recent reading model which is used by 75% of the countries where readership is measured. The readership figures produced by AMPS are comparable to the best in the world and high RPCs are found in many developing countries such as South Africa, where similar demographic and socio-economic factors are at play," continues Haupt.

Soweto spaza shop story

Barbara Cooke, formerly head of research for Naspers/Media 24's magazine division and now with media independent AML, tells a story which humorously demonstrates that all is not always what it seems.

"I remember visiting the owner of a spaza shop in Soweto which used to receive five copies of Drum every month. Because four copies were always returned when the unsold copies were collected at the end of each month, we had cut his allocation from five copies to three. He was incensed and had actually asked for a larger allocation of copies, and our visit was to explain to him why we could not accede to this request. Instead, we got a lesson in magazine economics that was a total revelation to us.

"The cover price of Drum at that time was R5.00 and this was what the first buyer paid. But, if she looked after it and brought it back, with the cover duly ironed, within a week, the spaza owner promised to pay her R1.00. He then sold it again for R3.00, and so on, each week, until it had been sold three or four times, after which he then gave it back to us for a refund. He made a healthy profit, and delivered a readership of over 20 per copy. We certainly couldn't officially condone this, but were also loath to impede such entrepreneurship!"

Drum, now a weekly, has RPC (readers per copy) calculated at 21.1 on AIR (average issue readers) which drops to 11.2 RPC on RR (regular readers). The 2011/12 AMPS readership figures are even more interesting: 2,906,000 (AIR) and 1,549,000 (RR).

According to Kevin van Deventer and Fiona Brauns of The Media Shop, "Daily newspaper circulation has declined annually by 5.7%, since 2008, and equates to 411,000 copies. Q4 (of 2012) declined by 2.2% when compared to Q3."

In conclusion, advertisers might be well-advised to investigate the actual returns to be harvested on any particular title, and not to stare blindly at ABCs and AMPS, even with seeming empirical certainty in the results. Sometimes the actual story goes beyond the figures.

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