

Robust outdoor media data soon

By [Vivian Warby](#)

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Data from the first outdoor advertising live survey using the Npod handheld research meters will be available for Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in late 2007 and the rest of the country in 2008 as the rollout continues nationwide. This will take media owners into a new era of buying and selling in this space, said Ken McArthur, MD of Nielsen Media Research SA. He was speaking at the eighth Pan African Media Research Organisation (Pamro) conference held in Cape Town last week.

For the first time an electronic passive meter (with little human intervention) can track a sample of people who potentially pass outdoor advertising hoardings: the Npod is a small device (the size of a cellphone with an aerial) that can provide portable, passive, people-based measurement of outdoor audiences. The person carries the Npod with him or her whenever they leave their home. It relies on GPS technology to track the travel patterns of the person when they are out of the house, whether as a pedestrian, motorist or other commuter, in relation to known outdoor sites.

It records each respondent's position every four seconds, giving detailed travel information which is then compared with a map of geo-coded outdoor sites in the area. This covers a variety of formats including bus shelters, standard posters and overhead signs, amongst others. When a respondent's travel path intersects with a known outdoor display, an intercept is recorded representing an opportunity to see the ad. The Npod does not require all three satellites it uses, to create a fix.

National rollout

The Npod, in cooperation with the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF), went live in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal earlier this year. This follows a pilot study in Johannesburg and in Chicago and Germany. It will be rolled out nationally over a three year period.

It was decided to go live with it first in Johannesburg and Pretoria because it is the most populace area and it is also where the commercial activity is happening, said McArthur. In Gauteng 1358 urban and rural dwellers were used and 872 in KZN. It will roll out into the other province over the next two years.

"We're very excited by this. In South Africa there is no robust data on this outdoor media and will take media owners into a new era of buying and selling," said McArthur.

The sample of people used in Gauteng and KZN were representative of the national population and were chosen from those who had filled in AMPS and RAMS surveys. They had to carry the Npod for 10 days and take it with them every time they left home.

The info gathered from the Npod will be laid on maps of impact sites and from that it will be garnered how many people travelled past a site. In pilot studies done here in 2002 and also in Chicago and Germany, it showed that some sites had zero people pass them while others had hundreds of thousands pass.

First data released: 2007

While outdoor displays have become more sophisticated with a growth in the outdoor industry, the medium still lags behind television, radio and print when it comes to the share of advertising budgets.

McArthur said data gathered from the Npod will bring outdoor on a par with television, radio and print in the selling space giving verifiable opportunities.

Despite the space being the oldest form of advertising, bar the old Copland Method there was no actual verifiable opportunity, said Pamro honorary president and SAARF chief technical officer, Piet Smit. "In the past, outdoor media could only rely on a half baked sample taken every five years."

The exercise is costing R3 million a year and is coming from levies.

McArthur said the device works very well and that an interim report following it going live in Gauteng and KZN would be made available to SAARF and media owners toward the end of the year. This will be to see if it stands up to scrutiny and then the first data will be made public to the market at the end of the first quarter next year. By the end of 2008 there should be a national sample, said Smit.

It is hoped that the Npod will bring new accountability to the outdoor media sector. For more information, visit www.pamro.org.

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