

Media planning bias

By  Chris Brewer

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There's nothing seriously wrong or unusual about planning bias.

Everyone has their favourites - remember that one particular schoolteacher?



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Media planners will deny any political influence and will also deny personal preference or prejudice regarding different media types and titles.

When I was a planner working for John Turvey, just about every schedule had "World Air News" on it. There's no way it could be justified, but John loved flying and he loved reading that magazine so, no matter what the product was, it was inevitably advertised in that magazine.

Media favouritism happens for no other reason than the simple fact that planners are human (I think). There will inevitably be bias **somewhere** in every media schedule. It may not be as obvious, or unethical, as the booking of a particular medium after an above-average lunch but it will always be there, which is often why one media plan will differ wildly from another, proposed by someone with the same brief and of equal talent.

I've been asked to take a closer look at many media schedules and, invariably, the ones that shouldn't justifiably be there

are quite quickly spotted.

As I've said on many occasions, advertising is a personable business and the more pleasant the media rep is the more business he or she will get from the agency staff. The more attractive a media rep is the more often appointments with the agency media director will be kept.

It's a simple fact of life. I'm quite happy to admit that I'm more likely to buy something from a pretty sales lady. And I have little doubt that you, reading this, are almost exactly the same.

But bias can destroy a potentially effective schedule and it comes in four forms. The first is when a media planner happens to have a strong liking for the media rep (maybe enjoying fairly frequent lunches and whatever else they might get up to - who knows?)

The second is when a media planner happens to prefer a particular TV programme. No matter what the product profile says, if the favourite programme of the planner is *Top Gear*, that's where the ad goes most of the time.

And bias isn't restricted to agency media planners. There are many clients who insist on specific media and even when a gutsy planner explains it's a bad choice he will remain determined and, of course, get his own way.

Thirdly there's bias based on ignorance - where an "old and trusted" medium is maintained like an old family retainer and the new, dynamic medium is ignored. Many eminent media people still subscribe to the old American theory that "for every minute spent processing information, **reading printed material** is 3.5 times more efficient than television and it's 5 times more efficient than radio."

Finally there's bias based on corruption but we don't really want to take the lid off that box at the moment so I'll leave it alone - except to say that it's become increasingly rare.

That's why one leading media expert was once heard to say "the best media plan is the one signed off by the client".

So media planning bias does exist. It's not difficult to detect and correct. You could call me for example - otherwise just learn to live with it.

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ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: chris@brewers.co.za. Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: www.brewersdroop.co.za

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