



## PPM changing conversation with the audience

paying little attention to what makes listeners tune in. Or, for that matter, what makes them tune in to the radio medium in general. PPM is very good at identifying those places or those personalities that generate tune-out. But it tells you virtually nothing about why listeners come back to the same station. It doesn't even do a very good job of explaining why they tune out of that host or feature.

By way of analogy, think of a short-staffed Starbucks location. It draws a big crowd who feels that Starbucks has the best coffee, but it has low sales figures because customers have to wait too long. Do you close the location, or do you add some counter help? Likewise, a morning show may be serving up the most entertaining radio in a market, but may not be getting to their prime content fast enough, with the result that listeners often lose their patience and the show under-performs on a minute-by-minute basis. Do you fire the morning show, or re-structure their breaks so listeners get what they came for without having to wait so long?

My second concern has to do with "PPM panic". In most markets, we're still in the very early days of PPM. Sample sizes are smaller than they were in diary days. Compliance levels are still below target in many of the younger demo cells, resulting in even less reliability. Meanwhile, cellphone-only households are not fully represented and ethnicity is not etched into the sample frame. Yet, some stations are preparing to change format without digging into the diagnostics to see whether they are just getting a bad break in the early panel results or if they in fact have a broken format.

Finally, the biggest concern is whether we are simply spending too much time and energy on the PPM conversation, and ignoring other more relevant conversations. We know that PPM is important to agencies who want more accurate measures to calculate GRPs and CPPs, but is that where the advertisers themselves are focusing their attention?

The amount of dollars going to traditional above-the-line ad expenditures—

the kind measured by GRPs and CPPs and booked by buyers—is declining in favour of social media, digital media and other below-the-line marketing. Advertisers are increasingly looking for engagement from their marketing partners.

And there's no reason that radio can't be a partner in delivering. Yet, by stripping radio of the talent and the other glue that draw listeners to the medium in order to increase its exposure counts in PPM, some radio companies may be cutting themselves out of the one slice of the revenue pie that is growing.

Maybe it's time to have some conversations with advertisers as well.

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All consumer research is essentially a conversation whether you speak to listeners on the phone, hire a research company to ask some structured questions, or dissect the results of a BBM survey, you're engaging in a conversation. Listeners speak through their words or actions and programmers respond. Programmers make changes and the listeners in turn provide the necessary feedback. And so it goes.

I was reminded of the importance of this conversation a few months ago when I was speaking with Nicole Jolly, VP Operations at Flow 93.5 Toronto. Nicole was urging BBM to include ethnicity within their PPM sampling parameters to ensure that the diverse population of Canada's largest markets are included in what she describes as the conversation between radio programmers and their listeners. This is a social as well as a business issue. Only those who are part of the conversation can expect to have their interests and culture reflected on radio.

Since speaking with Nicole, I've been observing how PPM is changing the conversation that programmers have with their listeners. And, as big a believer as I am in PPM and its ability to paint a more accurate picture of tuning, I am concerned about the nature of some of those early conversations with listeners.

I have three concerns.

The first is what I see as an unhealthy obsession with listener tune-out, while

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