



BPA Worldwide Audience Metrics for Multiple Media Channels

What is Reported and Why

July 2011 – The most vexing challenge facing media buyers today is the inability to normalize data across different media channels. Magazine circulation doesn't neatly equate to web site traffic which in turn doesn't equate to attendees at events. Yet media buyers are expected to evaluate, compare and recommend the best channel(s) for marketing investment.

In a perfect world, the least common denominator for measurement would start with "media (content) consumption by people," but even this approach has flaws and limitations.

What follows is the rationale for determining which audited metrics are included in BPA Worldwide reports. Further, it is important to note the data in a BPA report is only for the media activity that occurred within the dates (usually six or three months) covered by the report.

BRAND

Print (Magazines, Newspapers, Periodicals)

BUSINESS

Historically, print has been measured by the number of copies distributed. While not a perfect correlation to people, circulation is a fairly close measure except in cases of bulk distribution, pass along and public place copies. BPA follows the practice of reporting copies.

COMPLIANCE

CONSUMER

In recent years, print has been augmented by digital editions which are also considered part of overall circulation. BPA reports show each issue's print and digital circulation separately and then as a combined total. Recipients receiving both printed and digital versions are only counted once in the total.

DATABASE

E-MEDIA

EVENTS

It is important to note the measure for print is one of receivership, not readership. For more on digital editions, see the Digital Content section below.

INTERACTIVE

NEWSPAPER

Events (Exhibitions, Conferences, Seminars)

Of all the media channels, event measurement is truly a count of people. BPA reports show the number of attendees and may optionally show the number of pre-registrants. A count of such is important to include whenever advertisers/sponsors have the opportunity to "speak" to this audience before and after an event. But reporting registrants alone is not permitted on a BPA report so as not to misrepresent them as "attendance." BPA also provides a count of the number of exhibiting personnel attending the event to ensure there is no confusion between the volume of visitors and delegates versus exhibitor staff.

In some international markets the count of the number of daily visits is also provided to document how many people attended the event on multiple days.

Online (Web Sites)

In instances where a site requires registration, whether free or paid, counts of individuals and patterns of activity are possible. However, few sites require registration or exist behind a paywall.

Without registration, a unique browser, based on cookie identification, is the closest one can come to counting people. A count of unique browsers can be inexact because...

...individuals may access a site using more than one computer (work, home, mobile device);

...individuals may have more than one browser on their computer;

...public place computers (libraries, internet cafes) may have only one browser but have multiple users.

Depending on the situation, unique browsers may be over-counted or under-counted or perhaps they even net out. It's impossible to tell. What is certain is that "unique browser" is a more accurate term for this metric rather than unique *user* or unique *visitor* in that the latter two imply an individual who cannot be conclusively determined without registration.

BPA reports contain data for unique browsers and have done so since the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) developed guidelines for metrics and measurement. Few others have followed suit, although recently one syndicated audience measurement firm announced it would switch its reporting from unique visitors to unique browsers in the interest of accuracy. Further, data from analytics tools (which is commonly mistaken as audited data) is often incorrectly labeled as unique user or unique visitor when in fact it is the browser which is being measured.

BPA reports also present data for the following traffic metrics: page impressions, user sessions, unique browser frequency, page duration and user session duration. Taken together, the metrics provide an indication of the vitality of the site and the potential ad inventory that may exist.

For reports depicting multiple media channels, unique browsers are the surrogate for people. Multi-channel reports that identify site traffic only by page views or page impressions do nothing but serve to confuse audience reach indicators by striving to show the "highest number." There is absolutely no correlation between page views/impressions and people. To show only page view/impression traffic on a report that also contains circulation and attendance makes normalizing data across these channels impossible.

Digital Content (Digital Magazines, e-Newsletters, White Papers, Webinars)

The current reporting standard of distribution for digital magazines and newsletters is net deliveries. As distribution is tied to an email address, the presumption is that there is a one-to-one relationship with an individual. Again, this is not a perfect correlation since an individual may have more than one email address to receive materials. Further, there is no way to account for pass along.

There is increasing demand for digital content metrics beyond delivery with open rate, frequency of access and duration to name a few. Technologies exist to reliably track these metrics and there is a clear audit trail for verification purposes. As there are no generally accepted industry averages for these three metrics, media owners are hesitant to report them for fear of being outside the norm. While BPA reports do include digital magazines and newsletters as net delivered copies, the option is there to report these additional metrics as well as others.

White paper measurement is very straightforward in that it is a download to an email address. Again, there is a presumed one-to-one relationship between an email address and an individual with no reliable way to account for pass along.

Similar to events, webinar reporting indicates number of registrants and number of actual attendees. The latter should not be construed as audience as there may be more individuals beyond the registered attendee who listen in to the webinar.

Mobile (Web, Apps)

The reporting metrics for mobile web are the same as for standard web and the option exists to show separate traffic data for each along with a combined total. As with the standard web, it is BPA's view that multiple traffic metrics are necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of site activity. Reporting only page views in a multi-channel report is a one dimensional approach that serves neither media buyer nor seller in that it mixes a content metric (pages) with a personal metric (subscriber, attendee), which have no correlation at all.

Currently, apps are measured as downloads to a mobile device. While accurate, the metric is of questionable value. That is because there is no reliable industry data about the deletion rate and a download by itself is not an indicator of activity. Usage indicators such as frequency of access, number of transactions and duration are more likely to become valued metrics.

As we are in the early stages of measuring mobile apps, “total downloads” are likely to become the equivalent of what “hits” were to web sites in the mid 1990s: an impressively large number with no intrinsic value whatsoever. It is BPA’s position that multiple metrics for mobile apps are necessary to provide a clear indication of activity.

Online Social Media (Networks, Blogs)

New social media channels are developing every day as are the metrics that define their activity. Fans, followers, connections, members and contacts all signify a person who is interacting with a social platform. As with mobile, one metric is not sufficient to depict social media activity. Frequency of access, duration, etc. are metrics that, in combination, will do a much better job.

A metric of questionable value when reported alone is that of “approval” or some similar term. This is largely due to the fact a channel will generate fewer “approvals” than it has followers. More importantly, to report “approvals” for one social media channel but followers, members, etc. for another is mixing apples and oranges and prevents normalizing data within the social media channel itself, let alone across other media platforms.

In conclusion, the ever-evolving media landscape promises more channels and more metrics. In such a world of varied claims and random reporting practices, the BPA report provides a standardized resource of unbiased data upon which informed media buying and selling can be based.

BPA Brand Report: Sophisticated data. Now.

About BPA Worldwide A not-for-profit organization since 1931, BPA Worldwide is governed by a tripartite board comprised of media owners, advertising agencies and advertisers. Headquartered in Shelton, Connecticut, USA, BPA has membership spanning more than 30 countries. Worldwide, BPA audits 2,600+ media properties—including business publications, consumer magazines, newspapers, web sites, events, email newsletters, databases, wireless and other advertiser-supported media—as well as 2,700 advertiser and agency members. Visit www.bpaww.com for the latest audit reports, membership information and publishing and advertising industry news.