



Why Real-Time Data Reporting Shouldn't Preclude a Media Audit

As the speed of business constantly accelerates, so does the need for reliable and timely data to make critical decisions. In the world of buying and selling media, programmatic processes have emerged to take advantage of technologies that improve efficiencies and reduce costs.

Technological advances also enable certain media channels to provide audience volumes, and sometimes profiles, in near real time. Example metrics are web site traffic, digital magazine usage and social media activity. Other channels are tied to frequency reporting such as metrics for magazine circulation and trade show attendance.

What all have in common is the need for industry-agreed measurement standards to be verified by an industry-owned independent, third party. This adds transparency, accuracy and reliability to the buy/sell process. These media audits are the foundation of trust that exists between media owners and media buyers.

But how do media audits apply to those metrics generated almost immediately?

By their nature, audits are retrospective. That doesn't mean data cannot be released in real time or near-real time. It *does* mean that at some point the data needs to be verified so that users have confidence in its accuracy. For example, web sites routinely release traffic data reflecting near real-time activity and 200+ choose BPA to audit that data after the fact to document its accuracy. For site owners, it is a simple way to assure buyers they have gotten what they paid for.

For decades, industry-owned BPA has been a neutral repository for media owner audience data which has been audited or is subject to audit. Originally, it was circulation data and now it has expanded into whatever data sets pertain to media brand channels. To improve upon our Reports Library data resource, we are testing a more robust database which would allow media owners to voluntarily file audience claims at any point in time and make that data available to users almost immediately. By doing so, the claims would be subject to a future audit and public disclosure of the audit findings.

This approach will provide two distinct benefits to both buyers and sellers:

1. It will put audience data into the marketplace at the earliest opportunity; and,
2. It will subject that data to an independent audit thereby allowing users to act on it with confidence.

While the move toward more timely reporting might be perceived as a significant sea change for BPA, we see it as a process update rather than a major course correction. Most importantly, regardless of reporting timeframe –whether on fixed dates or near-real time – users can be

assured that all audience data sets verified by BPA, regardless of channel, have been subjected to the most stringent industry established third-party audit standards media buyers and sellers have come to expect.