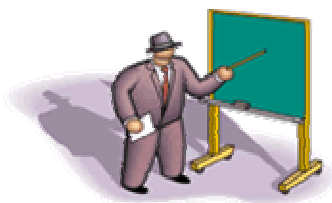


# A FREQUENCY OF THREE

## How a marketing researcher at General Electric named Herb Krugman Gave the TV Networks Something Better Than Money: The Gospel of *Effective Frequency*.

Years before General Electric thought of buying NBC, a tall, courtly GE psychologist named Herbert Krugman gave the networks a gift better than money. He had a theory that seemed to say, "heavier TV advertising is better."



Krugman convinced advertisers that a message communicates in three stages. And Krugman's "frequency of three" eventually became the Gospel of effective frequency planning which helped support larger and larger television budgets.

But Krugman never said three exposures are necessary, and misrepresenting Krugman on frequency became a continuing media scandal. Here is what Krugman actually wrote:

*"Let me try to explain the special qualities of one, two and three exposures. I stop at three because as you shall see there is no such thing as a fourth exposure psychologically; rather fours, fives, etc., are repeats of the third exposure effect.*

*"Exposure No. 1 is...a "What is it?" type of... response. Anything new or novel no matter how uninteresting on second exposure has to elicit some response the first time...if only to discard the object as of no further interest...The second expo-*

*sure...response...is "What of it?"...whether or not [the message] has personal relevance...*

*"By the third exposure the viewer knows he's been through his "What is it's?" and "What of it's?," and the third, then, becomes the true reminder . . . The importance of this view . . . is that it positions advertising as powerful only when the viewer...is interested in the [product message]...Secondly, it positions the viewer as...reacting to the commercial--very quickly...when the proper time comes round.*

**The public comes closer  
to forgetting nothing  
they have seen on TV.**

*"There is a myth in the advertising world that viewers will forget your message if you don't repeat your advertising often enough. It is this myth that supports many large advertising expenditures...I would rather say the public comes closer to forgetting nothing they have seen on TV. They just "put it out of their minds" until and unless it has some use . . . and [then] the response to the commercial continues.*

According to Krugman there are only three levels of exposure in psychological, not media, terms: Curiosity, recognition and decision. What Krugman calls "frequency" is not what media planners would call "frequency." Krugman doesn't discuss media frequency at all.

Today serious students of advertising understand there is no formula answer to the effective frequency question. They believe most exposures are reminders so a single exposure, if relevant, can make the sale. They also

know frequency for repetition to teach messages, as if they are the multiplication table, is a red herring, because advertising has greater relevance to the consumer.

Let's hope that's right.

(This article, one of the first challenging the doctrine of effective frequency, appeared in *Inside Media* magazine, January 1992.)

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