

DO ADS INCREASE AUDIENCE?

**When We Finally Measure People Seeing Ads,
Standout Creative Will Lower CPMs**

With each attempt to explain how advertising works we seem to grow more confident. The ARF's 1961 advertising model, "Towards Better Media Comparisons" sounds hesitant.



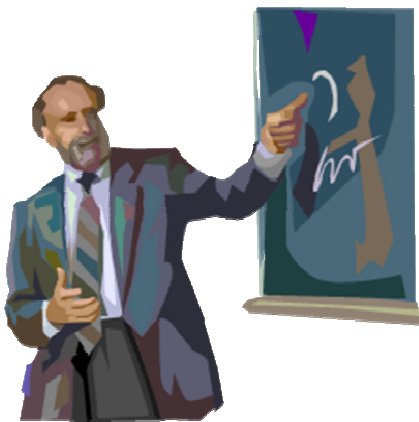
The 2002 version "Making Better Media Decisions" is a substantial promise.

I worry the next ARF model will be "How to make Millions Buying Advertising on EBay."

The Early ARF Models

To be of practical value, the early ARF models focus on obvious behavior and familiar measurements. Understanding is dumbed-down for easy use. The modeler's assignment is "tell us how

measurements can help better manage advertising dollars." This results in linear models that follow the decision making process of the industry at the time - exposure, attention, retention, persuasion, interest in buying and finally, purchase.



That narrow road will no longer do. The early models do not stretch our minds or match

reality. Their definition of media is narrow. The only media considered are paid media under advertiser control.

The models do not consider consumer states except as fixed attributes (sex, age, income), or known behavior inferred through measurements (buys vitamins, drives to work, drinks beer). And the models avoid discussing the many options in marketing which would show how limited advertising's role in shaping a consumer's buying decisions actually is.

An Ocean of Causality



But understanding the faults of the past is no guarantee for the future. We have ample faults of our own. Our current broad consumer-centric, holistic approach to research, over-reaches. It substitutes grand ideas for measurements. It talks much better than it functions.

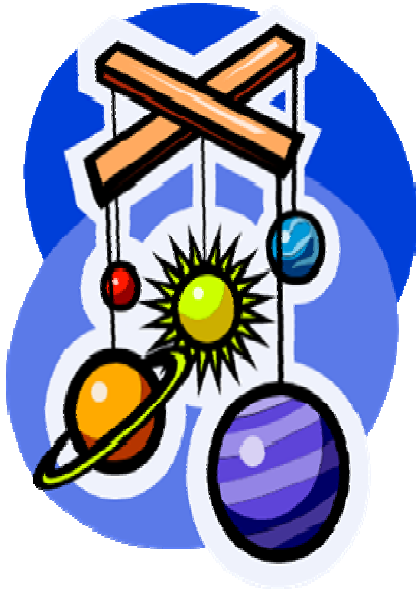
Today instead of seeing advertising response as a clear hierarchy of effect -- we see it as an ocean of causality - where many of the swimmers cannot be clearly identified, let alone let alone rescued. Our fascination with complexity carries with it the danger of talking ourselves into thinking we know something from the sound of our words alone.



The worst words of the Old are "Opportunity to see" -- a poor measurement pretending to count people seeing advertising,

matched by today's worst word "Engagement" -- a vague idea masquerading as delivered truth. To bring order from this chaos, the ARF is constructing a new advertising model, which is a good place for us to begin.

What is a Model?



A model is a structure. An advertising model takes the measurements currently in use and assembles them into a hierarchy of effect, from the most basic, like the number of copies of a magazine issue distributed, to the ultimate goal of consumers purchasing a brand advertised in that issue's pages.

The sequencing of effects in a model is important because it keeps us from *leaving things out*.

Too Big a Leap

A current example of *leaving things out* is the magazine industry's new three-stage measurement model. It goes from Magazine Exposure to Advertising Engagement to Consumer Response.

What's missing is a measure of ad exposure, or better yet, ad perception, preceding the measure of ad engagement, since you can't expect someone not exposed to the ad to be engaged by it.



If we include everyone who picked up the magazine as a candidate for engagement, we introduce noise into the system, understate the engagement value of magazines and perhaps fail to identify other factors -- like the limited exposure of the ad itself because of where it was positioned -- as the weak link in the chain to consumer response.

Tuning Isn't Seeing



Television has a similar missing link in its de facto measurement model. Today Nielsen's definition of ad exposure is "people who describe themselves as "watching television" during the average commercial minute of the program.", not *eye contact* with those commercials. Again this introduces noise into the system.¹

For example, without an eye contact measure we can only guess at how much commercial avoidance has reduced the actual number of people who see the messages carried by different channels with different commercial patterns. We know we need better data

¹ The 1961 ARF model defined TV exposure as open eyes confronting a live TV screen. This was shelved because there was no corresponding measurement at the time.

The Creative Roadblock

The Visual media have avoided measuring eye contact with the advertising carried by confusing it with advertising “attentiveness,” and then claiming that was the job of the creative, not media.

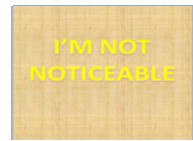
But recent work in Outdoor measurement suggests the sharp separation between media and creative is an illusion. In Out of Home the distinction between the message and the medium carrying the message is absent. The ad on an outdoor unit is the face of the medium. And since the qualifier for Out of Home audience is eye contact with the medium, to be audience a person must see the ad. Or better said, be attracted to the medium by the ad.



That brings us to the unthinkable – creative becomes an active media variable. Not in terms of attention paid, or engagement with, but by the message itself attracting eyes to the medium by being *noticeable*.

Noticeability

“Noticeability” is not a measure of ad message content. It describes the visual attraction of an ad in the context of its media environment. It is the appearance, color, shape or



configuration of the ad that attracts the eye, independent of what is being advertised -- and it occurs in a fraction of a second.

Measuring Noticeability

Noticing is measured as eye-contact with the advertising. It is the necessary pre-condition for engagement with the advertising. Engagement, et al. is the job of the creative message.

When there is an eye-contact measurement of commercial audience, if a message attracts your attention (a bright yellow billboard in a green field, a 100 dollar bill on a magazine page, a Gecko on the TV screen), that message will attract more eyes, regardless of what is being advertised or how.

And even more troubling to current practice, when commercial audience is defined by brief eye contact with advertising, the noticeability of the message itself becomes an important media variable. Eyes On data from Out of home shows a more noticeable ad can increase the unit's audience (the number of people seeing it) by 25%.



Historically it's been the look of the medium that attracts audience to advertising. But when audience is defined as people seeing advertising, it's the look of the ad that helps determine the size of that audience.

Welcome to the real world.

Erwin Ephron

(With thanks to Joe Philport)

POST SCRIPT.

Noticeability as a media measurement is not a new idea. The 1961 ARF Model originally identified Advertising Perception (a concept very close to Noticeability) as the highest level of Media effect, only to be talked out of it by Alfred Politz who argued that perception was influenced by ad content. Politz' measurement model for perception involved memory via ad recall. The technology for a behavioral measurement of noticeability through momentary eye fixation available now, had not yet surfaced.

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