



ARF MAGAZINE PROTOTYPING GUIDELINES

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Table of Contents

- I. Background
- II. Prototyping Definition
- III. Unmeasured Publication Candidacy
- IV. Circulation Audit
- V. Audience Source
- VI. Bases for Prototype
- VII. Frequency of Prototype Execution/Currency Issue
- VIII. Matching/Host Selection
- IX. Host selection Models
- X. Readers-Per-Copy
- XI. Disclosure
- XII. User Cautions
- XIII. ARF Review Board for ARF Magazine Prototyping Guidelines

The ARF Magazine Prototype Committee

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I. Background

The number of unmeasured magazines exploded in the 1990s and 2000 and remains huge despite the 2001 economic downturn. As a result, media operations and publishing companies produce hundreds of prototypes a year. In August 2001 there were observed to be 129 prototypes on the IMS system¹. Many major agencies review the publishers' estimates and then develop their own using their own standards or procedures.

Based on an analysis of confidential prototypes supplied to the ARF by a few agencies, agencies and publishers generally do a good job of estimating unmeasured magazines' audience composition and a poor job of estimating their total audience, compared to the estimates subsequently produced by MRI². As a result of the findings from this ARF pilot study, the ARF Magazine Prototype Committee was formed to frame general principles and guidelines for best practices for use by either agencies or publishers.

There is a rich variety of magazines serving a wide array of niche targets vital to promoting targeted brands. The nature of their audiences is such that hundreds of them cannot be rigorously measured by the syndicated services. *Prototyping offers a solution.*

II. Prototyping Definition

Prototyping is defined here as: estimating a magazine's audience based on a subscriber study and using a model (judgmental and/or computerized approach used individually or together) to select surrogate "measured" publication(s). It is acknowledged that prototyping is perhaps as much an art as a science. However, because of the pressure to include audience estimates in computerized planning systems, virtually all the major agencies and publishers in the USA follow this process. Prototyping provides a basis for creating an estimate of an "unmeasured" magazine audience for subsequent computer-assisted media analysis within the context of an appropriate syndicated study along with all measured publications. This greatly increases the efficiency for media planners, buyers, and sellers.

III. Unmeasured Publication Candidacy

Length of Life

Publishers' prototype audience estimates of new publications, or publications that have published their first few editions, should be labeled as 'publisher's estimates'. These estimates should be based on the best available third party data. Whatever is used to develop the publisher's estimate must be fully disclosed. However, agencies will make their own decisions on whether to use any or none of the information provided.

Prototypes may be developed for publications that have published at least four issues.

Publications in existence for over 2 years, which have developed a "substantial" circulation and have not requested audience measurement by a syndicated service, should provide a rationale for their [failure or reluctance, or slowness] to do so.

¹ Count courtesy of the DJG Marketing, LLC.

² Tony Jarvis of MediaCom and Tonya Deniz of Arnold, "To Prototype or not to Prototype? That is the Question," Proceedings of ARF Week of Workshops, October 2000.

Circulation Size

A minimum circulation of 100,000 is recommended for developing a prototype.

Geographic Coverage or Concentration

Geographically skewed publication prototypes should be clearly disclosed as such. Publications cannot be [suitably/acceptably] prototyped if their geography restricts the samples available in the syndicated service or suitable hosts, e.g., on MRI you could potentially develop a prototype for a new magazine distributed in New York off of New York Magazine, which is measured, but you could not prototype an Atlanta city magazine as there is no geographically similar host available

Demographic Profile

The magazine's demographic profile must be consistent with the syndicated service being used for the host selection. Highly upscale magazines that may be appropriately prototyped (or measured) in MMR may not work in MRI.

Publication Frequency

There is no restriction on frequency of publication. It should be noted that most major agencies will not prototype a publication if its publication frequency is not quarterly or more frequent. Many agencies require six-time frequency per year as a minimum.

Publication Genre

Publication genre is typically not a factor. Any publication can be estimated. However, certain agencies may not prototype particular genres.

From the agency perspective it is important to note that there is normally a request from the planning/buying group for a prototype to be developed by the agency's media research group.

IV. Circulation Audit

Circulation data that should be provided includes:

- An ABC or BPA statement or a letter of confirmation from ABC or BPA of a formal filing for audit as well as a sworn publisher's statement of circulation (48 States).
- Detailed circulation plans for either rate base increases or reductions (rate of change), publication frequency changes and any changes in the mode of distribution as "on the record".
- The effect of ABC reporting changes and their potential effect on any prototype estimate should be made explicit.
- Complete explanation of the home subscription development plan, newsstand performance or future plans for newsstand sales, public place programs, including all forms "non traditional manners" like daycare centers, publications as part of membership or loyalty programs, etc. (Controlled versus paid)

V. Audience Source

Typically, prototypes are developed for use within syndicated audience surveys. Publishers, agencies and the research syndicators, notably the latter, may establish their own guidelines.

VI. Bases for Prototype

Subscriber Study Requirements

It is preferable that the subscriber studies on which prototypes are based be ABC audited, or that such studies closely follow ABC guidelines. The key element of the ABC audit is a third party verification that the sample selected was a fair representation of the geographic definition of the prototype, e.g., 48-state circulation. (A 48-state sample is necessary for MRI national prototypes.)

Newsstand Circulation Proportions And Need to Profile Both Segments

Magazines with a large concentration of newsstand distribution are at a severe disadvantage when it comes to developing a prototype. High quality newsstand surveys requiring random probability sampling of newsstand locations, intercept interviewing, etc., i.e., *based on a random selection from a known sample frame*, are generally too expensive for most publications. However, such surveys are required to provide a reasonable estimate of the profile of the newsstand reader.

Note: The ARF will work with ABC to establish a set of pragmatic standards for the execution of studies to profile newsstand copy readers.

Frequency

Prototypes should be considered for re-evaluation based on new subscriber or newsstand studies at least every two and a half years or sooner depending on the evolution of the editorial and the circulation.

Tie Profile to Syndicated Source

Each prototype requires a unique analysis of the potential host publications in the syndicated service. Even if the two syndicated audience studies purport to measure the same universe using the same methodology, the selection of the host publications should be executed separately and independently albeit, based on the same subscriber study.

It must be remembered that subscriber and newsstand studies only provide the profile of the primary reader. In many cases the profile of the secondary reader is substantially different.

VII. Frequency of Prototype Execution/Currency Issue

When to Re-Examine

New prototypes should be prepared from scratch whenever a new, preferably audited, subscriber or newsstand study becomes available.

VIII. Matching/Host Selection

Prior to developing an estimate for an unmeasured publication, use and analysis of all available validated data is recommended, for example:

- High-quality subscriber study, preferably with an ABC verification audit as appropriate
- Data from other reputable third parties, e.g., MMR, JD Power, IntelliQuest, if a publication is measured in one of those services.
- Review of all data and media kits from the publication and its competitors, as well as discussions with the publisher to determine the competitive (demographic, editorial, or lifestyle) set
- Complete demographic analysis. (Remember that a subscriber study always produces a richer profile than a total audience estimate.)

IX. Host selection Models

“Prototyping” computer models are commercially available through third party software providers. Any model should be built in a systematic, well-tested, scientific way. The modeler should disclose the following:

- The underlying assumptions
- When the model was developed
- The composition basis
- The number of variables being used
- A detailed validation including the date of such validation

X. Readers-Per-Copy

The process and rationale should be transparent. In other words, sufficient supporting documentation should be provided to enable a user to reproduce the estimate even though the process is essentially judgmental.

Key considerations include:

- Competitive Set
- Public place copies – numbers and general description by location.
- Mode of distribution

Readers-per-copy estimates based on a question to a subscriber regarding “how many other people read or looked into your copy of ...” are considered specious.

XI. Disclosure

Agency

Agencies are not required to disclose anything. It is recommended that the agencies share their estimate of the publication's prototyped audience with the publication's research and sales/marketing executives.

Publisher

Publishers should fully disclose everything they have done including the weights and codes which are built into the various computer systems.

XII. User Cautions

Duplication (single-book vs. multi-book host prototype estimates)

Duplication cannot be dealt with appropriately at this preliminary stage. This subject will be reviewed by the ARF in the future along with other prototype techniques – such as simulations.

Reach-And-Frequency Analysis And Optimizations

It is not recommended that prototypes or publishers' estimates be used in reach and frequency analysis since they are based on hosts and duplication cannot be accounted for. They should be included in the plan on a gross rating or gross target point basis only. Prototypes should not be used in optimizers.

Please be advised that the use of prototypes in a reach-and-frequency analysis can underestimate the incremental reach that the prototype will add to the schedule if the host publication(s) is (are) already included in the schedule.

XIV. Review Board for ARF Magazine Prototyping Guidelines

We wish to thank and acknowledge the contribution made to these guidelines by the members of the ARF Review Board assisting the Guidelines Committee:

Bruce Goerlich, Consultant

Scott MacDonald, CondeNast

Gabe Samuels, ARF

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Barbara Zack, PHD Network