

Buying ad space - challenging the paradigm



media

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THERE was a time when the idea was that a person who booked advertising space would have nothing useful to contribute to an advertising strategy. Advertising strategy was dictated by creative considerations and media placement taking the leading role in the development of the strategy was simply not part of the equation – they were consulted, then told what media was going to be booked.

Today, four of Australia's big media buying agencies have offices in Adelaide and there are a couple of other smaller operators. But the industry has changed dramatically. Media strategy is no longer the poor cousin in the development of advertising strategy, but is in fact, in many cases the leading player. Funny how the pendulum swings. It has probably swung too far!

Good strategy and, in fact, outstanding strategy comes when media, creative and sound market knowledge combine in a media neutral atmosphere. But alas, this is usually the exception rather than the rule.

I've side tracked slightly because all this is leading to a breakfast I attended last week hosted by the Ten Network. The guest speaker was Dr Byron Sharp, Director of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute (formerly the

Marketing Science Centre's Research and Development Initiative).

What a stimulating experience this breakfast was. Two reasons. The first is that the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute is right here in Adelaide, operating out of the Adelaide University.

These guys are global movers and shakers in the field of market research and marketing strategy development – their client list includes some of the world's great brands – and right here in good old Adelaide.

Secondly, Sharp is a stimulating, engaging and confronting speaker. He challenges contemporary thinking (habitually I'm told), not just for the sake of it but based on the findings of the various projects undertaken at the Institute.

The presentation last week challenged some of the conventional views about television viewing and television media buying.

“ These guys are global movers and shakers in the field of market research ”

Now, I do not agree with everything Sharp had to say, and there were several areas in which I would have enjoyed a healthy discussion.

But the point was, he challenged my thinking. He forced me to look critically at the methods and paradigms I work with in my day to day business. And this must be good.

Media advertising is a cocktail of four ingredients. Reach (the number of people exposed to a message), frequency (the number of times exposed), continuity (or length of campaign) and budget (how much there is to spend). Often these four

can be paired up – reach and frequency, continuity and budget – and while not directly, they operate in an inversely proportional manner. In other words, if you want reach, it will be at the expense of frequency (and vice versa). Or the bigger your budget, the longer you can advertise (and vice versa).

The perennial battle for media people is to balance these parameters in a way that maximises the potential of the advertising campaign. This is quite a balancing act, and requires solid knowledge of the product being advertised, the media marketplace and the subtleties of the media research used to determine audience levels.

All sorts of things can influence the market's acceptance of an advertising message ranging from the creative execution through to the mindset of the individual. But generally it has been accepted that people need to see a message several times before they fully appreciate the import of the message.

So, when someone comes along and says “I've got evidence that shows that when it comes to TV advertising, frequency is simply not important”, it really does upset the applecart and challenges this person's thinking on how TV and the consumer mind works.

Now, I'm not about to instantly go out and change the way we go about buying TV based on a presentation over breakfast. But I am prepared to challenge the paradigm.

The work of people like Sharp and the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute is terrific. I've been exposed to some of it now on a couple of occasions and I believe this sort of work is critical to the ongoing level of expertise our industry has to offer. The wonderful thing is that it is right here in Adelaide, at our fingertips as it were. Bravo!