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Finding The Path To Consumer Engagement

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Word is out. Exposure no longer equals engagement. It's not new news, but it's certainly important news for marketers who for years have relied on reach and impressions to inject messages into the consumer's psyche.

No more. *Engagement* is today's emotional marketing currency. It motivates consumers to understand, and ultimately act on a brand message. Finding engaging places for messages is crucial to making campaigns work. And yet, finding this highly desirable new currency is a big challenge in today's cluttered marketplace. Think about it:

- The average consumer is exposed to over 3,000 marketing messages every day (which marketers in the U.S. spend over \$250.0 Billion annually to deliver)
- Marketers can choose from thousands of contacts to communicate their brand messages to consumers.
- Commercial airtime has tripled in the last 40 years (from 5 minutes per hour to 14 minutes)

The net of all this? Message overload and the proliferation of media choices have created an environment of "disengagement." Simply, consumers are paying less attention to our clients' messages than they once did.



Big challenge. So a few months back, a group of us at MediaVest USA set out to learn as much as possible about how consumers respond to different contact points – both media and non-media. We wanted to understand the extent of disengagement and more importantly how to optimize our media and integrated marketing contact points in order to re-engage the disengaged.

We polled just over 1,100 consumers, probing their opinions and behaviors as they relate to twenty-nine consumer contact points, including traditional mass media, niche media, integrated marketing contacts, and emerging contacts. We were primarily interested in the attention they “claimed” to give to messages delivered via these twenty-nine contact points and the correlation between this factor and message recall.

What a valuable journey. We busted some myths, adjusted some perceptions and confirmed some hypotheses. We even identified a new breed of consumer called the “ad cynic” – people who pay low attention to mass media. Rather than ignore these people and the growing ‘attention deficit’ problem, we sought to understand them better and find ways to break through to them. Overall, we gained invaluable insights about the crucial interaction that takes place between consumer and contact point.

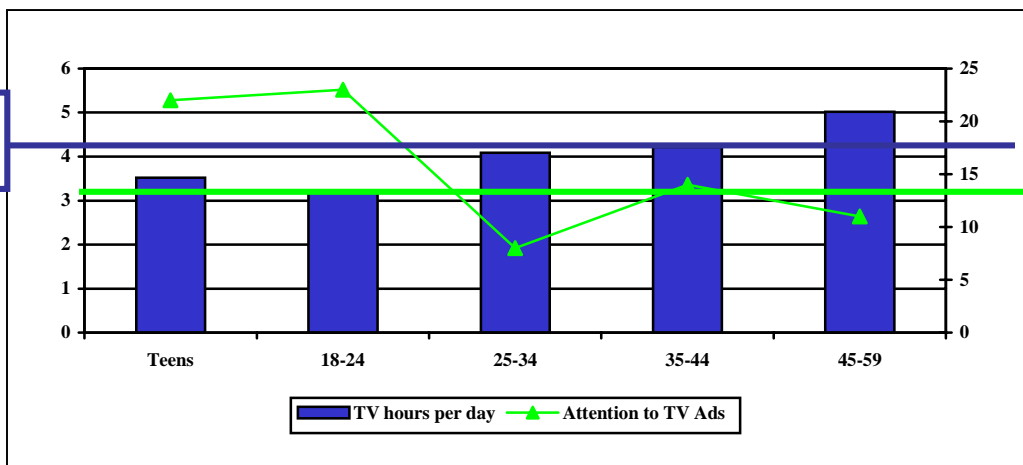
Some highlights:

Perception Adjusted: High media consumption does not always equal high advertising attention

Here's an interesting paradox. Everyone knows that kids and young adults are watching less TV than average. Relative to the mature age groups, they are out and about more. When they *are* at home, other entertaining vehicles such as games, music and the internet steal time from TV. But, while under 25's spend 20% less time watching television than their older counterparts, when they do watch television, they are **twice as likely** as over 25s to pay "high attention" to the commercials. Interesting. In contrast, mature adults (45-59 year olds) who, by the way, watch five hours of television per day (the highest of the age groups), are **34% less** likely to pay "high attention" to ads in this medium when compared to their younger counterparts

Finding: Under 25 year olds, relative to the other age groups, are harder to reach via television, but when they do watch television, they are more likely to be *engaged*.

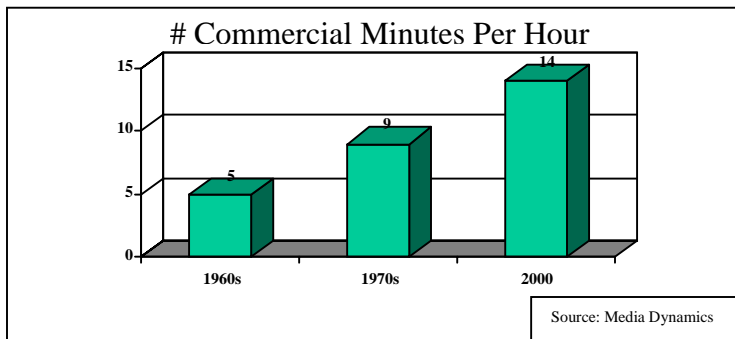
Average hours viewed: 4.2



Average attention level: 14%

Source: MediaVest Engagement Study September 2003 & Nielsen 0203 season hours spent viewing

Why, you may ask, are these mature, heavy TV viewers paying so little attention to the ads? One theory is that as they grew up in an era of less TV ad clutter, they are more likely to tune out ads. So, while the quantity of



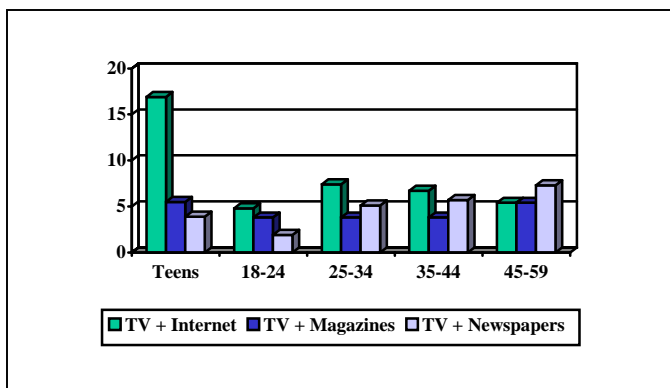
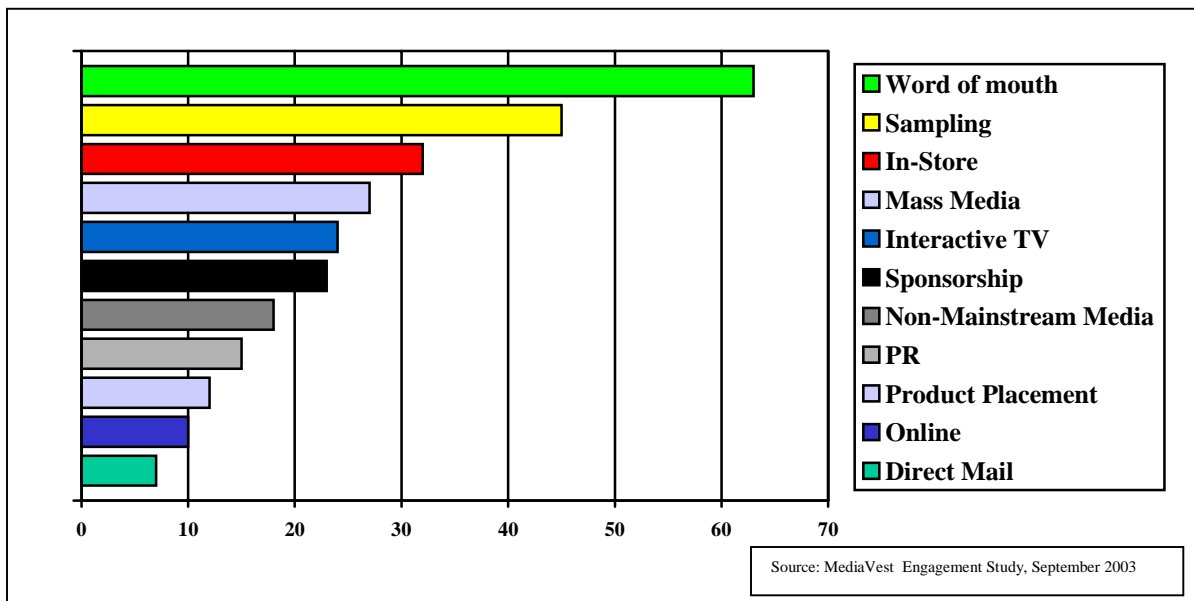
Source: Media Dynamics

commercial minutes has tripled (from 5 minutes per hour to 14 minutes) in the last 40 years, older consumers are protesting by simply tuning out more.

Myth Busted: Mass media is passe.

In fact, despite the emergence of new technologies and alternative methods for communicating marketing messages, advertising in mass media still ranks high Vs other media and integrated marketing contacts when it comes to attention paid (4th out of 11 contact points). Word of mouth, sampling, and interactive TV rank first, second and third and are consistently the highest attention contact points across all age groups.

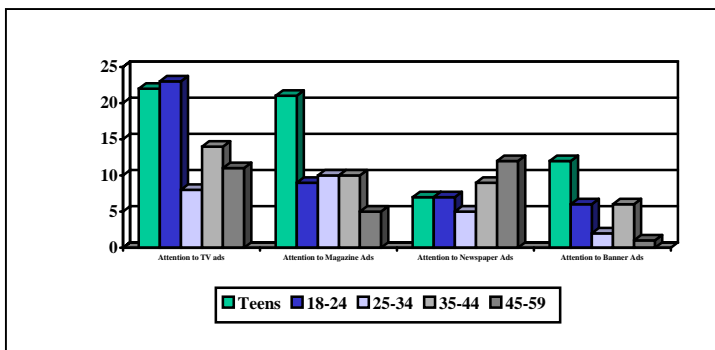
There were lots of specifics not shown on this chart. If you're writing this down, "banner advertising on the Internet" and "Ads in Public Restrooms" bring up the rear for all age groups in terms of media that capture consumer attention.



Hypothesis Confirmed: Cross-media multi-tasking (e.g. the simultaneous use of TV and Internet) does not necessarily lower attention to ads

This finding is most significant across the teen demographic. Teens have the highest (17%) simultaneous use of TV and Internet.

Source: SRI Media Scan



And yet, Teens still have **high** attention levels to ads in **both** TV (22%) and Internet (12%) when compared to other age groups

Source: MediaVest Engagement Study, September 2003

And about that new breed of consumer we discovered? In the course of our study we found that around 1 out of 3 individuals (or 37%) claim low attention to at least 1 of the 5 mass media vehicles (we counted TV, radio, billboards, magazines and newspapers). We call them “ad cynics”.

This group certainly represents a challenge to us, but not an impossible challenge. For one they are not paying low attention to ads in all mass media across the board. We actually found that there are clearly four clusters – one driven by low attention to TV ads (18% of all ad cynics – older skew), another by low attention to radio ads (31% - older, female skew), a third by low attention to billboards or newspaper ads (31% - teen skew), and finally one including people who tend to be inattentive to all types of mass media ads (18% - 18 to 24 skew). We found lots of other opportunities to engage them within the integrated marketing and emerging contact spectrum.

For example, “ad cynics” are engaged by a lot of the same contact points which are attention grabbing for people generally, like positive word of mouth and sampling efforts. We uncovered great potential for ‘opt in’ message options such as interactive TV, direct mail and web site information.

Conclusion

All of our findings provide us with rich, actionable insights that help navigate the evolving, complex relationship **between** communication channels, **brands and consumers**. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, our research gives us customized learnings that can be applied to individual client needs.