

Selling yourself to the sellers

by Caroline Creasy & Lisa Terlecki

The media planners who work for ad agencies can make or break your media business by considering you (or not) in the placement of advertising for their clients. The Mail & Guardian and Marketing Mix decided to find out just who these very powerful people in the advertising industry are and what media they consume in order to inform their decisions.

The media environment in South Africa has been experiencing rapid growth and transformation over the last few years: the SABC has sold off radio stations, the IBA has issued numerous radio licences, there is now a new television player in the market, in print we have seen the sale and unbundling of newspaper groups and the launch of a number of new titles. This means the industry has become increasingly fragmented, more competitive and far more diverse. This has created an enormous challenge for marketers and advertisers to keep up with media consumption trends.

In this rapidly growing market, the big question is how, and which of, the existing and new media groups are going to survive. This will largely depend on their commercial viability, and makes it one of the most important issues in the industry. Can they attract the audience they want, and are they able to sell their products to advertising decision makers?

The bottom line for media owners is that if they have not got the "buy-in" from the advertising industry, they cannot survive – and it is not only the battle for audience but more importantly the battle for adspend which will determine their future.

The onus is thus on media owners to endear themselves to the advertising industry – sometimes through very persuasive courting, wooing with corporate gifts and lavish entertainment, or by convincing the client with a solid argument about the value and benefits of advertising in a particular medium.

Over R5 billion worth of advertising spend is forked out across the classic media in South Africa every year. The question is: who decides where this advertising money goes? The bulk of the adspend is placed by media planners and media buyers – parties which represent media shops or advertising agencies.

Working in the industry, one discovers that there appears to be a lack of common knowledge about the media industry on the part of both the media owner and the advertising industry. This may not be obvious to the marketer, whose budget is at stake and who is ultimately responsible for the company's market share, sales and profits.

Given this, Marketing Mix and Mail & Guardian decided to find out more about exactly who the people are who bear the weighty responsibility of placing advertising.

The research was conducted by Market Intelligence Resource Group (MIRG) and set out to ascertain how much knowledge there is in the industry as a whole. At present this entails a survey of media planners and will later extend to representatives working for the media.

The first phase of this research was to construct a profile of a media planner. What has just been released reveals that there is a range of people within agencies making decisions, who have considerably varying amounts of experience and knowledge of media. Indications are that many of the people who handle accounts do not appear to have the knowledge to properly assist them to do so in a professional and informed manner.

The results of the initial survey would appear to support two assertions:

Assertion 1:

Representation of the media planning universe is not rep-

resentative of the social demographics of the country. In other words, there seems to be little affirmative action in this sector of the advertising industry. Although many agencies are working to correct this, there have been claims that "there is not enough time or a large enough talent pool from which to select people who could make a career of media planning".

Assertion 2:

Media placement (the allocation of adspend in particular media) would appear to be influenced by the planner's personal preferences. For example, planners listed radio stations most often listened to as 94.7 Highveld and 5FM, and when placing advertising over the last 30 days, both 94.7 Highveld and 5FM emerged as the most frequently placed stations.

The advertising industry needs to consider addressing these problems sooner rather than later. More time and energy needs to be expended educating school and university leavers about the career choices to be made in the ad industry, and media planning should be given the importance it deserves. It has previously been considered the least glamorous aspect of advertising, and this perception has to be changed.

Similar media planning debates have been addressed in a number of industry titles. However, the issue is whether too much of the planning role has been left to computers. Telmar media modelling programs churn out research data on frequency and reach estimates and are often regarded as the final word on a media schedule. This debate has focused on whether media planning has become a number-crunching exercise rather than a process requiring creativity, lateral thinking, strategic analysis, insight and experience. For a lot of new radio stations this has meant that they have had to fight an even tougher battle to get

onto the media schedules, as they have not had established research figures to support them.

Media are dynamic. Does the onus for the flow of information lie with the media owners? Are they ensuring that crucial information concerning their media is being effectively disseminated to media planners who should continually keep up to date with what is happening in the marketplace?

The following questions are being researched as part of phase two:

- Are media owners ensuring that sufficient information is being given to planners to equip them to make the informed decisions?
- Are media salespeople effective and professional about presenting proposals based on a client's marketing objectives?
- Should marketing divisions of media owners be more proactive in disclosing information on the changing profiles of their audiences?
- Are they service orientated?

The decisions of media planners and media salespeople can mean life or death for media owners. It is an issue which the industry cannot afford to ignore.

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Found out

The survey was done by conducting a total of 98 interviews nationally by using MIRG's Computer-Aided Telephone Interviewing System. The fieldwork was done on January 26, 1998.

Some of the findings:

- 54% of the media planners are in the age group 18 to 30.
- 80% of these people are women.
- 49% have two to five years in media planning; 19% have six to 10 years; 12% have 11 to 20 and 4% had 20 plus.
- The radio station most listened to within the last 30 days was Radio Highveld (25%) followed by 5FM (16%) and 702 (7%). All African language stations together scored 9%.
- The TV channel watched most was M-Net (scoring between 55% and 61%) while SABC 3 scored 24%, SABC 1, 11% and DSTV, 5%.
- The favourite TV programme was Friends (18%) followed by Mad about you (15%). Carte Blanche and the News were favoured by 4% of planners each.
- The favourite reading material is Fair Lady (16%), Femina (10%), Cosmopolitan (9%) and You (8%).
- 43% said they did not know what the most popular black youth TV programme was.
- 65% said they did not know who the editor of the Sowetan was.

