



Media Audits - Developing An Effective Process

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Over the last five years I've had many opportunities to speak with various media professionals from Australia, New Zealand and the US. Whenever the question "What about audits" pops up, they all share the same sentiment, i.e. any media person will be shown the door if they do not have a valid audit from a reputable industry sanctioning media or advertising association. However, on the Singapore and Malaysia front, there is not much importance placed on this crucial requirement.

Media planners, strategists and investors are often overwhelmed by incessant requests of media owners to showcase their products and services. It probably makes it even more challenging for these media buyers to make accurate, unbiased and effective decisions when presented with proposals from media sales professionals. As such, almost automatically, to cut the clutter and provide an even keel to evaluation of reach and effectiveness, a Media Audit should be presented and discussed in detail as part of the sales pitch.

The following are experiences I'd like to share, which are in no way an exhaustive process flow, but have actually propelled ZoCard to be the first Postcard advertising platform in SEA to be audited.

Step 1:

Define what's going to be audited - some media owners only audit the print run and distribution figures but not actual take-up by audiences. We strongly believe that although this is more challenging to execute, it is, without a doubt, more robust to have audits on the numbers of effective reach i.e. the number of advertisements that reach a required audience or take-up/consumed media/ads.

Take Up Rate or Consumption - This can be done quite easily - all that's needed is a basic stock control system that establishes the total run less the returns.

Step 2:

The next step is define the distribution points. This can be verified through periodic distribution verification reports, subjecting distribution points to random tests, even letting the auditors visit and inspect these distribution points. Content can be made available for verification and authentication at periodic quarterly or half yearly audits.

Step 3:

Most media owners have a paper trail that establishes the actual media purchase(s) or investment(s) by the media buyer/client. This media insertion/booking, must be verified with every delivery order from third parties engaged to deliver the raw products. Audits must be able to verify and match actual investments with actual

production/distribution by the media owner.

Step 4:

Once the system is devised, only then can this process be validated by the ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation). However, in our case, where there is little, if any, precedence (note: postcard advertising as a media platform is only 23 to 25 years old globally), we did an additional step, i.e.: to get our third party financial audit firm (endorsed by the CPA of Singapore) to verify our submissions to ABC. If the entire process meets the requirements of the audit agency, a much-lauded Audit Certification will be received by the media owner.

Media planners are increasingly calling for greater transparency, relying on data that is authentic and backed by a dependable and reputable audit to ultimately lend credence and integrity to the media itself. @