

THE CONCEPT OF EFFECTIVE FREQUENCY AND LOCAL MEDIA PLANNING PRACTICE. REVIEW OF FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE FREQUENCY.

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ABSTRACT

Effective frequency, a cornerstone of media planning, says how many times consumers should be exposed to advertising in order for advertising to be the most effective. Basic effective frequency level is believed to be 'three-plus' exposures and this figure is adopted by most media planners. Beside the basic level, marketing, media and creative copy factors influence the final determination of effective frequency level. Such factors, defined by Ostrow in 1982, were not revised for more than 25 years and still are used in media planning textbooks. This exploratory study examines how local media professionals make their decisions about frequency levels for advertising campaigns. The study focuses on local advertising campaigns because nearly half of all money spent on advertising comes from local advertisers (Jugenheimer, Barban and Turk, 1992). Despite this fact very little has been done on a local level, where more restrictions and limitations are usually imposed on media planning (Otnes and Faber, 1989).

A series of in-depth interviews were conducted with media directors of local advertising agencies to identify their approaches to media planning and to compare them with traditional media principles reflected in academic literature.

Ostrow's suggestions were supported only partially. Some of them didn't get support, while others were not particularly relevant when applied to a local market. It was also found that on a local level frequency often overpowers reach in media planning calculations because of the inability to guarantee precise targeting and usually low advertising budgets. Media directors would prefer to keep the message noticeable, rather than "mayonnaising" the budget across different media or media vehicles.

The following preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. Though there is no formula to calculate the frequency threshold level, achieving such a threshold in any advertising campaign is a necessary but not sufficient condition for advertising success.
2. A higher frequency level should be established in the following situations:
 - a) with new brands/products, b) with less known brands, c) with lower market share products, d) with lower loyalty products, e) with some categories of audience that require additional effort to perceive and process advertising message (children, older audiences), f) with complex copy, g) with new copy or new campaigns, h) with copy showing product or service i) with shorter copy.
3. There is no reason to lower the frequency level artificially, even in situations where there is potential for lower advertising frequency to have greater impacts. Advertising money should be used solely to keep or advance current advantages of the advertised product (such as high market share, high brand awareness, etc.)

Any such guidelines should not carry precise figures. Establishing frequency goals for an advertising campaign is a mix of art and science but with definite bias towards art (Ostrow, 1982). Even with sophisticated research and computerized software, there is no substitute for experienced media planners and their knowledge of specific products, communication channels and marketing environments.

References available upon request