

# JACK MYERS REPORT™

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## Will Frequency Re-Emerge As A Media Planning Priority?

By JACK MYERS

**JUNE 10, 2003** — Is it time for media planners to begin rethinking their emphasis on recency-based media planning strategies, and begin shifting toward a renewed emphasis on inflated levels of frequency?

Until a few years ago, media planners built schedules based on achieving a minimum average frequency level of three-time exposure. In the mid-1990s, media planners made a rapid shift in the underlying tenets of media planning, focusing away from frequency and instead concentrating their plans on achieving maximum reach levels and maintaining them on a sustained basis. Recency planning strategies assume that consumers are constantly in the market for purchases, and the goal of advertising is to assure they are exposed to a message at the time closest to their purchase decision.

The result was an increase in audience segmentation studies, expanded emphasis on buying high rated network programming that delivers hard-to-reach audiences, and expanded emphasis on narrow programming niches that deliver hard-to-reach audiences. As demonstrated by Turner Broadcasting's Media at the Millennium III study presented to advertisers and agencies this year, the cost of generating extended reach to those difficult-to-reach audiences can be extremely expensive. (This is an over-simplification of the Turner point-of-view, but a more detailed examination of the study is not essential to reinforce my point.) Turner's solution was to shift budgets away from expensive broadcast advertising to fulfill reach goals and instead utilize less expensive cable inventory.

The Turner study, however, reinforces marketers' commitments to recency planning and does not seek to

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change fundamental media planning strategies. Instead, it seeks to alter the buying methodologies used to implement those strategies.

### ***It's Time To Re-Evaluate The Relevance Of Recency***

In the next several months, media planners and marketers should begin re-evaluating their commitment to recency, and begin exploring whether they will be better served by media strategies that emphasize breaking through the clutter of media through frequency based tactics. Recency is an appropriate approach for marketers seeking to reinforce a brand message. However, when goals and objectives change, media strategies need to be adjusted as well. More and more marketers are using media advertising to drive an immediate, short-term consumer reaction.

Consider the following: recency is appropriate and relevant when the goal is to establish and reinforce fundamental awareness of a brand message. Awareness is the most basic goal of advertising. As established in the 1960s by General Electric marketing executive Herbert Krugman, advertising had two additional levels of impact beyond awareness: interest and retention. Krugman put forth the theory, accepted for more than 30 years, that the basic goal of advertising was to move consumers through this three stage process by achieving a consistent exposure of three messages: a.k.a. three time frequency.

### ***Five Time Frequency Is Required To Motivate Consumers To Purchase Decision***

In the 1980s, CBS-TV Stations' business development unit funded new research by Bruce Eckman that recommended two more levels of advertising impact: intent to purchase and motivation to purchase. At the time I headed the CBS unit that conducted extensive research with retailers that proved through actual sales results that reducing reach and increasing frequency translated directly into increased sales, provided the creative message was similarly motivational.

The concept of motivation has essentially been drained from the media planning lexicon as recency has taken over marketers' fundamental advertising goals. However, more commercial messages are shifting from brand awareness and toward objectives that demand immediate action. This includes visiting websites, calling 800 phone numbers, responding to promotional offers such as zero interest rate financing, and, obviously, making a purchase.

Media strategies need to change in tandem with creative messaging. As marketers' goals become more focused on generating intent to purchase and motivation to purchase, media planners must respond in kind. However, media planning and creative/marketing strategies are disconnected, and the twain rarely meet.

### ***Marketers Must Break The Parity Paradigm***

As media become increasingly cluttered, with marketers all achieving parity levels of one-time message exposure on a sustained basis, media planners must consider alternatives that are designed to break through the clutter and build superior retention and motivation through frequency. This represents a radically different approach to media selection and purchase. It emphasizes dominance in dayparts and selected media. It de-emphasizes the most expensive forms of mass media.

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