

# Bringing Recency Planning To Magazines

Erwin Ephron

Ephron, Papazian & Ephron, Inc.

Since advertising appears to work by influencing consumers who are ready to purchase, the proper timing of print-delivered messages would seem essential. But, applying the recency scheduling model to print requires extensive changes in the way we position, plan and buy magazines. And then there is the over-arching question of print creative.

I believe magazines, as a medium for advertising, are handcuffed by advertiser attitudes and the print planning process. Accordingly, this paper is in two parts. The first section looks at the 'expectation-environment' for magazine advertising –and the uses of print and the budgets for print these modest expectations produce. My conclusion is that print is both under-used and badly used as a message delivery system. The second section focuses on how to correct the badly used part, by improving the print planning process. It looks at the new data and the conceptual mechanics required to bring modern recency theory to print planning.

## EXPECTATIONS

The importance of expectations in media budgeting and planning cannot be overstated. Recency planning in television assumes the reason for advertising is to increase short-term sales. This warrants large budgets. Although TV relies heavily on media measurements, like weekly TRPs, target CPM and reach & frequency, these measures are useful to the degree that they increase our ability to plan TV to influence purchases. The important measure of TV performance, at least for packaged-goods advertisers, is now *sales response*.

Our expectations for print are more modest. The going-in assumption is print effects are long term and build slowly, not at all like the immediate effects of television and not worth as much. The tracking of print performance usually ends with stewardship – paid circulation, first-third of book, editorial facings, right-hand pages, and so on. In the few cases where print effectiveness tracking is done, it usually looks at brand or advertising awareness *not sales*.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that magazine and TV advertising produce different results seems unlikely. The physical characteristics are different, but the goals and methods are identical. They both bring brand messages to consumers in order to elicit response. But the usual different-media-for-different-purposes sorting-out gives TV the front-line job of selling and magazines the back-room chore of maintaining long-term brand awareness – an assignment with little future in this age of advertising accountability. If, as recency theory holds, advertising's primary job is to make immediate sales, planning print for long-term awareness makes it a non-starter in the competition for media budgets.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that print works slowly is open to question. Millward Brown UK's Ad Track shows magazine advertising produces sales and print ad recall drops after two exposures (wears-out), both indicating print ads get the immediate attention of readers. TV ad recall scores do not show similar 'wear-out'.<sup>3</sup>

The irony of this construction is it turns things upside-down, positioning print as a medium for producing immediate sales and TV as suited for building brand awareness in the long-term.

## **RECONSIDERING PRINT**

There are several reasons for reconsidering the role of print at this particular time. The most important one is the uncertain future of television. The days of cheap TV will soon be over. It's no longer just buyer demand and seller profit goals that will drive up prices. It's the economics of big production costs and small ratings. And perversely, smaller ratings bring a network response that makes small ratings even smaller. Adding a commercial here and there to increase revenue, a current practice, further discourages viewing. So we have the makings of a vicious spiral down. More commercials reduce viewing – which increases the incentive to add more commercials – which further reduces viewing and the overall effectiveness of television advertising. Print has none of these pending problems.<sup>4</sup>

Much has been written about the changing media balance between print and television. For example, a 1997 FCB media research report found:

- As a group, the top 25 magazines deliver significantly more GRPs than the most popular TV shows.
- Despite delivering more GRPs, magazines are more cost-efficient than TV.
- As network ratings continue to fall, the GRP advantage magazines have over TV is growing.
- A number of magazines reach more people than TVs 'must see' shows.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed magazines are a high reach medium. Six print vehicles, (Parade, Reader's Digest, TV Guide, People, USA Weekend, BH&G and National Geographic), have a larger audience than the top TV show (ER).<sup>6</sup> As for cost, the following simple comparison of Print and TV target CPMs documents print's substantial advantage. The magazine costs used are a conservative 25% off the open rate. The TV costs are from NETCOSTS and represent a typical mix of dayparts appropriate for the demo. Table 1 shows magazine CPMs range from 42% to 66% of TV CPMs for the broad demo targets shown. If an income or education qualifier were to be added, print's advantage would be even swiftly regreater.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 1: NATIONAL TV AND MAGAZINE CPMS, 1998**

Target	Adults	A18–	Women	W18–	Men	M18–
		49		49		49
CPM	\$4.01	\$5.60	\$5.74	\$7.82	\$8.68	\$11.50
Print						
CPM	\$6.20	\$12.32	\$9.35	\$17.90	\$14.64	\$27.61
TV						
Print/TV	66%	45%	61%	44%	59%	42%

It is disingenuous, but common practice, to discuss the value of different media without mentioning the creative. No medium is more damaged by ignoring message effectiveness than print. Advertisers have spent years and millions in testing to learn how to construct TV commercials. Print is almost never tested. As a result advertisers are reasonably confident of their ability to make TV commercials that 'work.' They have no such confidence with print. And rightly so. When the MPA attempted to identify strong print creative to pair with TV for in-market testing, strong print executions were hard to find.

To this point we have argued that magazine advertising is surely capable of producing sales, a prerequisite for recency planning. We have also parenthetically argued that creating the knowledge base to enable advertisers to produce better print ads is certainly as important as improving print planning. Now on to the main event.

## **REGENCY PRINT PLANNING**

The perception that magazines cannot produce an immediate sales response is probably, in part, a result of the way magazines are planned and scheduled. Number of insertions' in print versus 'number of target points' in television. If we approached television planning as we do print planning, we would focus on the number of TV spots purchased.

Recency theory has reshaped television planning because it mirrors how we think advertising actually works in today's mature consumer markets.<sup>8</sup> The Recency model says advertising's primary function is to increase immediate sales. (Other longer-term functions, like building awareness and saliency, are important, but secondary, and can be viewed as the by-products of advertising that sells.) Recency further says advertising works by influencing the brand selection of consumers who are in the market for the product at the time. It recommends reach and continuity as the most appropriate media tools for skimming these ready-to-buy consumers. A number of major packaged-goods marketers have tested these ideas with TV advertising in-market and have found that a continuous reach strategy indeed produces greater sales for many of their brands. As a result, recency has become the new conventional wisdom for television.

In contrast, magazines continue to be planned in a deplorably old-fashioned way – by insertions – using what I would call the 'boxes on the flow-chart' method, with little thought as to message delivery in real time. Given what we have learned about the importance of timing, this seems destructive to the medium and its advertisers.

To explore how recency concepts might be used in planning print, we can start with the television model. The five elements of recency planning in TV are:

1. A narrow planning interval (the week or shorter).
2. Sequential reach goals (1-week, 4-week and 13-weeks).
3. Moderate weight (60 to 80 target points a week).
4. Dispersion (moderate weight can produce high reach if it is spread across programs, dayparts and networks).<sup>9</sup>
5. Emphasis on total weeks of advertising.

A recency plan attempts to maximize the number of weeks at specified reach levels. TV reach optimizers like SuperMidas and Xpert, which produce least-cost reach solutions, are the special-purpose tools for recency planning.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to TV, magazines:

1. Have *no* consistent planning interval, short or long.
2. There is no reach strategy and reach goals are typically 'highest affordable,' or are retro-fitted to reflect what the plan will achieve.
3. R&Fs are calculated for the schedule or the quarter, or the flight, almost never for the week.
4. There are *no* weekly weight requirements, (to influence that weeks purchases), since scheduling patterns are based on flue distribution of insertions, not target points.
5. Insertions are not dispersed. Because of discount pricing, they are concentrated among relatively few tides.
6. Total weeks of advertising are seldom an issue in print planning. (See Table 2.)

**TABLE 2: RECENCY TV PLANNING COMPARED TO CURRENT PRINT PLANNING**

	<b>Planning Interval</b>	<b>Reach Goals</b>	<b>TRP Weight</b>	<b>Selection Strategy</b>	<b>Scheduling Strategy</b>
<b>Television</b>	1-week	Minimums	Minimums	CP-reach-point	Dispersion
<b>Magazines</b>	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	None	CPM	Concentration

**THE FLOW-CHART PROBLEM**

Magazine schedules are not so much planned as *art-directed* on the flow-chart. Magazine insertions are placed, strategically, to fill the spaces. Weeklies block-out a week, monthlies block-out four weeks. Insertions are often checker-boarded to increase the number of weeks covered. On the flow-chart itself, there is no visual distinction between a large audience magazine like Digest and a smaller audience magazine like Esquire (that is., there is *no* indication of TRP-weight). Their boxes are identical.

The pattern on the page, uniform rows of boxes (or arrows), give the illusion of concentrated and substantial magazine weight – certainly more visually impressive than a TV plan's few lines and numbers – when the truth is most magazine plans are woefully inadequate by television standards. Most important, there is no required minimum weekly target point weight – in fact TRP5 are not an important part of most magazine plans. Yet there is evidence that weekly weight may be as important to print effectiveness as it is to television.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE WEEKLY-WEIGHT PROBLEM**

Recency planning mandates a minimum of 6040–80 TRPs a week to achieve weekly reach goals. More weeks at lower TRPs – so called 'drip scheduling,' the TV equivalent of print planning – doesn't appear to work.<sup>12</sup> The problem with very light TV schedules seems to be insufficient weekly reach. Similarly, sales response to magazine advertising may not be detectable because magazine schedules almost never achieve sufficient weekly reach.

Here's a specific example. This \$4.0 million, high-reach print plan runs 70 insertions in 29 different magazines, scheduled over 24 weeks. It is a well-conceived, substantial and concentrated print plan. But it generates only 505 target points, or an average of 29 points a week—about half the threshold TV level. Even this is misleading, since average weight will vary substantially by week. Weekly reach, the key measure, will range from about 10 to 30, whereas the TV goal is 35 to 40.<sup>13</sup>

The obvious reason print plans don't focus on weekly TRPs and weekly reach is most magazines are monthlies and, weekly or monthly, they don't have good information on audience delivery by week. A TV audience is reached at the precise time of telecast, a magazine issue collects readers over time. So although a plan may place a weekly magazine in the column labeled 'week of October 19,' and may even put the magazine's 'rating' in that week, many of those issue-readers will not be read until a later week.<sup>14</sup>

There are five steps needed to bring recency to magazine planning. Some are simple. Others require new thinking, new data and changes in the way we now do business.

### **1. Make the week the planning**

The first step in repairing print planning is to establish a relevant and consistent planning interval. The goal of recency planning is to place advertising messages where they can influence purchase occasions. Since advertising effects dissipate rapidly with time, the time frame should be no longer the week. Mega-budget TV brands will use shorter intervals, like the half-week or even the day, but the week is the default period for TV, because of budget. The average TV brand cannot afford to buy shorter-interval reach and run advertising for more than a few weeks.

### **2. Use weekly TRPs as the planning unit**

The second step is to change the planning unit from the insertion to target points. (Just as in television, where TRPs not spots are used to plan schedules.) To calculate weekly TRPs, magazines need to develop week-by-week estimates of issue readers since total audience surveys do not provide this information.<sup>15</sup>

Current magazine plans exist in a 5th dimension. They are set specifically on paper (those little boxes), but do not exist, precisely, in time, because it takes a magazine issue several weeks to gather its readers.

The first reader accumulation curves were developed in the 1960's by Ed Papazian, using the build of Politz 'through-the-book' issue readership. A 1975 Simmons diary study (SORTEM) and a 1977 Steve Douglas, *Newsweek* pilot study done in Milwaukee, provided more information. Ed Papazian, Alan Miller, Steve Douglas and Leslie Wood worked with these data to produce the accumulation curves for the Telmar Tempo (now TIMEPLAN) and IMS ADCUME models.<sup>16</sup>

The key variables are publication interval (the shorter the interval the faster the build), readers-per-copy (the higher the rpc, the longer the build) and topicality (the more short-lived the content, the quicker the build). So *People*, a weekly, delivers its audience faster than *Digest*, a monthly, and *Newsweek*, a weekly with fewer readers-per-copy, delivers its audience faster than *People*, and *TV Guide*, a weekly with that week's listings and even fewer readers-per-copy, delivers its audience faster than either *Newsweek* or *People* (Table 3).

**TABLE 3: % ISSUE AUDIENCE DELIVERED BY WEEK**

	Week Week Week Week Week Week					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Digest</b>	56%	10	7	4	3	2
<b>Newsweek</b>	55	19	11	8	3	1
<b>People</b>	49	11	9	7	7	6
<b>TV Guide</b>	94	6	–	–	–	–

Source: Telmar TimePlan

The IMS ADCUME and Telmar TIMEPLAN software allow planners to control the flow of print TRPs across weeks to approximate desired weekly TRP weight levels. For example, if a monthly, like *Digest*, delivers 66% of its target points in two weeks, then a weekly like *People* could be scheduled to build-up weeks three and four, followed by another monthly in week five, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. DEVELOP SEQUENTIAL REACH GOALS FOR THE CAMPAIGN

In recency planning, weekly TRPs are simply the means to achieving plan reach goals. In TV, a typical one-week reach goal is a 35 to 40. It is high enough to cover a significant part of the market, yet not high enough to generate an excess of frequency (which recency holds is less valuable than reach). The four-week goal is 65 to 70. The 13-week

goal is 80 to 90. Sequential reach goals ensure the campaign is covering the broad target market and not simply reaching the same consumers each week.<sup>18</sup>

Individual magazines are high-reach vehicles, but magazines, as a medium, have a somewhat lower *total* reach than TV. This suggests that 4-week and 13-week print reach goals should also be somewhat lower than TV. The appropriate reach goals for print can only be developed through planning experience, as weekly TRP data and weekly reach curves become available.

Using issue reader accumulation curves to generate weekly TRPs is relatively simple. Calculating the weekly reach generated by magazine combinations is far more difficult.<sup>19</sup> It involves, for example, estimating the duplication of later (mostly pass-along) readers of monthly A with early (mostly primary) readers of Weekly B and so on. (See Table 4.) The anticipated MRI issue readership accumulation study, which can be processed for the week-by-week duplication rates of combinations of different age issues of different magazines, should provide a (weak) empirical base for constructing the curves (See Table 4).

**TABLE 4: THE COMPLEXITY OF WEEKLY REACH CALCULATIONS:  
(How do primary readers duplicate with pass along readers?)**

Publication	On Sale	TRPs			
		Wo 8/24	Wo 8/31	Wo 9/7	Wo 9/14
Monthly A	8/4	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.6
Monthly B	8/26	6.0	5.2	2.3	1.2
Monthly C	8/31	11.6	5.6	2.7	1.6
Monthly D	9/10	–		4.2	5.4
Total TRPs		18.6	11.8	10.0	8.8
Reach		?	?	?	?

Source: RJ Palmer from Simmons 1997 and IMS Adcume

Weekly TRP estimates and a reach-frequency 'engine' allowing us to estimate the weekly, 4-week and 13-week reach of mixed magazine schedules are the basic ingredients for a print optimizer roughly comparable to those currently being used for TV. The big difference (and advantage) to print optimization is the optimized print schedule can be purchased, while the optimized TV schedule usually can't be. The reason is TV's far greater program and price volatility.

#### **4. Develop and apply exposure value weighting**

Today's print planning often assumes like type magazines – for example, within Women's books, or Newsweeklies – are interchangeable, but it does not assume all magazine

exposures are of equal value. In fact most magazine sales presentations spend more time on 'soft values' – the environmental effects of content, the bond between book and reader, or the special nature of the readers themselves – as they do on the numbers.

On the buyer side, qualitative judgment is almost always used to override straight CPM or reach criteria in selecting specific magazines. In other words, exposure value is handled by editing the list, not by re-weighting the data, because weights, *per se*, are not available. This ad hoc process does not work well with recency planning's emphasis on reach, because the cost-effective way to buy reach is with dispersion. By looking at more rather than fewer magazine combinations. Current practice which uses the 'Yes/No' ax of judgment to cull the list, rather than modifying audience-size (and CPM) for exposure value, eliminates candidates and results in less cost-effective reach planning. The TV experience with reach optimizers shows limiting dayparts, program or network selection destroys much of its value. Optimizers perform best when they can use *all* of the combinations.

When reach optimization comes to print, it is certain to reopen, quite properly, the age-old primary/pass-along, at home/away from home 'quality of reading' issues. I believe agencies will return to adjusting total audience for presumed effectiveness in order to include more candidate magazines in an optimization – just as TV is now looking at quality of viewing measures to recapture daypart values lost in the optimization process.<sup>21</sup>

## IMPACT ON CURRENT PRINT BUYING PRACTICES

There is no free lunch. Recency planning and its special-purpose tool, optimization, will question the value of current print-buying practices.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, the discount structure of print rate-cards and the current practice of publisher package-discount negotiation. These tend to concentrate advertising in fewer magazines, which limits reach. For example, six insertions in two of Women's books will produce an average reach (W 18–49) of 53.6. Two insertions in six titles increases the average reach to 65.4 (see Table 5). The typical magazines plan-12 insertions in weeklies, and six in monthlies – is an inherently low reach plan, certainly different from a recency television schedule, where that degree of message concentration in individual programs would be unacceptable.<sup>23</sup>

**TABLE 5: REACH W 18–49 – WOMEN'S BOOKS, ALL COMBINATIONS**

	Average	High	Low
2 Titles 6x	53.6	61.7	47.3
6 Titles 2x	65.4	66.8	62.0

Source: Simmons 1997

## CONCLUSION

Print plans tend to be Brontosaurus-like in size, structure and contemporaneity. They have a small brains called 'strategy,' many pages of numbers where more brain might be

and a Jurassic disregard of the changing world around them. If, as we believe, advertising works by influencing consumers who are ready to purchase, and if, as we again believe, reach is more valuable than frequency, then the proper timing and distribution of print messages would seem essential to print planning.

Of course the most likely scenario for recency print planning is in the media-mix-coordinating print with television. A fascinating twist is the effect this would have on the planning sequence. A TV/print recency plan will begin by laying down print weight first and then filling-in with TV, since television target points are far more manageable.

What a brave new world that will be.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> John Philip Jones has recently published data showing short-term advertising effects (STAS) in print quite similar to those found in TV (John Philip Jones. *Does STAS Only Work with Television Advertising*. Telmar Awards Paper, April 15, 1998). Millward Brown and MMA, also show immediate sales response to print advertising similar to television, although both stress longer-term effects.

<sup>2</sup> Print's widespread use direct response vehicle contradicts this positioning. It shows print produced immediate sales effects are not only plausible, but also common and predictable.

<sup>3</sup> *What is Wearout Anyway?* Doug Scott, Millward Brown international. Breakfast paper, ARF Creative Development and Evaluation Council, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller discussion of the changing cost-effectiveness of TV and Print, see Erwin Ephron, *Response Not Readership is Print's Major Problem*. Session papers, Worldwide Readership Symposium 8, Vancouver, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> FCB Media Report, *Questioning the Magazine Niche Myth*. FCB New York, Summer 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Nielsen NTI, weeks of September 29–October 26, 1997. Simmons, Spring 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Of course there is the issue of measurement comparability, MRI recall versus Nielsen meter, but I believe the *worst-case* scenario for print would be equal dollar effectiveness.

<sup>8</sup> Erwin Ephron, *Recency Planning*. Journal of Advertising Research, July–August, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See Erwin Ephron, 'Learning to Live in Lilliput – the media Land Where Small is Beautiful.' ADMAP, December 1997

<sup>10</sup> At this writing, off-the-shelf optimizers cannot solve for sequential reach goals. These need to be composed from a series of optimizations representing a plan in 1-week, 4-weeks and 13-week increments.

<sup>11</sup> There are a number of reported cases where print effectiveness correlates with TRP weight. The Family Circle study, the Coty Vanilla Fields introduction, the 'Milk Moustache' campaign. See Ephron, *Response Not Readership is Print's Major Problem*. Session papers, Worldwide Readership Symposium 8, Vancouver, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> The minimum TV-weight required to read sales effects in-market appears to be 50 points a week. See Larry Gold, *Let's Heavy-up in St. Louis*. *Journal of Advertising Research*, November 1992.

<sup>13</sup> A well-known consumer healthcare brand. Data supplied by R.J. Palmer.

<sup>14</sup> The rating is the average issue target audience as a percent of the target group. Magazines call this '% coverage.'

<sup>15</sup> As this is written, MRI has announced plans to pilot-test a reading diary survey to obtain average issue readership accumulation data for a large number of weekly and monthly magazines. The full study would produce reader accumulation curves by magazine group, which would be applied to total audience estimates to model week-by-week TRPs. Since recency planning is based on weekly TRP scheduling, this is essential step for print.

<sup>16</sup> Ed Papazian, *How Fast Does a Magazine Reach Its Total Audience?* *Media/Scope*, January 1966. *Newsweek's Exploration of Magazines' Daily Audience Accumulation Patterns . . .*, *Audits & Surveys*, 1977. Also see, Steve Douglas, *Timing, Advertising & Promotion. A Study of the Importance. Development and Use of Audience-Accumulation Methods in Media Planning.* Prepared for Telmar Information Services, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> A practical problem for weekly print planning is the scarcity of weeklies directed to women, (although *Woman's Day* and *Family Circle* publish 17 issues a year). Shifting the on-sale date of a few monthlies by 10-days, earlier or later would solve the problem.

<sup>18</sup> Reaching different people with the message across the year is the high-yield strategy, because purchase often results in repeat-purchase for successful brands.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Douglas, *Timing Advertising & Promotion. A Study of the Importance. Development and Use of Audience-Accumulation Methods in Media Planning.* Prepared for Telmar Information Services, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Since print readership studies are typically single-source this will also allow product usage targeting and, admittedly crude, media-mix optimizations.

<sup>21</sup> See Erwin Ephron, *The Myth of King Super Midas – Thoughts on Optimization* ESOMAR/ARF Worldwide Electronic and Broadcast Audience Research Symposium, Vienna (Austria) 26–28 April 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, TV optimization challenges both daypart planning and the current CPM guarantee system, which insures total TRP weight, but not the recency-critical week-by-week TRP delivery.

<sup>23</sup> TV event sponsorship, like Revlon and the Academy Awards, is the exception, but this tends to be more for promotional, than for media value. See Erwin Ephron *Belaboring the Point: TV sponsorship is based on a series of old-fashioned ideas*. *The Ephron Letter*, July 1998.