



***Good* Radio Ads Are Powerful Indeed**

Most of the published research concerning variations in Radio execution used some type of recall or image-change measures, rather than actual sales results. One of the reasons that recall studies have been so popular is that they're not terribly expensive, and they can be conducted more often and for a wide variety of ads.

*"The best Radio ads
have the same impact
as TV"*

Many studies have shown that there's a wide variation in effectiveness among Radio commercials, which tends to hurt Radio's comparison with TV ads (which usually have a narrower distribution of best-to-worst). We came across about twenty different articles that found meaningful differences between the most — and least — effective Radio ads.

For example, the PreTesting Company found that the difference in recall between Radio and TV ads is much smaller when the analysis is limited to the top quartile of each medium. In other words, **the best Radio ads and the best TV ads are much closer in recall impact than are Radio and TV ads in general** (Galen 1987, Radio Ad Lab *Compendium*, page 36).

Do We Know What Matters? Content, for Sure...

How can an advertiser make sure that a Radio ad is among the best?

Some of the earliest published research in this area came from Radio Recall Research, Inc., which used a combination of in-mall exposure and day-after telephone calls for a commercial testing service. RRR used a lab setting to expose people unknowingly to Radio ads embedded in background music. Participants were then called on the telephone a day later to test their recall. RRR's approach to recall used a "brand cue," and then required recall of specific message points, much like the syndicated Burke method for copy testing.

While the mall-based sampling prevents the RRR research from being statistically projectable, it was used extensively to compare Radio ads to each other. One of the best summaries was published in 1981 (Radio Ad Lab *Compendium*, page 32), based on 1,200 Radio commercials tested by RRR with 200 respondents per commercial. There were 32 product categories tested over the period June 1975 - July 1980.

RRR used a thorough analytical method to find which Radio ad **content characteristics** had the most impact on "proven recall." The variables which clearly had an effect were:

- Number of words (more is better, all else being equal)
- Brand mentions (more is better; early in the ad is better)
- Number of different ideas (more than four or five is bad)

Footnotes:

¹ *The Radio Ad Lab White Papers series is designed to summarize published research about specific aspects of Radio effectiveness. On our website, you can also find the full summary of all published research in this area which we published as the Research Compendium. You may also be interested in our Case Studies series which presents selected proprietary research to which we've had access. All are available as free downloads at RadioAdLab.org.*

(Continued from page 1)

- Execution format (straight announcement and “sing-and-sell” were weakest)
- A simple duplication of a TV soundtrack was weak

Variables which appeared to have no effect either way were “humor,” “type of music,” and “gender of presenter/spokesperson.”

Though humor was not clearly related to recall in the RRR analysis, a later analysis of RRR data by Weinberger and Campbell in 1991 (Radio Ad Lab *Compendium*, page 38) found that **the effectiveness of humor in Radio advertising depends on the product category.**



Their analysis sorted Radio ads into four product-type categories based on Foote Cone & Belding’s *Planning Matrix* (thinking/feeling and high/low involvement), and they found that humor worked best for “low involvement” products.

“TV soundtrack duplication isn’t enough.”

Environment Can Make a Difference

In the 1999 Ferris-Charlebois paper presented to an ESOMAR conference (Radio Ad Lab *Compendium*, page 49), the authors considered several **environmental factors**.

- Radio recall was higher for those who had been driving at the time.
- Radio recall for ads was higher for brands which ran on both TV and Radio.
- Retail ads did not do any better than other categories of Radio ads.
- And Radio ads in news programming may yield recall levels as high as TV’s.

Duration is Linked to Effectiveness, Too

Finally, we found one other recent study of variations in Radio ad performance. The Media Partnership in the Netherlands (Brennecke 1997, Radio Ad Lab *Compendium*, page 43) conducted a major test of commercial pods over the telephone and measured product and brand recall and image after the playback.

While this was an artificial environment measuring immediate recall, it does provide more recent information about factors which can affect recall. They concluded that, among other things, spot duration has a positive effect on impact, such that spots of **45 seconds or more were more effective**. (In their study, there was also an interaction between “likeability” and length.)

