



Commercial Wearout

The issue of commercial wearout is closely associated with "effective frequency" or what are enough exposures, followed by how many are too many.

Effective Frequency

There have been many studies on the issue of effective frequency; unfortunately, most have remained proprietary. The classic work on this was in 1979 titled "Effective Frequency" and authored by Mike Naples, then director of research, Lever Brothers, and later head of the Advertising Research Foundation. The ARF published a special issue of its Journal of Advertising Research dedicated to effective frequency.

The principles of effective frequency can be understood best by reviewing the conclusions offered by Mike Naples in the book he wrote. Those conclusions are still meaningful today. According to Naples, "the following conclusions are based on learning theory, advertising laboratory experimentation and empirical marketplace studies":

- Conclusion 1: "One exposure of an ad to a target group consumer within a purchase cycle has little or no effect in all but a minority of circumstances."
- Conclusion 2: "Since one exposure is usually ineffective, the central goal of productive media planning should be to place emphasis on enhancing frequency rather than reach."
- Conclusion 3: "The weight of evidence suggests strongly that an exposure frequency of two within a purchase cycle is an effective level."
- Conclusion 4: "By and large, optimal exposure frequency appears to be at least three exposures within a brand purchase cycle, or over a period of four or even eight weeks. Increasing frequency continues to build advertising effectiveness at a decreasing weight, but with no evidence of decline."
- Conclusion 5: "Beyond three exposures within a brand purchase cycle, or over a period of four or even eight weeks, increasing frequency continues to build advertising effectiveness at a decreasing weight, but with no evidence of decline."

There have been a great many tests and a lot written on television commercial wearout, but no one knows "how much is too much." The lessons learned from television can equally be applicable for Radio.

Observations:

- Research has indicated that even when television commercials are initially effective, subsequent exposure causes effectiveness to level off and ultimately decline.

- Repeated exposures, even to advertising that is initially persuasive, may cause a campaign to lose its effectiveness.
 - Research has established that wearout is not a gradual process. Once the point of maximum effectiveness is reached, wearout occurs quite rapidly.
 - Wearout is a function of frequency, exposure and time. If one runs a heavy schedule within a given week, one is directly affecting both exposure and time, which is compressed, as opposed to running the same schedule over several weeks.
 - In the ridiculous extreme, it is obvious that no matter how good one's ad is, a person exposed to it every hour on the hour will eventually reach the gag point.
 - The greater number of different commercials one has (for the same product), the greater the probability that one will maintain the attention of the target audience throughout the campaign.
 - A convincing case can be made that there exists some form of drop-off in the effectiveness of a television commercial over time. This has been shown in the form of day-after-recall, awareness, interest, and attitude.
 - In general, advertising strategies tend not to wear out. It is the execution which tires and lends to viewer irritation or "tune-out."
 - Commercials with a strong attention-getting gimmick or those which rely on verbal or visual hyperbole, will wear out quickly. One can only tell the same joke once to the same audience.
 - A good selling idea will not wear out. Most product commercials are based on product differentiation. With these commercials, it is more likely to be the execution which wears out and stimulate viewer irritation.
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- One key factor is the target audience. A commercial aimed mainly at mothers, for example, might have a quick wearout factor among teenage girls.
 - Studies in the '80's indicate young children and the elderly appear to be more tolerant of repetition.
 - Varying the content of the message rather than its execution is the appropriate strategy for overcoming wearout.
 - Strong competition can accelerate wearout, particularly if there is little differentiation in creative strategy within a product field. Loss of "share of mind" may not be just through failing to rejuvenate a campaign but due to the effects of competing claims.



Source: Dr. Tom Evans, Vice President of Audio Research and Special Projects for ESPN, Inc.