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

Radio Ad Effectiveness Depends on Execution

In the Radio Ad Lab White Paper #2¹, we summarized a large set of published research which estimated that, on average, Radio commercials generate about 80 percent of the recall of a single TV ad.

But there's some interesting research behind that general pattern. This new White Paper makes clear how important it is to invest more time and effort in the quality of Radio advertising creative. It turns out that there's a wide range of variation around the historical average for Radio — *more so than for other tested media*. And that tells us something about the importance of

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.

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.



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.

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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)
- 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.**

*“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.)

Radio Ad Lab Commentary: The Importance of High-Quality Radio Creative

We waded into the waters of “Radio creative” with great trepidation. Clearly, there’s no one right answer about what works and what doesn’t. And in all honesty, there’s not a lot of recent published research to provide solid “guidelines.”

But we do know this: There’s considerable research showing how wide the difference is between good Radio ads and the not-so-good. Furthermore, there’s some evidence that the good-to-bad range for Radio ads has typically been wider than for other media.

Regrettably, that comes as no surprise to the Radio Ad Lab Research Committee. It’s widely understood that Radio commercials don’t usually get as much attention as their TV and print siblings. In addition, Radio campaigns are rarely subjected to the extensive pre-testing applied to the TV and print ads.

But in this era of the supremacy of ROI, isn’t it time for a change? When there’s evidence that the best Radio ads can have as much impact as the average TV ad at a fraction of the cost, **doesn’t it make sense to invest more in creating and**



Coming Soon: Radio Ad Lab Guide to Radio Commercial Testing Services

While the Radio Ad Lab doesn’t have all the answers to what makes for a great Radio commercial, we do believe in the merits of objective research to find out what works for each advertiser. That’s why we’re now compiling our first *Radio Ad Lab Guide to Radio Commercial Testing Services*, to be published shortly.

We’re doing an extensive search of industry resources so that we can make available to you a description of each significant commercial testing service that offers Radio ad testing. Included for each firm will be:

- Company information: Name, address, phone number, e-mail and fax by location; length of time in business, key people/partners, global and internet capabilities.
- Test design: Recruitment, explanation of study, where and how ad is exposed, session length and other details.
- Questionnaire and measures: Questionnaire outline, types of measures (recall/persuasion diagnostic measures, etc).
- Sample sizes: Number recruited and final sample expectations.
- Validation: Validation studies and documentation.
- Ad format(s) tested: Finished, rough or concept.

This *Radio Ad Lab Guide to Radio Commercial Testing Services* will be published shortly, and it will be made available electronically for free, as are all of our other publications. So if you’re not now on our email notification list, please let us know (info@radioadlab.org).

“Doesn’t it make sense to invest more in creating and testing Radio ads?”



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To measure and understand
Radio as an ad medium

The Radio Ad Lab is an independent organization established in 2001. The Radio Ad Lab is funded by Radio industry companies and works with advertisers, agencies and Radio broadcasters to further the understanding of how Radio advertising works, to measure Radio's effectiveness and to increase advertiser and agency confidence in Radio.

Radio Ad Lab Board of Directors and Research Committee

The Radio Ad Lab Board of Directors is comprised of radio industry executives from the funding organizations and from other key broadcasting constituencies. For more detailed information, and to view a list of the Board members, please visit our website.

The Radio Ad Lab Research Committee is responsible for determining the direction of all research projects funded by the Radio Ad Lab and includes members from the advertising and client communities in addition to the Radio industry. Research Committee members are:

Radio Ad Lab Research Committee: Chair - Jerry Lee (WBEB-FM); Vice Chair - Mary Bennett (Radio Advertising Bureau). **Agencies:** Paul Hunt (Burrell Communications); Alyce Abbe (Carat); Shari Anne Brill (Carat Insight); David Ernst (Initiative Media); Janice Finkel-Greene (Initiative Media); Matthew Warnecke (Mediacom); Kim Vasey (mediaedge:cia); David Shiffman (Mediavest Worldwide); Jeff Voigt (Mindshare Team Detroit); Agnes Lukasewych (MPG); Natalie Swed Stone (OMD); Judy Bahary (Starcom Mediavest); Helen Katz (Starcom Mediavest Group); Michele Buslik (TargetCast); Irene Katsnelson (Universal McCann); Michael Orgera (Universal McCann); J.P. James (Uniworld Group, Inc.); Lucilla Iturralde-Rachev (The Vidal Partnership); Matt Feinberg (Zenith Media). **Advertisers:** Jeni Cramer (At-Large); Kaki Hinton (At-Large); Debbie Vasquez (Coca-Cola North America); Betsy Lazar (General Motors); Glenn M. Roginski (GlaxoSmithKline); Mark Dorrill (The Home Depot); Paul Silverman (Novartis Pharmaceutical); Rex Conklin (Wal-Mart); Ramon Portilla (Wal-Mart). **Broadcasters:** Gary Heller (CBS Radio); Jess Hanson (Clear Channel Radio); Kathleen Bohan (Univision Radio); Charlotte Lawyer (Consultant). **RAB:** Sean Clark; Andy Rainey. **Networks:** Barry Feldman (American Urban Radio Networks); Allison Gelardi (Jones MediaAmerica); Len Klatt (Premiere Radio Networks); Pamela Lynott (Jones MediaAmerica); Paul Bronstein (Westwood One Radio Networks). **Rep Groups:** Doug Catalanello (Interep); Gerry Boehme (Katz Media Group). **Arbitron:** Ed Cohen; Carol Hanley. **ARF:** Bill Cook. **Consultant:** James Peacock (Peacock Research, Inc.).

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