



Personal Relevance, Personal Connections: How Radio Ads Affect Consumers

The First in a Series of Consumer Research Studies

Conducted by WirthlinWorldwide, December 2004

Study Highlights

Since its inception in 2001, the Radio Ad Lab has learned there are many ways to look at “effectiveness,” and there are a multitude of factors which can affect advertising outcomes. One of the more challenging issues concerns the “how” of radio advertising. It’s one thing to demonstrate that radio can be effective; it’s another to help advertisers know how to assure effectiveness in their radio campaigns.

What is clear (as we summarized in Radio Ad Lab White Paper #3, at <http://radioadlab.org/white-papers.htm>) is that there is a wide range of effectiveness across different campaigns. The average radio ad tends to have about 80 percent of the recall power of a single television ad (at much less cost), which makes for excellent Return on Investment.

But we also know that there’s a big difference between the best radio ads and the weakest. That suggests that the ROI for radio advertising could be even better-if only we knew the magic formula for creating and scheduling good radio ads.

Out of that concern grew the current study, which we believe can provide useful guidance to advertisers pondering the “how” of radio advertising.

How We Did This Study

In response to a Request for Proposals issued by the Radio Ad Lab in Fall 2003, the research firm WirthlinWorldwide (WW) proposed the present study. In general, WW offered their expertise in brand mapping to better understand how consumer perceptions of radio advertising might differ from those of TV and newspaper ads.

The details of the methods we used in this study, along with additional findings, are available in the full paper, available for free download at <http://radioadlab.org/reports.htm>. The Radio Ad Lab conducted the research in two phases—a qualitative first phase to understand the values and benefits lexicon used by consumers in discussing media and advertising, and a quantitative structured survey to better quantify the architecture of consumer relationships to advertising.

After recruiting and screening our respondents on the telephone for Phase Two, we offered them a choice of taking the survey on the Internet or via a printed questionnaire in the mail. About 80 percent of the Phase Two completions came from Internet surveys. In Phase Two, we achieved a total of 662 completed and usable questionnaires.

The Results

The advertising-specific section of the questionnaire included a battery of questions that compared advertising on two media (radio vs. TV, or radio vs. newspapers). For example, respondents were given a list of statements like this: **"I feel like the ads are directed more toward me personally."**

Respondents were then asked to rate that statement on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 meant "associate more with television" (or newspapers), and 7 meant "associate more with radio." Averages were then computed for each question. Average scores above a value of 4.0 represent statements associated more with radio, while any scores below 4.0 would be associated more with the other medium.

Radio Ads vs. TV Ads

First, let's see which statements were most associated with radio when the comparison was to television.

Radio is associated more with:	Mean (rated on a scale of 1 to 7)
Advertisements make me feel more connected to my community	5.2
Advertisements in this medium are more honest	4.8
The advertisements are concise	4.6
I feel like the advertisements are directed more toward me personally	4.4
Advertisements in these medium are reliable	4.3
I am more likely to trust the advertising in this medium	4.2
I get more exposure to advertisements for local products and services	5.3
I can do other things while absorbing the advertising in this medium	5.1
I am more likely to trust the advertising	4.3
Provides me with last minute info about products/services before I shop	4.2
More likely to get a good deal on the products/services that I purchase	4.1
I'm less likely to waste money buying products/services that I don't want	4.1
Advertisers who use this medium care more about reaching me personally	4.7

As you can see in Figure 1, the consumers in our study rated radio ads more highly than television ads on a number of dimensions. One of the most intriguing patterns was a sense of personal relevance, as seen in statements like:

- "... directed more toward me personally ..."
- "... care more about reaching me personally ..."
- "... more connected to my community ..."
- "... more likely to trust ..."

To us, this pattern is significant. When compared to television ads, radio ads are seen as being more personally connected to the consumer. We also see the beginning of another theme, concerning radio's ability to connect with people emotionally. When people cite radio ads' greater association with honesty, trust, and reliability, we believe consumers have a more internal, more values-based relationship with the ads they hear on radio. We saw a similar pattern of personal connectedness when radio ads were contrasted with those in newspapers.

Radio Ads vs. Newspaper Ads

We asked a related battery of comparative questions of those respondents surveyed about radio and newspapers. The issue of personal relevance shows here too, at least as strongly as for television (Figure 2).

Radio is associated more with:	Mean (rated on a scale of 1 to 7)
Advertisements are more fun	5.6
Advertisements are creative	5.3
The advertising in this medium is more interesting and engaging	5.1
Advertisements in this medium are intrusive	5.1
I feel like the ads are directed more toward me personally	4.9
Ads do a better job of reaching the people they are meant for	4.9
I can do other things while absorbing the advertising in this medium	5.7
The advertisements are more likely to hold my attention	4.6
Remember ad longer because ads in this medium have more impact on me	4.6
These advertisements are more likely to open my mind to new ideas	4.2
Advertisers who use this medium are trying hard to reach me	5.0
Advertisers who use this medium care more about reaching me personally	4.4

Our theme of Personal Relevance for radio advertising shows up in comparisons like:

- "... directed more toward me personally ..."
- "... better job of reaching the people they are meant for ..."
- "... have more impact on me ..."
- "... trying harder to reach me ..."
- "care more about reaching me personally ..."

Clearly, consumers see radio advertising as being more connected to them as individuals, and more relevant overall, than is newspaper advertising. We see emotional threads running through the statements associated with radio as well.

Ad Perceptions

It seems clear that radio advertising is perceived as being more relevant to the consumer, and more personally connected, than ads on television or in newspapers. And because of that more-personal connection, radio ads trigger emotional reactions among consumers.

That makes intuitive sense, we believe. Radio is the medium people choose for themselves, and radio programming is usually targeted to very specific groups of people. What we've discovered is that the personalization of radio formats carries over to the perceptions of radio ads. In simple terms, people believe that "my station" carries "my ads."

Medium Perceptions

In our full report, we also discuss a series of analyses conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide on perceptions of each medium (as opposed to the advertising perceptions discussed above). For this article, we won't attempt to cover all of those analyses, in part because the analysis techniques take a while to explain.

For now, though, we can tell you that the results were consistent with, and provided a grounding for, the perceptions of ads in each medium. As a medium, radio reaches people at a more personal, emotional, and relevant level.

What it Means for Advertisers

We think these are the major implications for advertisers and their agencies:

1. The personal nature of the radio medium is also reflected in the expectation that radio advertising is directed personally to the listener, and that radio advertisers are “trying to reach me personally.” This has some specific implications for the planning and creation of radio advertising:
 - Radio ads, more than for other media, need to be compatible with their surroundings. There is no one-size-fits-all ad for radio (at least not one that’s effective) and format-specific advertising matters.
 - Radio ads need to speak to people at a personal level, not as a group. Consumers expect television and newspaper ads to try reaching a large population, but radio ads need to speak to the individual.
 - While radio can be used to provide synergy with advertising on other media, that doesn’t mean that radio ads can simply duplicate the content or style of the other medium. Effective radio communication requires an approach that is more personal.
 - And because radio ads work differently than those in other media, advertisers would be well-served by the use of more radio commercial pretesting to make sure the message is appropriate to the medium. (See our separate publication, the Radio Ad Lab Guide to Commercial Testing Services for Radio at our website, <http://radioadlab.org>.)
2. Radio reaches people at an emotional level at least as well as television, and much more than newspapers. It’s widely acknowledged in the advertising community that it’s no longer enough to present consumers with product/service attributes and benefits. To be truly motivating, advertising must include an emotional appeal. The tendency of radio listeners to interact with the medium on an emotional level represents a great opportunity for advertising to leverage that emotional receptivity. This observation may also suggest something about “production values” in radio advertising. Elaborate production may be less important than having the right message—the right conduit into personal relevance and emotions.
3. Given how strongly people identify with “their” stations (and “their ads”), radio’s ability to be effective, and to generate excellent ROI, shouldn’t come as a surprise.

The fact is, radio makes personal, emotional connections with listeners, and that’s a very powerful environment for an advertiser. The Radio Ad Lab has other studies in the pipeline to better quantify radio’s ROI for advertisers. For now, though, we have some objective indicators of why radio can be so effective—when it’s used properly.

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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:

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About The Radio Ad Lab

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

All Radio Ad Lab research, including White Papers, studies, and summaries, is available in its entirety and for free download at www.RadioAdLab.org. We encourage you to sign up for our email list at the website to make sure that you're notified of new Radio Ad Lab research.

