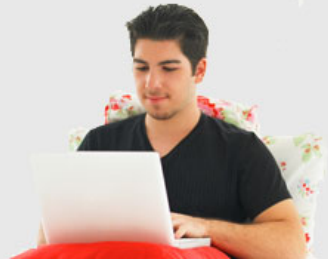


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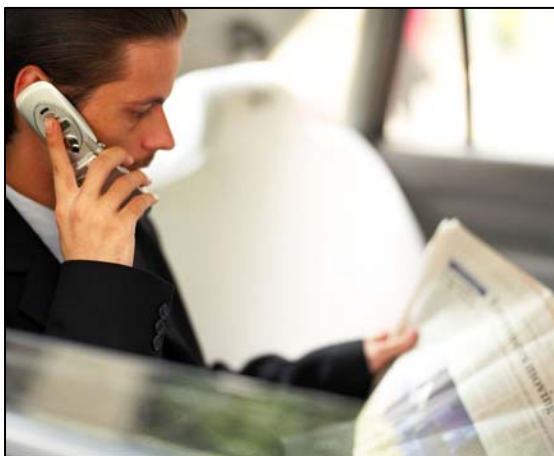
## “Engagement” Is in the Eye of the Beholder

*Marketers and researchers need to recognize that there are many definitions of engagement, and that metrics should be linked to objectives whenever possible*

*By Maura Clancey*

At a time when media multitasking is becoming the norm — with consumers juggling cell phone calls, email, television, conversation, eating, and dozens of other activities — few concepts seem more relevant to advertising ROI than engagement.

When we talk about audience “engagement” within media, what we really want to know is: Are people more likely to be paying attention to the *advertising*? Determining if consumers are more attentive to a particular medium, genre, network, magazine, daypart, or program is only relevant if we can translate that to an assumed “value-add” for advertisers.



The notion of *engagement* has many facets, with different buyers and sellers keying in on measures that apply best to their assets and capabilities; engagement can be measured in terms of the resonance of a media brand with the consumer, the minutes spent physically watching the TV screen, or the commitment to seeing a certain program. Thus, an accurate and client-driven approach is one that recognizes the particular engagement criteria that apply. Not all media serve the same purpose or act the same way; so Knowledge Networks (KN) takes a custom approach to understanding how programming operates and its strengths and weaknesses as they relate to metrics like engagement.

One key tenet, based upon extensive KN/SRI research, has been that engagement with content spills over to become engagement with advertising. Our research has shown, for example, that those who are attentive to a particular network — whether it is Fox News or The Weather Channel — are also more likely to see and remember ads on that network.

## Hardly New, but Still Evolving

The notion of media audience engagement (a.k.a., “attentiveness” and a dozen other pseudonyms) is nothing new, especially in television. In the 1970s and 1980s, we conducted extensive studies for the broadcast networks on repeat viewing of programming – considered to be a marker for engagement with the program, and thus greater worth for advertisers.

Since then, KN/SRI has used a variety of metrics to accurately describe the engagement value that a particular network or other client brings to the table based upon their objectives. Each represents a different approach to the same question: Are we holding consumers’ attention, rather than just “reaching” them?

- **“Eyes-on” minutes:** Multitasking is often the antithesis of engagement; so when activities accompanying TV (from eating to reading) began to multiply, we began measuring the number of minutes viewers had their “eyes on” the TV set. From 1991 to 2001, we conducted over 30,000 interviews asking this battery of questions and found that attentive and inattentive behaviors were both largely consistent. (KN has conducted over 50,000 interviews using its *How People Use*® questions; to learn more about these reports, go to <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/htm/index.html>.)
- **Brand resonance:** When consumers feel an affinity with almost anything – a coffee type, skin care product, or TV network — we say that the brand *resonates* with them. KN/SRI extended this concept to media brands with extremely positive results. These measures showed that resonant media elements — including personalities,

programs, and channels — lead to engagement with advertising; this assumption can be extended to ad recall and reactions to advertising.

- **“Wantedness:”** We also developed a four-part measurement to understand the importance viewers attach to programming; the aspects are:
  - Value (defined as worth, usefulness, or importance)
  - Necessity (something that is essential, indispensable)
  - Effort (the amount of work one would put into viewing a program)
  - Persistence (repeated viewing; enduring)

By evaluating these separately and together, we arrive at a clear sense of the value a program or other entity holds for consumers, and thus whether they are likely to be involved in advertising that surrounds or inhabits the entity.

More recently, we have evaluated more than 60 measures of engagement for primetime programs and modeled ad recall. Our goal: To identify the strongest predictors of ad recall, which in turn will become operational definitions of engagement. We will have scores across programs, genres, and networks, which will translate to more-informed buying decisions for advertisers.

## *Linking to Product Relevance and Purchase Intent*

Engagement with advertising also is influenced by product relevance. Is a consumer in the market for that same category and kind of product? Does a particular brand have the edge, or is the decision wide open? And, conversely, is the ad reaching consumers who are more likely to be in the market for that product — young men, perhaps, or Moms with grade-school kids?

All of this goes to the *relevance* of advertising — whether a consumer’s relationship to the brand or product type creates a deeper natural interest. A brilliant ad can be wasted on those who have little or no likelihood of buying; and, conversely, a lower-quality ad about a highly relevant product can be more impactful than anyone could predict.

Most recently, KN has embarked on a partnership with XYTE, which has created a powerful profiling system that identifies the “intentionalities” that are hard-wired into us. By linking XYTE’s profiles, which remain essentially unchanged for a lifetime, to engagement with media, product consumption, and other behaviors, we can arrive at a more actionable understanding of consumers and empower more accurate targeting.

In addition, we have done some preliminary work toward linking attentiveness to purchase intent for advertised products and services.

Of course, the “X” factor that is so difficult to measure but also impossible to ignore is creative. In the absence of good creative, all other planning and measurement goes by the wayside. But we must still get the metrics about context and other elements in order to give the creative its best opportunity.

## *The Value of a Custom Approach*

These are just a few of the ways that engagement resides in the eye of the beholder. Our takeaway, through years of study, has been that, while common patterns do emerge, the best way to measure engagement needs to be established on a case-by-case basis; among the factors to consider are:

- The medium in question
- The product being advertised
- The goals of an ad campaign
- The populations being targeted by the product or advertising

As we expand our engagement work, so too will our understanding of the concept itself broaden; but measuring engagement in some form or other will be an important aspect of advertising metrics for many years to come.

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