
MMR Unveils Latest PReSS Survey

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Over the years, reader engagement has been a hot buzzword, but until recently there was little in the way of accurate data.

Last year, though, the tide began to turn. Monroe Mendelsohn Research developed the Publication Readership Satisfaction Survey, or PReSS, to help measure the qualitative attributes of magazines. The service was created to help advertisers and media buyers measure reader involvement and satisfaction from 16,000 survey participants, allowing for side-by-side comparisons between magazines.

On June 14, MMR will release its most comprehensive report to date. The 2005 PReSS survey will measure engagement across 17 metrics for nearly 200 magazines.

The survey “gives the advertising agencies the ability to take a look at how good the brands really are,” said Bob Shullman, MMR senior vp and PReSS’ chief architect. “This brings a new dimension to decision-making as it effectively demonstrates the strengths of a publication vis-à-vis its competition.”

Participants provided answers to questions such as how often they read a particular magazine and how enjoyable, entertaining and informative that magazine is. The survey also asked participants about the visual elements of the magazine, for instance, how memorable its covers were. The responses were then assigned a numerical rating, which advertisers can compare in a multitude of ways. For example, an advertiser can weigh a group of newsweeklies based on how many times a reader read the magazine in a given month, or how many minutes subscribers spend reading the magazine.

A sampling of the latest data reported that National Geographic and Guideposts scored high in overall excellence, while Sunday magazine Parade and the bimonthly AARP the Magazine were the top two magazines for reader loyalty.

While magazines often conduct independent subscriber studies that show reader involvement, “It’s an apples and oranges comparison when one magazine [compares] does it to another,” said Coleen Kuehn, executive vp, chief strategist for MPG. “With PReSS, it’s an apples-to-apples comparison.”

So far, many of the major media agencies including MindShare, MediaCom, MediaVest, Starcom, OMD and MPG subscribe to the service. Interestingly, magazine publishers have so far been slow to sign on. Only two magazines from Time Inc. (Business 2.0 and Cottage Living) and two from Hearst Magazines (Veranda and Esquire) are on board, in addition to independent titles The Sporting News and The Economist.

“It’s the one ingredient that has been missing from media analysis, especially from the perspective of advertising agencies,” said Sims Bray, publisher of Hearst’s Veranda. The

hesitancy on the part of publishers could come from the fact that the product is unproven and expensive—the PReSS study is an additional \$30,000 to \$50,000 on top of the standard Mendelsohn Affluence data that costs approximately \$60,000. “Magazines are spending a small fortune on research as it is,” said Bray.

On the heels of the release of PReSS, Simmons Research this fall will unveil its own Multi-Media Engagement Survey that measures engagement for magazines, Web sites, and television in both English and Spanish. Later this year, PReSS also will expand its reach for its 2006 survey to cover cable TV networks and Web sites of both magazines and popular destination sites.