

Media Planning

There used to be a video booth in Toronto called “The Soap Box.” For a small fee, you could go inside, shut the door, and pontificate for up to five minutes on whatever point you wanted to share with the world. At the end of the day, the person giving the best soap box performance would see themselves broadcast on an obscure public broadcasting station that nobody ever watched. Thus comes the next challenge in any communications campaign: It’s one thing to have something to say, it’s another to be heard.

Effective communications campaigns need a media plan. This part of your campaign outlines how you’ll get your message across. A media plan consists of two elements: The media you pay for and the media you get for free (also called “earned media” or “press relations”). This section focuses on the media you pay for, but keep in mind that effective campaign teams think about using paid media in concert with earned media (see “*Getting Media Coverage*” and “*Press Releases*”).

As with all other elements of a communications campaign, your media plan should link to your overall campaign objective. Before creating a media plan, you need know your target audience, geography, timing (when will the campaign run, is there a deadline such as a vote?), creative mediums (will you have TV ads, radio ads, print ads?), and, of course, budget.

Creating a Media Plan

Quite simply, a media plan allows you to spend as little money as possible to reach as many members of your target audience as possible, with enough frequency to ensure that your message gets heard. Unless you’ve got a bottomless budget, a media plan requires trade-offs. A good media planner, normally found at advertising agencies or independent media planning firms, juggles these trade-offs for you. All media plans should clarify the following:

1. **Media mix.** What type of media should you purchase? Print, TV, radio?
2. **Media vehicles.** In what specific TV show, radio station, newspaper, magazine, etc., should you place your ad?
3. **Media schedule.** When should you run your ad, how often, and for how long?

We’ll go through each of these in turn.



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MEDIA PLANNING ON A SHOESTRING

We realize most organizations can’t afford much of the media described in this section. You may be lucky to buy a radio spot—forget about a TV commercial. If you have a limited budget, focus on lower-cost media (e.g., billboards, print ads, local cable programming, direct mail, and earned media). However, even if you’re low on money, most of the traditional media planning principles still apply to non-traditional media. How will you allocate your budget to get repeat exposure? What mix of billboards and local weeklies will give you the coverage you need? How long will your campaign run? Can you reach enough people to make a difference?

Media mix. The media mix is the proportion of television, radio, print, and other forms of advertising used in a particular campaign. Figuring out the right mix is part art and part science. Certain media, like television, reach a lot of people, but come at a high price, and budget constraints may rule it out. Other media channels are more flexible and let you hone in on your target audience. For example, if you’re trying to reach women who knit, place ads in magazines focused on textile crafts. Finally, creative constraints might also eliminate one or more media options. If your message

relies on powerful visuals, don't waste money on radio spots. Complicated messages may do better as print ads than TV commercials.

Media vehicles. Unlike the term "media channel," which refers to a general type of media outlet, "media vehicle" refers to the specific individual television station, radio station, print advertiser, or outdoor advertiser where your campaign message will run. Media planners choose media vehicles based on how cost-effectively they reach your target audience. However, cost isn't the only factor. KWRT radio may be a great bargain, but if it reaches only 500 total listeners, you won't reach enough people to make a difference. That's why media planners also look at the number of target audience members a vehicle is likely to reach. Regardless of where you place your ad, remember one thing: Marketing research shows that on average, people don't remember an ad unless they see or hear it three or more times. A poor media plan spreads the budget too thin across too many vehicles. You're better off reaching 100,000 people three times than 300,000 people only once. That said, you also don't want to pay to have the same people see your ad 15 times, because that's more repetition than they need.

Some vehicles give you a higher concentration of target audience members. If a television station plans to run a special series on fly fishing, by all means, place your fly-fishing lure ad during the broadcast. You'll reach far more fishing enthusiasts than if your ad runs during *Oprah*. If you're trying to reach the moveable middle, remember that while *Logo* and *The Advocate* may be friendly media vehicles, they almost exclusively target the base.

Media schedule. The media schedule outlines when your ad will run and how often. It includes the number of weeks your campaign will be running on each media outlet and the timing of the media spots. The media schedule takes into consideration budget (certain timeslots are more expensive than others), frequency (will the target audience have enough exposure to the ad to remember it?), and reach (are you reaching enough people?). Skillful media planners balance these considerations to help you effectively reach your target audience. Because audiences need repeat exposure to your campaign to remember it, planners typically buy a minimum amount of coverage from each media vehicle. For example, minimum frequencies for magazines are four to six ad placements over a twelve-month period. Radio ads should earn

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at least 50 gross rating points per week. Most media schedules also take into account "effective reach" (i.e., the percent of the target audience that can be expected to have had an adequate number of repeat exposures to the ad campaign).

Buying Media

Once you and the media planner agree to a plan, it's time to buy the media. A media buyer (who is often the same person as your media planner) negotiates placement rates based on the expected advertising impressions. They use cost guidelines from past experience or TV and radio cost projections provided by media forecasting companies like SQUAD. Media buys generally fall into two categories: broadcast and print. To understand what you're buying, some basic terminology is helpful.

Understanding broadcast media buys. There are two sets of basic terminology for broadcast media. The first defines what you're paying for (how many people are you reaching, how many times, and how significant is this in your market?). The second defines how much you're paying. See the "[Broadcast Media Terms](#)" chart on the following page for a list of terms.

Understanding Print Media Terminology. The bad news is that print media has a different set of terminology from broadcast media. The good news is that it's far less complex. See the "[Print Media Terms](#)" chart on the following page for a list of terms.

Post-Buy Analysis (Did You Get Your Money's Worth?)

For most consumer products in America, you buy a fixed quantity for a fixed price. Apples at the super-market cost a dollar per pound, and if you spend a dollar, you'll get one pound. With media buys, the price is fixed but the quantity can vary. It's more like a local farmer's market: Two apples cost a dollar, but it's a crapshoot whether you'll get two big apples or two small ones. You might get a bargain; you might get stiffed; you might get an apple with worms. Let's take a look at what makes media buying and pricing so tricky.

Broadcast Media Terms (What Are You Paying For?)

Term	Definition	Fictional Example
Share	The percent of households watching television in a particular market that are tuned to a particular show	<i>Lost</i> may have 25% share in the 8:00-9:00 p.m. prime time slot in Denver
Rating	The percent of households with a television in a particular market that are tuned to a particular show (differs from share because rating includes households not watching TV at the time)	While 25% of television viewers may be watching <i>Lost</i> at 8:00 p.m. in Denver, this may only equate to 18% of the population if many people have their TVs turned off because they're out fishing
Gross Rating Points (GRP)	A total measure of ad exposure (a commercial run multiple times during a show counts as multiple times)	If <i>Lost</i> has a rating of 18% but the same commercial runs three times during the one-hour episode, the GRP is 18 x 3, or 46 (gross ratings are duplicated ratings and can exceed 100)
Reach	The number of unique households actually exposed to the ad	If Denver's population is an even 2 million and <i>Lost</i> has a rating of 18%, the reach of the commercial is 360,000 households
Frequency	The average number of times an audience is exposed to an ad over the course of the campaign, or within a specific timeframe (frequency isn't the same as total number of ad placements because not everyone watches each ad)	If, by some media planning mistake, the ad runs only once each on <i>Lost</i> , <i>Heroes</i> , and <i>Ugly Betty</i> , and all three ads are in the same timeslot, the frequency would be one, since target audience members could not watch all three shows at once
Gross Impressions	The sum of all gross audiences of all media vehicles without regard to duplication	Every time a person is exposed to the ad, it counts as a gross impression (if you see the same ad 10 times, that's 10 gross impressions)
Cost Per Thousand (CPM)	Cost of delivering the message to 1,000 households (getting 1,000 gross impressions of the advertisement)	If <i>Lost</i> reaches 360,000 people in Denver and the CPM is \$50, you would pay 360 x \$50 for the ad, or \$18,000
Cost Per Point (CPP)	Cost of reaching one percent of the population	If <i>Lost</i> has a rating of 18 in Denver and the CPP of a commercial is \$800, the cost for the spot is \$14,400 (\$800 x 18)
Cost Per Unit (CPU)	The cost for purchasing a single ad spot, generally determined by the rating x CPP	What did you end up paying for the <i>Lost</i> ad? In the example above, the CPU is \$14,400

Print Media Terms (What Are You Paying For?)

Term	Definition	Fictional Example
Circulation	The number of copies of a particular issue that are sold or distributed	<i>Food Lovers</i> magazine has a circulation of 100,000
Audience	Total number of readers of an issue, including pass-alongs	<i>Food Lovers</i> has an audience of 140,000 because it's often read by both partners in a household, and recipes are passed along to friends
Composition	The percentage of the target audience that the publication reaches	55% of <i>Food Lovers</i> readers are women aged 25 to 55
Coverage	The percentage of your target audience that the magazine reaches	An ad placement in <i>Food Lovers</i> Denver will reach an audience of 140,000 people, 55% of whom are women aged 25 to 55, so it reaches 77,000 women; if there are 1 million women aged 22 to 55 in Denver, your coverage is 7.7%
Cost Per Thousand (CPM)	The cost to reach 1,000 people	If the ad costs \$10,000 and reaches 140,000 people, the CPM is \$71.43 (\$10,000 ÷ 140)

Understanding how media pricing is negotiated.

Broadcast media pricing is difficult because you agree to a fixed price for a TV commercial upfront, but you don't have any guarantee how many people will actually see the commercial. Media buyers (who typically charge a commission of 15% on the media they buy) try to predict what an ad is worth by estimating how many people are likely to see it. To do this, they normally look at audience ratings. All other things being equal, buyers value a commercial spot on a show with 1 million viewers more than they do on a show with 500,000 viewers. However, unlike print advertising (where circulation numbers stay consistent), TV viewership can vary widely from week to week. (Just because 1 million people watch *Ugly Betty* this week doesn't mean 1 million people will watch it next week—particularly if it runs during the Super Bowl).

Projecting the viewership of an upcoming television show is something of an art. Media buyers look at the past to try to predict the future. They check viewership history, historical ratings trends, competitive programming situations, on-air staffing changes, and anything else that bears relevance. Based on their estimates of audience size, the media buyer negotiates a fixed

price. The rub is, the actual audience reached by the station at the moment your commercial runs could be higher or lower than estimated. Like buying apples from Farmer Dan, you won't get your money back because you got less than you hoped for. Conversely, you won't pay more if you got more coverage than you hoped for either. However, it's nice to know if you got close to plan and whether or not your media buyer made accurate projections. This requires doing a post-buy analysis.

Doing a post-buy analysis. In addition to reporting on whether you got more or fewer viewers than you paid for, a post-buy analysis also checks for worms. Did the schedule run as ordered? Was the reproduction quality good? Do the invoice fees match the agreement?

Audience levels for the overall campaign should average within 10% of projections. Obviously, you don't want to reach far fewer people than projected. But it's also not ideal to reach far more people than projected. Why? Because it means you could have reached your target number of people with fewer media placements, saving money on the media buy. That said, no media planner is perfect. You can expect them to be close, but not dead on.

Sample Post-Media-Buy Analysis

A post-buy analysis may appear as follows:

- A** Viewership for *ABC News* exceeded expectations, while *Oprah* disappointed. The upshot: *ABC News* provided greater than expected value for the money.
- B** The index of actual vs. projected coverage and costs shows the degree to which something was higher or lower than expected. In this case, actual GRPs for *ABC News* reached 107% of cost expectations. Good media plans should fall within 10% of projections overall (an index of 90 to 110), though individual media placements may vary more than this.
- C** Actual and budgeted cost usually stays the same since the media buyer negotiates the price upfront. However, costs can decrease if spots do not run as planned, as is the case for *Ugly Betty* below.

	Purchased/Contracted			Actual/Achieved			Index of Actual vs. Projections	
	Gross Rating Points	Cost	Cost Per Point	Gross Rating Points	Cost	Cost Per Point	Gross Rating Points	Cost
<i>ABC News</i>	150 A	\$66,750	\$445	160 A	\$66,750	\$417	107 B	100
<i>Oprah</i>	100 A	\$28,800	\$288	90 A	\$28,800	\$320	90	100
<i>Ugly Betty</i>	75	\$22,500	\$300	65	\$19,500	\$300	87	87
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Analysis of Other Media Purchases

Few people conduct post-buy analyses for radio since listenership remains fairly steady. However, you should at least do a worm check (i.e., get a final schedule to ensure that the spots ran as planned, in the approximate timeslots you negotiated).

With print placement, simply monitor execution. Did it run in the size, format, section, etc., as contracted? Was the ad of good quality? Always request tear sheets of the pages that include your ad.

Monitoring outdoor placement is also a matter of execution. Were the posters or billboards maintained? Do the locations conform to the contract?



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