

Up Your Ratings

Leading Edge Information You Can Use to Increase Ratings,
Get a Raise and Have More Fun

**Steve Casey
Research**

Volume 9, Issue 2

February, 2011

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Up Your Ratings is produced monthly. It is free to clients and friends of Steve Casey Research.

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Update: Leading Edge Music Analysis: Artist Era Distribution and Strength

Last month I let you know about a new analysis we've added to MusicVISTA, the Artist and Song Distribution Detail.

Thanks to an idea from Australian programming consultant Simon Mumford, we have a nice update. Rather than a single artist, you can now click on multiple artists. So, for example, you can combine Queen and Freddie Mercury, or any other set of artist that you want to treat as similar when you are thinking about artist separation and controlling the impact an artist has on a sched-

Lessons from PPM Meters: How People Really Listen to Radio

This newsletter has a mostly international readership. In your country, it is likely that your ratings are not based on the electronic "Portable People Meter". Nonetheless, the automatic recording of radio listening is giving us a closer look at the reality of listener behavior. You can use that information to increase your programming skills, regardless of how ratings are conducted in your country.

In 2010 we started to get some much better information about PPM. Arbitron itself started studying the differences in key metrics between winners and losers. DMR, Coleman,

Broadcast Architecture and others have greatly increased our knowledge. Much of this came to a head with the December 2010 Arbitron client conference, which had a huge emphasis on PPM and a number of informative presentations.

Almost everything the “experts” said in the beginning about PPM and how stations should adjust their programming was misguided at best. Fortunately, what is now emerging is a much clearer and realistic of PPM strengths and weakness. Even more importantly, people are now arriving at much more accurate conclusions about how we mesh PPM data with our programming strategies.

About Steve Casey Research

Steve Casey Research specializes in helping stations increase ratings. Our contribution is highly effective research and communications between listeners and the station programming team. We help you obtain frequent and accurate feedback from your listeners.

Most consultants show up with opinions. Steve Casey brings you leading edge tools. He makes available to his clients the most advanced music research tools in radio and over 40 years of experience using and perfecting those tools at many of the most successful stations, in more than 50 countries.

We've been honored to provide our help to exceptional broadcasters like the Australian Radio Network, TV2 Radio (Denmark), Mango (India), CanWest (New Zealand, Turkey), Cox (USA), CBS (USA), NRJ Group (France), Chrysalis (UK), Start Group (France), Millennium (India), Primedia (South Africa, Israel), SBS (United States, Puerto Rico), Finelco (Italy), GMG (UK), SBS (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Romania, Greece), RMF (Poland), Sandusky (USA), Juventus (Hungary), Prima (Romania), Clear Channel (USA), Virgin (UK, Thailand, Jordan, France, Turkey and India), AMP (Malaysia), Regenbogen, Big FM, RPR1 (Germany), Communicorp (Ireland), Lagardere (France), MFM (France), Red, Angel, Freedom (Greece) and dozens of other great radio stations around the world.

Unfortunately, a lot of people are holding on to what they learned earlier, unaware of the new information. And it takes time to sort through it all.

My goal is to share with you some initial observations I've made. These are things I believe are the clearest facts to come out from the most recent analysis. There is much more, and it is my goal that we can and will add to it.

What We Can and Can't Control

For the most part, each individual listening occasion is far more environmentally determined than it is under your control, in terms of starting and ending.

Of course there is no beacon telling people to tune in. So you can't do anything to make that happen!

And their decision to tune away, normally, is about what else is going on in their lives. It is not because you played the wrong song or the DJ told a story, etc. They are simply done with radio. Or with the kind of radio you do. Who knows? The meter doesn't tell us. Now of course, people do hear things they don't like. But they don't usually act on it. Their lives are too busy and we are too unimportant. The average length of a listen to your station when actually measured by the electronic PPM, is 10 minutes. But for your fans, your P1s, how long is the average listen?

Even with your fans, the average listen length is the same - only 10 minutes!

This is why we don't have control. Not directly. We can't make the average listen any longer. Or at least, we can't do it often enough and well enough to make a real impact on our success. That is not the thing we should focus on to make our ratings go up.

“And their decision to tune away, normally, is about what else is going on in their lives. .”

So what makes the ratings go up? The P1s will tune in 35 times a week, and the average listener will tune in 5 times. The precise numbers will vary by format. But the answer is clear: **To build ratings, the listeners must come to your station more times. That, and only that, is what we can truly control.**

In the December conference, the staff of Arbitron repeatedly said **“In the diary world, it was all about getting them to listen longer. In the PPM world, it is all about getting them to listen more often”**.

“50% of a station’s cume are people who spend less than 1 hour per week with the station.”

Cume Quality: Now We Know the Truth

PPM approximately doubles cume.

The number of stations listened to is also doubled, from around 3 to more than 6.

Although the study sample size was small, some interesting results came back from interviewing people who had participated in the PPM panel. Only half of the cumed stations were known to have been listened to:

Around 30% of the stations shown as cume by the PPM measurement were **“invisible”**.

The respondents had no idea how those stations came to be credited to them, and they could reveal no knowledge about the stations.

Around 20% of the stations shown as cume by the PPM measurement were **“incidental”**.

The respondents did not remember listening, but had a theory, like “my son likes that station.” They were not able to give the interviewer details about the programming on these stations.

The remaining 50% were stations that were **“purposeful”** listening. The respondents were able to reveal details about the programming on these stations.

50% of a station’s cume are people who spend less than 1 hour per week with the station. They drive much of the in-and-out listening, bring down the average listen span, and contribute very little to the quarter-hour ratings.

Implications for Programming Research

The implications for programming research are huge when the commercial ratings are based on electronic measurement.

Because so much of the recorded behavior is not a reflection of somebody’s happiness (or lack of it) with your station at that moment, the ratings are less useful as a diagnostic tool for your programming. While they measure reality, they measure much more than purposeful listening. The diary had the advantage of dealing with listening on a level that was very focused on purposeful listening, and listening done to stations that have an ongoing relationship with the diary keeper. Studies have shown that about 15% of listening is lost, but what is captured is almost all useful to programmers trying to improve their product.