

JWM Opinion - No 2 September 2013

'Sticky Breaks & Drive to Live'

James&Wilkinson Media (JWM) are a UK based company that specialise in helping broadcasters to maximise their on-air marketing whether it be TV, Radio or Digital. Since its formation in April 2011 JWM have worked with broadcasters across the globe. Each region has its unique challenges and outlooks, however many similar issues exist that cause non-optimal performance in their use of their highly valuable owned resource, whether that is on-air promotional GRPs or creative. We hope that we have been able to help broadcasters we have worked with to address some of these issues.

We thought that our findings in each market may be interesting reading to people who operate in the broadcast world. This is the second of our monthly bulletins that reflect our business schedule or hot topics in broadcast marketing. In this JWM Opinion piece we discuss the increased challenge of retaining audiences through breaks.

This Summer's 'holiday mode' that exists across Europe, when vacations are long and business opportunities in short supply, has given us the opportunity to visit broadcasters at opposite ends of Europe, from Norway, in the north west, and to the Ukraine, on the eastern border of Europe. Although geographically and culturally very different, it was interesting to observe a common connection from a broadcast perspective. This was the impact of legislation on their breaks and the resulting viewing experience for the audience. Both countries are more limited than a lot of European markets, by the number of advertising breaks they can broadcast. The result being long breaks, often over 7 minutes in duration, particularly when you include sponsorship bumpers and promotion in the mix as well...and with this comes the problem of how to keep audiences engaged across these breaks in content?

Both these countries are not alone in facing this challenge. Growing penetration of PVR technology allowing viewers to skip breaks, along with the rise of VOD offerings taking viewers out of the linear stream and, for some, restrictive legislation creating long breaks are all contributing to the issue of break stickiness across many markets.

The challenge of sticky breaks is not a new one, although the challenge is now tougher with increased competition, and technology savvy audiences exploiting video content both within and outside of traditional broadcasting. Increasingly we're seeing programme innovation and On Air promotion designed to maximise that 'Drive to Live' experience, and increased focus on developing stickiness, both in terms of content and breaks. This is stickiness not only measured against viewer retention but also its ability to build audience engagement as part of their viewing experience.

In our travels we have experienced different approaches to this issue, putting the US aside, there is some interesting innovation coming out some Northern European markets, including the UK, where PVR penetration is now 67%.

Firstly at the content level, there are a number of broadcasters that are investing time and effort to ensure their content offering maximises that Drive to Live...whether that is re-shaping existing programme formats to create 'must see live' moments, or leveraging the immediacy of social media or marketing designed to create 'an unmissable event'. With over 25% of UK audiences regularly engaging in media meshing (interacting or communicating about TV content they are viewing) there is clearly some success around this.

Secondly, we are seeing others looking at how they manage their breaks and review their structures to refine this. We all know that broadcast creative teams can make fantastically engaging creative....however these are single marketing 'assets' that are focused around a central campaign idea, and then scheduled individually into breaks sitting alongside other break content. So they are campaign focused, not break focused. Think about all the items that can feature in a break...promotions, ads, sponsorship bumpers, channel bumpers, promos, idents, menus, squeeze backs, IPPs and bugs....it's clear that increasingly broadcasters need 'break guardians'. The role of these guardians should fall far beyond more simple operational & timing requirements. Breaks should be shaped to tell a story, they should engage with viewers, fulfil commercial needs and strengthen the broadcast brand....and quite often the media planners within a broadcaster are best equipped to fulfil this role and be the glue that binds the component parts together into a seamless experience. They should come with an understanding of audience behaviours, an effective promotional strategy and best practice use of promotional tools, take into account editorial sensitivities, and apply good marketing sense.

Thirdly, some broadcasters are prepared to take calculated risks, test and innovate in their breaks. In particular, we have seen some interesting innovation come out of China and the UK. Increasingly, broadcasters have access to a broad mix of 'tools' to help do this. Finding new ways to use announcers to make their breaks stickier, introducing dynamic branding technology to reduce zapping at the end of programmes or challenging traditional break formats. The rise and power of social media is being increasingly recognised and integrating second screen usage helps feed the 'Drive to Live' and viewer engagement that can be so powerful when used effectively.

So a challenge to you...

Why not start today? Quite often we view the latest great programme promotion from our creative teams, but very rarely do we sit down, with our peers, and actually view breaks as a whole. How do they deliver against the needs of both you as an organisation and your audiences? This, we would recommend is one of the first places to start.....but remember Rome wasn't built in a day!!

Please feel free to give feedback on the above Opinion piece.

Should you be interested in exploring how JWM could possible help your broadcast organisation then please do get in touch at:

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