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David W. Nylén  
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## C.4 Advertising Media Selection

### CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIA DECISION MAKING

**Advertising media** provide the means of delivering advertising messages to target audiences. The most widely used media are newspapers, magazines, television, cable, radio, outdoor, and direct mail. **Media vehicles** are specific programs or publications within a media class. *Time* is a media vehicle in the consumer magazine media class.

**Nature of Advertising Media Decisions.** Advertising media decisions are made to form a media program that is part of the promotion program which, in turn, is a component of the **marketing mix**. As part of the marketing mix, media decisions follow and take direction from the **positioning** decision. Because there are interdependencies between them, media decisions are usually made concur-

rent with the **advertising copy** and **advertising budget formulation** decisions.

Information needed to make advertising media decisions is derived from the **situation analysis**, the **positioning** decision, and from other marketing mix decisions. Figure C.4-1 summarizes information required in making media decisions. Figure C.4-1 also suggests areas to investigate (subproblems) in evaluating an existing media program.

Developing a media program requires three decisions, each of which represents a problem of allocating the advertising media budget.

- **Media Selection.** The first and most complex decision is to select the advertising media to be used for a product in the designated planning period.
- **Media Scheduling.** Media scheduling is concerned mainly with allocation of advertising

FIGURE C.4-1

#### Information Required in Making the Media Selection Decision

Source	Information Required
Situation Analysis	Characteristics of target segment Size of market Geographic distribution of market Sales seasonal Consumer buying behavior Consumer store choice Level of involvement
Positioning and Objectives	Target market Promotion-related objectives
Other Promotion Decisions	Promotional mix Advertising budget Advertising content Sales promotion requirements Sales force requirements
Other Marketing Mix Decisions	Importance/differences in price Product complexity Degree of product differentiation Channel member media desires

over time. There are several scheduling issues. Should advertisements be spread evenly over time or should they be grouped? Should advertising be concentrated in the media or dispersed? Should frequent small ads be used or infrequent large ones?

- **Geographic Allocation.** For marketers with multiple sales areas, a decision must be made on the division of the media effort among geographic areas.

The process for making these three decisions, which are usually made in the order listed, is presented in the second part of this entry.

**Describing the Media.** Media selection is a technical decision area usually carried out, except in small firms, by advertising agency specialists. In order to participate effectively in media decisions, marketers must not only understand the process, but also the terminology used in describing and measuring media.

Advertising media are described in terms of audience characteristics, audience distribution, media environment, and cost.

- **Media Audience Characteristics.** In describing the size of a print media vehicle (a magazine or newspaper), the primary measure of size is **circulation**, the number of copies purchased or, for a nonpaid publication, the number of copies distributed to a qualified person or organization. The **audience** of a print media vehicle is the number of persons who have read a particular issue. For a broadcast media vehicle, such as a radio or television program, the primary measure of size is the rating point. The **rating** of a television program is the number or percent of television-equipped homes that viewed that program. Radio ratings are similarly defined. The **audience** of a particular broadcast program, sometimes called the number of **impressions**, is the number of people who watched that program. The audience figure is, of course, always larger than the circulation or the rating.

Media can be described in terms of audience size and also in terms of audience selectivity. A **selective medium** is one that delivers a narrow audience with specifically defined characteristics. A **nonselective medium** reaches a broad audience of mixed characteristics.

- **Audience Distribution.** When an advertiser runs a schedule of advertisements over a period of time, the audience cumulates. In broadcast, **gross rating points**, the sum of the rating points for a broadcast schedule, is the primary measure of cumulative "weight" over the scheduled time period. **Gross impressions** measures the cumulative audience for a broadcast schedule. For print media, cumulative audience is measured as total circulation (the primary measure) or gross impressions.

Distribution of the audience exposed to an advertising schedule tends to be uneven. Some are exposed to one ad and others to several. Audience distribution can be measured by a full frequency distribution, but more often it is measured by reach and frequency. **Reach** is the number or percent of different people who are exposed to one or more advertisements in a schedule. **Frequency** is the average number of times a person is exposed to an advertisement in the schedule. Media can be described in terms of their ability to deliver reach or frequency. Newspaper is regarded as a high reach medium while radio is considered a high frequency medium.

- **Media Environment.** Media environment refers to the editorial surroundings in which an advertisement appears. There are many different ways of describing the editorial environment of a medium. It may be prestigious (*National Geographic*); it may offer local identity (the local newspaper) or regional identity (*Southern Living*); it may represent a particular expertise (hobby magazines); or it may be a general interest medium (Sunday supplements). A **cluttered** medium is one that has a great many advertisements for the amount of editorial material. The **life of a medium** refers to the length of time it is read or viewed (television a few seconds, newspapers a day, and magazines several days or weeks). Media vary in the impression they make on trade intermediaries, and they vary in their ability to provide color reproduction.
- **Media Costs.** Media costs are highly complex. The unit of purchase varies by medium as does the availability of commission to advertising agencies. Most media have elaborate discount structures for amount purchased and continuity of use. Rates vary with position, time of day, size, length, and a myriad of other variables.

In describing media, the question of relative cost or **media efficiency** inevitably arises. **Cost per thousand (CPM)** is used to compare

the cost efficiencies of two media vehicles (*Time* versus *Newsweek*). Use of the ratio form permits comparison of media vehicles that are different in audience size. The calculation is as follows:

$$\text{Cost per thousand} = \frac{\text{cost of purchase unit} \times 1,000}{\text{number of persons or households reached}}$$

The purchase unit used in the calculation should be the same for each media vehicle. The number of persons or households figure should include only those who meet the description of the target market.

Cost per thousand calculations cannot validly be used to compare different media because the purchase units cannot be equalized. A 30-second television spot on *Cheers* cannot be equated to a full page in *Cosmopolitan*. Such comparison must be made utilizing other dimensions of the media. One basis on which costs can be compared between media is the minimum cost of entry. For some media, network television for example, the minimum cost for even a light schedule is very high and is suitable only for major advertisers. By contrast, a schedule in a small, local newspaper or radio station has a low entry cost and is suitable for the small advertiser.

**Characteristics of the Media.** In selecting media, it is important to know the characteristics of each of the major media. This per-

mits the marketer to select a medium whose characteristics match the requirements of the product to be advertised. This is an essential step in the media selection process outlined in the next section.

Figure C.4-2 summarizes the characteristics of the major media in terms of the four descriptive characteristics discussed above.

**THE MEDIA SELECTION PROCESS**

Assuming that the amount of money available for advertising media has been set by the **advertising budget formulation** decision (see GLOSSARY entry C.1), three interrelated media decisions must be made: (1) What advertising media should be used? (2) how should the advertising be scheduled? and (3) how should media expenditures be allocated geographically? A media selection process for making these three decisions is described below.

The media selection process is best thought of as a problem of matching available media to the objectives set for the product to be advertised. Because there are likely to be multiple media objectives and there are a great many media alternatives to be considered, the process of media selection is best broken down into a series of steps. A media selection process is presented below and summarized in Figure C.4-3.

**FIGURE C.4-2**  
**Characteristics of Major Media**

<i>Medium</i>	<i>Selectivity</i>	<i>Distribution</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Entry Cost</i>
Newspapers	Low selectivity	Reach	Local identity, ads sought, cluttered	Low
Magazines	Highly selective	Reach	Special interest, good color, prestige, long life	Medium
Television	Low selectivity	Reach	Intrusive, demonstration, cluttered	High
Cable	Selective	Frequency	Intrusive, demonstration, special interest	Medium
Radio	Highly selective	Frequency	Music, personalities, local identity	Low
Outdoor	Low selectivity	Frequency	Size, color, low interest	Medium
Direct Mail	Most selective	Reach	Flexible, personal, low interest	Low

Information inputs  
(See Figure C.4-1)

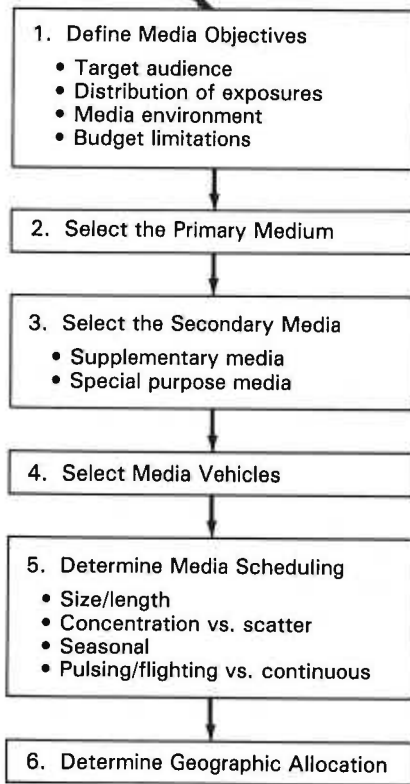


FIGURE C.4-3

The Media Selection Process

**Step 1: Define Media Objectives.** As a first step in media selection, it is essential to define what is expected of the media program. This is best done by defining media objectives. Refer again to Figure C.4-1 for information used in setting media objectives. The media objectives should cover at least these four areas: (1) target audience, (2) distribution of exposures, (3) media environment, and (4) budget limitations.

■ **Target Audience.** The target audience will ordinarily be the same as the target market designated in the positioning decision. The target audience needs to be further described in demographic terms so that it can be matched to the audience of media alternatives.

■ **Distribution of Exposures.** The distribution of exposures objective is usually defined in terms of the balance between reach and frequency. One cannot choose to maximize both reach and frequency. Increasing reach is usually achieved at the expense of frequency and vice versa. The choice between reach and frequency is a difficult one. Generally, frequency is favored for frequently purchased products, low involvement decisions, concentrated markets, simple products, and convenience goods. Reach is favored for infrequently purchased products, high-involvement decisions, dispersed markets, complex products, and shopping goods.

■ **Media Environment.** The media environment required is largely a creative decisions. The media decision maker must confer with the creators of the advertisements to determine their needs. They should ask such questions as: Is a physical medium needed (print)? Is color needed? Is local identity important? Will music be used? The medium chosen must meet the creative needs of the advertising.

■ **Budget Limitations.** Assuming the total media budget has been established, the final media objective should express the financial constraint under which media selection must take place.

**Step 2: Select the Primary Medium.** Initially, the advertisers should focus on selecting the one medium that best meets the requirements of the product. This selection is made by matching the media objectives as stated in step 1 to the characteristics of the media as summarized in Figure C.4-2. This is done by asking: Which medium most efficiently reaches the target audience? Which medium provides the needed balance between reach and frequency? Which medium has the environment that best meets the creative requirements? Which **medium** is affordable under the financial constraints?

**Step 3: Select Secondary Media.** Although most budgets are not large enough to permit scattering money through several primary media, there are legitimate needs for additional media as supplements to the primary medium and for special purposes. Supplementary media may be needed to fill gaps in target audience coverage by the primary

medium. Supplementary media may also be needed to change the distribution of impressions. For example, magazines are sometimes used to supplement television because light television viewers tend to be heavy magazine readers. This smooths the audience distribution. Or, outdoor might be used to supplement television in order to build frequency of impressions. Other secondary media will be needed for special purposes. Yellow pages, directories, trade publications, and trade shows are examples.

**Step 4: Select Media Vehicles.** With the media type determined, the media vehicles to be used must be selected. Thus if the primary medium is to be magazines, the question is which magazines are to be used. The process is similar to that in step 2. The reasonable alternative vehicles are listed, their characteristics compared to the media objectives, and the best fitting vehicles chosen. At this stage, the focus tends to be on efficiency (usually in terms of cost per thousand) in reaching the target audience. Unless the budget is very limited, it is usual to select more than one vehicle in the primary medium. This is done to provide complete coverage of the target audience and to meet the reach and frequency targets.

**Step 5: Determine Media Scheduling.** There are several scheduling issues that must be decided, each of which is guided by the media objectives set in step 1.

- **Size/Length.** In scheduling print advertising, the advertiser has the choice between many small ads or fewer large ads. Likewise, in broadcast, the advertiser can use many short spots or fewer long ones. The choice is a tradeoff between audience and creative considerations. Audience distribution is affected by the choice between large (long) and small (short) ads. Using many small ads rather than a few large ones increases frequency, but perhaps at the expense of reach.

The audience that reads a large ad will be greater than the audience for a small ad, but generally the audience will not increase in proportion to the cost. However, creative considerations may call for the larger or longer ad

even at some sacrifice in efficiency. Complex products, for example, may need long copy that only a larger or longer ad can offer. Or the objective may be to create an aura of importance or prestige around the product. Creatively this may call for a large space ad. In making the size/length decision, the advertiser must strike a balance between the audience and creative needs of the advertising.

- **Concentration versus Scatter.** The advertiser can influence reach and frequency by the way advertisements are scheduled to appear. For example, if a television advertiser schedules commercials to appear in the same program week after week, the tendency will be to increase frequency at the expense of reach because viewers tend to be loyal to particular programs. By contrast, if the advertiser buys scattered commercial positions with commercials never repeating a position, the tendency will be to reach more viewers, but average frequency will decline. The same is true in print. Use of many print vehicles, particularly those with low duplication of audience, increases reach. Concentration in a few print vehicles and ones with high duplication increases frequency. The choice should be made in terms of the audience distribution objective set in step 1.

- **Seasonal.** For products that are sold seasonally, advertising should be concentrated in advance of and during the heavy sales season. It rarely works to attempt to change the sales season with advertising. Thus cold remedies are advertised beginning in the fall and continuing into the winter cold season. The purpose of leading the season slightly is not only to build consumer awareness of the product, but also to encourage the channel members to sell, stock, and display the product.

- **Pulsing/Flighting versus Continuous.** Advertising can be scheduled at a continuous even level, it can be scheduled in an alternating heavy-light pattern (pulsing), or grouped so that heavy advertising is alternated with periods of no advertising (flighting). Pulsing and flighting are widely used. The practice is based on the idea that the amount of advertising must exceed a threshold level before it becomes effective. Thus advertisers, especially ones with limited budgets, group their advertising so that it exceeds the threshold when it runs. During the hiatus period, the advertiser relies on carry-over effects. Evidence as to the existence of a threshold is ambiguous.

## G-152 SECTION C / CONCEPTS FOR MARKETING PROGRAMS

### *Step 6: Determine Geographic Allocation.*

Theoretically, the geographic allocation of the media budget should follow the equi-marginal principle whereby budget dollars are moved between areas until the amount of sales lost by moving a dollar from one area is matched by the sales gained by moving it to another area. Firms, of course, do not have information that would permit them to make such calculations. The usual solution is more political than economic. Advertising dollars are typically allocated in proportion to sales results so that strong territories are rewarded and weak ones penalized.

Sales results from advertising are subject to diminishing returns (see GLOSSARY entry C.1). However, the level at which advertising is no longer productive in generating profitable sales will vary with the size of the market for the product class, the level of market share for the product, and other factors affecting sales responsiveness such as the effectiveness of the brand's distribution in the market and the level of competition.

What these factors suggest is a quite different allocation approach from what is typically done. All other things being equal, ad-

vertising allocation should be in proportion to sales potential (product class sales) rather than brand sales. Although it may not be politically feasible, as brand market share reaches higher levels, advertising returns are likely diminishing and the budget should be adjusted downward. Finally, there are always local conditions that influence the responsiveness of a market. If, for example, a brand does not have good distribution in a territory, advertising would be largely wasted and should be reduced.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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