Position Paper

Proving the Value of Audited Media to Advertisers and Media Buyers

Business of Providing Assurance

BPA WORLDWIDE℠

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PROVING THE VALUE OF AUDITED MEDIA TO ADVERTISERS AND MEDIA BUYERS

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INTRODUCTION

Today's smart marketers want assurance that they are getting an honest return on their advertising investment. With advertising budgets under increased scrutiny, many must now achieve the same or better results with fewer financial resources. Accountability has never been more important. As a result, advertisers increasingly turn first to those media owners who can show a commitment to transparency and credibility by submitting to an independent, third-party media audit. With audited media brands, advertisers can be confident their messages are reaching the audience they expect and, as a result, achieve the best ROI. Media audits, provided by reputable member-supported organizations, represent the buyer's most reliable means to ensure that a media owner's audience claims are accurate and timely.

In spite of the clear value proposition that audited audience data brings to the marketplace, some media owners are choosing to be audited by organizations with less rigorous standards, or worse, proceeding with no audit whatsoever. Why? Typically, it is done to cut costs, but in doing so maintenance of the audience database is reduced to the point where the quality of audience coverage is questionable. There is no doubt that the move toward unverified audience metrics puts marketers' buying decisions at risk.

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This position paper will present the value of audited vs. unaudited media, and emphasize the great lengths that media owners go to complete a successful audit with global assurance provider, BPA Worldwide.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Major media companies around the world provide content through multiple media channels. Most, if not all, are supported by advertising revenue. These media owners emphasize to existing and prospective advertisers that their titles are subject to an independent, third-party audit of their audience and thereby assure advertisers the value of their investment. In fact, many marketers have implemented policies wherein they will advertise *only* in audited media.

Consider the following points regarding verified or audited audience data:

- Advertisers can better target and focus on audience "quality" and "engagement" instead of simply "more is better".
- Ads in audited media are more valuable since advertisers know what they are buying and the media owner can prove the audience being delivered.
- Media owners who can demonstrate value through a measured, quantifiable audience provide advertisers with assurance for the media buy.
- Advertisers can move from a media buy based solely on price to one based on effectiveness and proven ROI.

MAKING THE CASE FOR AUDITED MEDIA

In the opinion of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) with very few exceptions, there is no plausible reason not to have audience audited by an independent body whose sole mission is to employ professional, valid methods of verification. Media audits are in themselves inexpensive: the average cost to audit a print channel is usually equal to the one-time b&w page rate.

Why would an advertiser choose to invest in a non-audited b2b channel? Most often, the lure is an ostensibly lower price for advertising vis-a-vis competitive, audited publications. And most often, this proves to be a false economy.

> **"Media audits provide me with the assurance I am getting what I pay for."**
>
> - **Kathleen Neumann, Senior Advertising Media Buyer, National Instruments**

How important is a third-party audit to an advertiser? According to Kathleen Neumann, Senior Advertising Media Buyer at National Instruments, "Media audits provide me with the assurance I am getting what I pay for. But even before making the purchase, the verified audience data allows me to make a thorough evaluation of the media and gives me confidence that I have made an informed decision."

Media owners that are committed to being audited are, by necessity, dedicated to maintaining high standards and accurate records in order to deliver on their promises and this requires a significant, ongoing investment on their part. They are willing to provide transparency about their audience composition to their advertiser customers and the industry at large. When they err, or fail to meet their promises, their corrected claims are made public by the auditor, and their advertisers and competitors call them to task.

Non-audited media brands have no such oversight, and may or may not be making the necessary investments to deliver the quantity and quality of audience for which advertisers are paying. In such cases, publishers' promises to marketers may or may not be honored and, if they are not, advertisers may never be aware of this breach of faith and sound business practice. For example, if circulation in an unaudited publication drops significantly or issue frequency is reduced during the year (not an uncommon occurrence), the media buyer and the marketer would never know. With an audited title, either of these changes would be readily apparent

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A further example involves digital media which is increasingly prevalent today. Content and advertising messages delivered electronically are subject to the volatility of email addresses. A media audit requires a high degree of discipline and investment from a publisher to maintain and update subscriber records to assure accuracy and deliverability. Without an audit, advertisers' ads may be just somewhere in the ether.

WHAT'S IN A BPA AUDIT?

Performing nearly 3,800 audits annually around the world, BPA Worldwide remains the trusted resource for compliance and assurance. The BPA media audit is known for its rigor and stringency by enforcing high-level standards and rules to which all must adhere. Successful media audits are the result of considerable and ongoing investment to ensure audience claims are accurate and reliable. Importantly, it is the *media owner* that pays for the audit and does so in advance of the service.

After submitting a membership application and fees, a media brand has up to 12 months to work with BPA to complete its initial audit. Once the initial audit is passed, audits are performed on an annual basis with audience data issued throughout the year, frequency determined by channel.

By definition, audits are a series of checks and balances, and a BPA media audit is no different. During the audit process, all supporting data are analyzed for audience quantity and quality of each media channel.

Audience data appearing on a BPA report undergoes numerous checks, tests and verifications. Depending on the media channel being analyzed, BPA requires media owners to provide clear documentation for their audience claims. During the BPA audit, a media owner must provide supporting materials/files for each channel reported, including:

- Print: proof of production (i.e. printers' bills); proof of distribution (i.e. postal receipts); qualification sources (qualification cards, industry lists, bulk agreements), and payment (checks, credit card receipts, etc. (if applicable)).
- Digital Editions: log files from distributor of digital editions, digital editions for each issue, and accompanying e-mail alerts
- Website Traffic: tag placement, site registration (if applicable)
- E-Newsletters: SMTP log files, sample newsletters, vendor reports, and accompanying e-mail alerts
- Events: event registration database; event attendee database; on-site inspection of registration system, sample badge, show directory, floor plan, and exhibition dates
- Social Media: group activity reports from each social media platform

BPA employs its own staff to perform audits. Upon completion of an audit, it is reviewed by an internal audit department. If, during the audit, BPA finds errors or discrepancies with the audience claims, BPA will issue a publicly available corrected Audit Report. Audit Reports detail findings that differ from the publisher's claims and disclose the accurate audience figures.

MEDIA INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS SUPPORT AND PROMOTE THE VALUE OF AUDITED DATA

Of course, BPA is not the only industry organization promoting the value of media audits.

The 4As (American Association of Advertising Agencies) is one of the biggest advocates of third-party audience verification in the media industry. The 4A's periodically sends out a bulletin to all of its member media agencies strongly reinforcing the importance of independent audits of b2b publications and urging them to "give preference to audited over non-audited" publications. The group also stresses "audited statements are the best way to evaluate a publication's circulation integrity, vitality and relevance to a particular target segment…"

> **"Audited statements are the best way to evaluate a publication's circulation integrity."**
>
> **- 4As (American Association of Advertising Agencies)**

Further emphasizing the 4A's position, "BuySafeMedia," an industry-wide initiative supported by 16 major marketing and business associations, focuses on the importance of selecting audited channels for a media plan. The program targets client-side buyers of media, who unknowingly may be putting their advertising investments at risk by selecting unverified media. Details and a short, award-winning video are at www.buysafemedia.com.

Industry supporters of BuySafeMedia include:

- 4A's (American Association of Advertising Agencies)
- American Advertising Federation (AAF)
- Alliance for Audited Media (AAM)
- The Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA)
- American Business Media (ABM)
- Association of National Advertisers (ANA)
- Business Marketing Association (BMA)
- The Business Marketing Institute
- BPA Worldwide (BPAWW)
- Canadian Business Press (CBP)
- Canadian Marketing Association (CMA)
- Canadian Media Directors' Council (CMDC)
- The CMO Council
- Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM)

Industry supporters of BuySafeMedia (continued)

- Exhibit & Event Marketers Association (E2MA)
- The Tradeshow Teacher

CONCLUSION

For savvy marketers, it is imperative that media evaluation be based on reliable audience data that has been verified by a trusted third-party auditing firm. When considering possible media outlets, advertisers should always be aware of audited versus non-audited media. With audited media, a marketer can evaluate the appropriate audience criteria relevant to their needs and make stronger, fact-based decisions. Without independently audited media, marketers can't be sure who is *really* seeing their messages and assume unnecessary risk with their ROI. They have to trust their messaging is reaching those who the unaudited brand says it does. Why take that risk?

"Trust me" from the publisher of an unaudited publication is not sufficient business justification.

The audit is a clear indicator of full transparency by the media owner in the marketplace. It shows they have nothing to hide and is proactively opening its audience to analysis and scrutiny. Any media owner that chooses not to be audited, or audited to sub-standard guidelines, should raise immediate questions among marketers considering media placement.

In today's ultra-competitive marketplace, where advertisers and media buyers are being held ever more accountable for their mar/com investments, "trust me" from the publisher of an unaudited publication is not sufficient business justification. There is no point investing precious advertising dollars with unaudited publications when there are quality audited publications to choose from.

Make the smart decision: *always* choose audited media.

About BPA Worldwide. BPA Worldwide is in the business of providing assurance. For 80+ years as a not-for-profit assurance service provider, BPAWW was originally created by advertisers, advertising agencies and the media industry to audit audience claims used in the buying and selling of advertising. Today, in addition to auditing audience claims, through its iCompli service, BPAWW verifies compliance to defined government, industry, and organizational standards as well as adherence to privacy, data protection and sustainability guidelines and best practices. Performing nearly 3,000 audits in over 20 countries, BPAWW is a trusted resource for compliance and assurance services. Its latest offering, Ad iCompli, measures and scores online ad campaign performance for business and consumer marketers.

For more information on BPAWW and its services, please visit www.bpaww.com.