

The Media Audit

NEWS RELEASE

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Daily Newspapers Are Winning Battle For Local Web Audiences

The Internet, say the seers of Cyberspace, will make newspapers obsolete.

Maybe. But not right now.

According to The Media Audit, a syndicated survey of both online and traditional media in more than 80 US markets, the web sites of America's old gray daily newspapers are building a commanding lead over other local media web sites. Television - even network affiliates -- and radio seem incapable, with few exceptions, of attracting the web audience numbers of daily newspaper web sites. In addition, -- and perhaps more importantly -- newspapers are attracting to their web sites an audience which complements their traditional/print subscriber base.

The Media Audit surveys are based on telephone interviews and measure the impact of daily newspaper web sites in the newspaper's immediate market or Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA).

"In our most recent survey daily newspaper web sites are out performing all other local media in 51 of 81 markets we covered," says Bob Jordan, co-chairman of the 30-year-old media rating service that produces The Media Audit. In 67 of those markets newspaper web sites are attracting more than 10% of their immediate market's adult population. Almost all other local media are struggling to attract low, single-digit percentages. "There are some exceptions, some of them rather spectacular exceptions," says Jordan, "but they are very few."

The Media Audit includes city guides among local media and in most cases they do a better job than radio or television in challenging the newspapers. When newspaper web sites didn't rank first in a market, a city guide or a city guide in partnership almost always held that position.

The Washington Post web site leads the way in attracting an Internet audience with 32.8% of DC area adults visiting the site in a 30-day period. That figure (32.8%) is a percent of the total market population, not just a percent of adults on the web. Other daily newspapers following closely include web sites of Austin (Texas) American-Statesman, 25.5%; Raleigh (North Carolina) News & Observer, 20.7%; Charlotte (North Carolina) Observer, 21.0% and Sacramento (California) Bee, 15.3%. Many newspapers have more than one local web site but the data included here relates only to a newspaper's primary web site.

The 25 largest newspapers in the country, by circulation, are not necessarily among the top 25 web sites when measured by penetration of their local market or SMSA. Only five newspapers would appear on both lists. The five and the percent of market adults visiting their sites are: Washington Post, 32.8%; Minneapolis Star Tribune, 20.0; Boston Globe, 17.2; Houston Chronicle, 15.4; and, San Diego Union-Tribune, 14.6. "These figures relate only to a newspaper's immediate market," says Jordan "and do not reflect the regional, statewide or national audience that some newspaper web sites may attract. As an example, the New York Times web site attracts significantly more viewers than does the Houston Chronicle but it only attracts 10.7% of the adults in its

immediate market (20 counties in NY, NJ and CT). The Chronicle attracts 15.4 %."

More than 90% of the country's 1400+ daily newspapers have web sites; some have more than one. "Almost all of the daily newspapers are decades old and their identities are indelibly established in the communities they serve. Add that to their market dominance in content development and you have a combination that will be difficult for other media to overcome. However, publishers should be aware that a few television network affiliates have demonstrated they are just as capable as newspapers in attracting audiences to their web sites. Because of the competitive pressures they face in multiple TV station markets they seem to be more adept at responding to the constant updating that local web sites require. If publishers aggressively market their web sites and constantly update their content, we would expect their leadership among local media to continue," says Jordan.

The audience attracted to the newspaper web sites is demographically different from the subscribers to the traditional newspapers. "The web audience," says Jordan, "is predominantly 18 to 44-year-olds in comparison to the traditional newspaper subscriber base which is heaviest among those over 45. On the web, newspapers are attracting the audience segment they have found so difficult to attract to their print products."

And that younger web audience contains substantial numbers of yuppies, - college educated 21 - 34 year-olds with significant discretionary income and bright financial futures. The yuppies are as essential to the newspaper/advertising industry as they are to current social security recipients.

"On their web sites," says Jordan, "the newspapers are attracting a very valuable audience that complements the readership of their print product."

The only problem Jordan sees with the newspaper web audience numbers is in the future. "When people get past 40-years-old they become heavy readers of newspapers. But, will today's 18 - 34-year-olds - - now getting their news from the Internet - - become readers of print newspapers when they pass 40?"

The Media Audit, a syndicated media ratings service currently covering more than 80 markets, provides both quantitative and qualitative data for media web sites as well as for traditional media. In addition to comprehensive audience profiles, TMA provides trend data on market penetration and market share.

Traditional media - print, broadcast and outdoor - have used The Media Audit data in sales, marketing and management for 30 years. In 1998, the surveys started providing data on local media web sites. The surveys now contain more than 400 fields of qualitative information in addition to quantitative measurements of local web audiences.

The Media Audit has more than 1700 clients that include radio and television stations, cable television networks, cable television operators, daily newspapers, alternative weekly newspapers, city and regional magazines, shopper publications, outdoor billboard companies, and direct mail houses. In addition, The Media Audit clients include local Internet web sites for daily newspapers, television and radio stations, alternative newspapers, shoppers, and city guides. The client base also includes more than 500 advertising agencies, media buying services, and advertisers.

The Media Audit is a product of International Demographics, Inc., a 30-year-old Houston firm that is engaged exclusively in syndicated, multiple-media surveys conducted at the local market level.

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NOTE: If you would like to periodically receive market survey data from The Media Audit, please contact Bob Jordan by email and leave your name, title, company affiliation and your mailing and/or email address.