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Outdoor Industry Taps MRI For New Ratings, Will Compete With Nielsen's

by Joe Mandese, Monday, Apr 24, 2006 8:30 AM EST



DAYS AFTER NIELSEN ANNOUNCED PLANS for an aggressive rollout of a new state-of-the-art ratings system for out-of-home media, the outdoor media industry today announced the final phase of its own plan and it doesn't appear to have any room for Nielsen. Instead, the outdoor industry plan, which is being coordinated by the Traffic Audit Bureau (TAB), has awarded its outdoor audience ratings initiative to an alliance Europe's Gfk Group, Gfk's U.S. subsidiary, magazine audience researcher Mediamark Research Inc., and media planning services provider Telmar. The new system, which follows an extensive pitch managed by the TAB, included proposals from top media research companies around the world, including Nielsen

Outdoor, which last week said it was expanding its GPS-based outdoor media ratings service to Los Angeles, as part of plans to deploy the new technology-based measurement service in the top ten media markets in the U.S. Los Angeles follows the launch of Nielsen Outdoor in Chicago. The service also operates in South Africa. Nielsen said it would begin recruiting a sample for Los Angeles in May and expects to deliver data in the fall.

The TAB's decision to award its ratings contract to Gfk/MRI and Telmar, is the third and last phase of an ambitious plan to provide to create the most accountable audience measurement system of any medium in the world. Unlike other media measurement systems that essentially measure a so-called "opportunity to see" advertising, the TAB's initiative measures a "likelihood to see." The TAB calls its new metric an "eyes-on" system that will provide visually adjusted demographic ratings for outdoor advertising in more than 200 U.S. markets.

The TAB did not disclose details of the new ratings plan, but said it was poised to commence "contract negotiations" with Gfk/MRI and Telmar, and that the new system would be developed and phased in over a three-year period.

MRI, known as Madison Avenue's official currency for magazine audience estimates, has become more aggressive in other media. It also is competing for a



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new radio industry ratings initiative with Arbitron and The Media Audit, and recently announced plans to release a new research on the so-called "day in the life" of multimedia consumers.

The outdoor media industry's push comes as demand for out-of-home media accelerates on Madison Avenue, and as the ad industry raises the bar on the accountability of audience estimates for all media. In fact, the American Association of Advertising Agencies, in March, issued a new edict to the media that they would be held directly accountable for estimates that are used as the basis of advertising deals.

"This is a giant leap forward for the out of home industry in an amazingly short period of time and will provide marketers with more credible information than they have ever had before for the purposes of planning and buying the medium," Mark Kaline, head of media at auto giant Ford Motor Co., said in the TAB's statement.

Joe Mandese is Editor of MediaPost.

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