

Making Agency Tools work harder

Each time we sit through a media pitch we never fail to be impressed when the agency showcase their proprietary suite of media planning and buying tools.

These are always demonstrated with impressive charts showing potential cost efficiency savings backed up with successful case histories and ‘*black box*’ live demos. This is usually the point in the pitch that ‘*showcases*’ how the various tools such as: market prioritizers, budget allocators, flighting plan simulations, awareness modelling, CCTV channel mix allocators and TV spot plan optimizers -can all be used to squeeze the maximum bang out of the media buck.

The biggest media agencies have a whole ‘toolkit’ to solve just about every media planning and buying question including a fast expanding array of digital and new media planning tools plus an avalanche of proprietary consumer insight and media touch-point research too.

Some of the most practical and valuable traditional media planning and buying tools that we have seen recently are:

Tools	What do they do	How do they do it
Market Profiling	Allocates the media budget by prioritizing markets in order of importance/sales potential.	Combines and weights a number of macro factors including: economic, market size, actual brand penetration and sales, market potential, competitive pressure and other macro factors.

<p>Media Mix Modelling</p>	<p>Directionally allocates the media budget across the different media. The jury is still out on just how effective this approach is.</p>	<p>Uses consumer contact points or ‘touchpoints’ to determine the most impactful media and weights media budget accordingly. Some models combine reach and frequency to give overall result.</p>
<p>Sales and Awareness Models</p>	<p>Simulates awareness build or sales potential generated by different campaign shapes. Mostly works with TV to allocate the most efficient flighting patterns eg burst vs. pulse vs. continuity.</p>	<p>Uses historic advertising weight, brand awareness or sales data, calculates awareness build and drop-off to forecast impact of different strategies.</p>
<p>TV Channel Mix</p>	<p>Allocates budget between TV channels e.g CCTV vs PSTV vs City TV.</p>	<p>Uses cost based approach to find optimum cost efficiency of different channel combinations. Can build in a reach function to maximize reach of different channel mixes.</p>
<p>Schedule Optimizers</p>	<p>The workhorse of the media team. Trawls through combinations of thousands of TV spots to find the most efficient combination to achieve set reach, frequency and cost goals. Same principle applied to newspapers, magazines and radio spots.</p>	<p>Software that analyses original audience data to individual spots (respondent level) to find the best possible combination of spots.</p>

But as powerful as some of these are, when we sit with both sides reviewing on-going work and media performance, all too often we don't always see these tools, and equally important, the thinking behind them, really put into practice. This is a huge lost opportunity for both marketers and agency planners.

'Lack of time', 'too complicated', 'we don't have the right inputs', and 'they tell us what we already know' are the most common reasons given for not fully leveraging these valuable resources and for sure agency planners can sometimes be overly optimistic about the efficiencies these tools can really generate, and yes, time is always a problem here.

But even with these limitations we would argue that anything that takes some of the intuition or 'guess work' out of planning and buying in this hugely complicated fragmented media world of ours can only be a good thing and at the very least building a media plan using the appropriate tools can:

- Directionally point the way
- Act as a 'base plan' to build on
- Set annual buying guidelines

And we have seen numerous ways where planning and buying tools have helped build plans that do result in significant improvements in both planning effectiveness and buying efficiency.

A good place to start is by listing some key questions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are my most important media issues? 	<p>When it comes to investing your budget, everything is important - and there maybe be a tool for solving nearly every problem in the agency's toolbox - but realistically start by identifying your top one or two most important media issues and focus on solving/resolving them first.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What tools does the agency have and can they really make them work in this market? 	<p>Time for an update from the agency team. Most big agencies will have a 'suite or toolkit' of planning and buying tools. Most will have been 'recalibrated' to work with local audience and market data.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can I see non-confidential or anonymous case studies of how some of these tools are currently being used? 	<p>In our experience the agency will be more than happy show these – but be sure to ask for current examples to make sure the findings are relevant and realistic.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What data inputs do I need to share with the agency? 	<p>Most common client inputs are sales and or awareness tracking data, the more frequent the interval point (eg weekly vs quarterly data) the more conclusive the output. Some tools such as spot schedule optimizers don't need any client input.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can I really give the agency the time to implement this? 	<p>The big question that we cannot answer but we know from experience that time spent upfront will save both time and money once the campaign gets under way.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can I afford to test and learn and follow the recommendations of this approach? 	<p>We would encourage all marketers to allocate a % of time and money to testing alternative approaches. The real question is 'can I afford not to?'</p>

So to keep getting the best of your agency's thinking it is well worth spending an hour or so with your agency planning and insight teams to get the latest updates on how some of these tools can start to be used, or used more frequently and deeply to really 'buy more for less' as the pitch chart says!

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