

Gilmore Girls Meet Drew Carey

Or Do TV Viewers Respond to the WB in a *Bigville* Way?

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Abstract

Advertising students at Augustana College, a Christian liberal arts college located in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, joined forces with the local Warner Bros channel to research the all-important 18-34-year-old demographic. In order to better grasp all varied work involved in an advertising campaign, these students agreed to research who was watching the WB in Sioux Falls, and to undertake an educational campaign on behalf of the station. The objectives were twofold: To get a firm grasp on the WB's demographic and to determine through an impartial and scientific study whether the WB was reaching the demographic.

The college researchers, primarily business majors seeking a concentration in marketing, were to spend spring semester of 2002 deriving a random sampling of Sioux Falls residents, telephoning the list to ask 11 questions to determine demographics and purchasing behaviors, and to include a buried question respondents were unlikely to know. Then the plan was to follow up with a campaign on the WB designed to edify the population about the buried question, and to conduct a follow-up survey to quantify the shift in knowledge accomplished by the campaign. The course's marketing professor viewed the project as a way to teach students how to write and test survey instruments; practice "sales" skills during random phone calls; write, direct, film, plan and purchase media for a TV campaign; reinforce their knowledge of reach and frequency; understand the value of random sampling techniques as well as how to use the data garnered; use SPSS software to help illustrate the shift in knowledge accomplished by the campaign; and prepare a final PowerPoint summary presentation for local and national WB decision makers. Another bonus for the students was the promise of a hefty hands-on project to add to their professional portfolios. The WB agreed to supply \$3275 in WB media, a camera crew to film the 30-second ad, and an editing crew to put the ad together. It was also agreed that credit for the research was to be given to Augustana College marketing students in any materials supplied to advertisers.

The semester did not progress smoothly; however, the process helped students and their client understand the value of flexibility, communication, business alliances, and relying upon research rather than gut in making marketing decisions. There were a few surprises in store for the client, and more than a few twists and turns in the plot – perfect for TV! – before the semester ended.

Gilmore Girls Meet Drew Carey **Or Do TV Viewers Respond to the WB in a *Bigville* Way?**

When the WB searched for ways to communicate the purchasing power of the channel's important 18-34-year-old demographic, it enlisted Teddy Roosevelt and 36 college advertising students to ride herd on the group's viewing and buying habits.

Warner Bros' Sioux Falls, South Dakota, affiliate was finding it difficult to convince local car dealers, furniture stores and realtors that younger consumers were buying cars, furniture and homes. The station's sales were lagging among the traditional advertisers who were certain that their market was home at 10 p.m., watching the local news. Faced with closed minds and checkbooks, WB General Sales Director Ralph Steinhauer approached a group who understood the allure of *Felicity*, *Dawson's Creek* and *Smallville*.

Augustana College students enrolled in an advanced marketing class concentrating on advertising accepted the challenge to research who was watching the WB in Sioux Falls, and to undertake an educational campaign on behalf of the station. The objectives were twofold: To get a firm grasp on the WB's demographic and to determine through an impartial and scientific study whether the WB was reaching the demographic.

This hands-on approach to learning advertising was designed primarily to help students grasp the comprehensive nature of the advertising process. Boyer (1990) suggested that passive learning does not foster critical thinking, nor does it enable retention of material. In this professor's opinion, echoing that of Mellor (1991), wrestling with decisions that face marketers

and advertisers daily, along with interactive lectures, exercises and small group work was the best way to learn the process.

Collaborative learning is especially appropriate in a course as broad as advertising and with a class of this size (Walker 1996). All members of the group are held accountable for the team's outcome as well as the overall outcome of the project. Positive interdependence is reality in today's workplace.

Introduction to the Project

The college researchers were to spend spring semester of 2002 deriving a random sampling of Sioux Falls residents, telephoning the list to ask 11 questions to determine demographics and purchasing behaviors. One was a buried question specifically chosen because respondents were unlikely to know the correct answer. Then the plan was to follow up with a campaign on the WB designed to edify the population about the buried question, and to conduct a follow-up survey to quantify the shift in knowledge accomplished by the campaign. The course's marketing professor viewed the project as a way to teach students how to write and test survey instruments; practice "sales" skills during random phone calls; write, direct, film and purchase media for a TV campaign; reinforce their knowledge of reach and frequency; understand the value of random sampling techniques as well as how to use the data garnered; use SPSS software to help illustrate the shift in knowledge accomplished by the campaign; and prepare a final PowerPoint summary presentation for local and national WB decision makers. Another bonus for the students was the promise of a hefty hands-on project to add to their professional portfolios. The WB agreed to supply \$3275 in WB media, a camera crew to film the 30-second ad, and an editing crew to put the ad together. It was also agreed that credit for the

research was to be given to Augustana College marketing students in any materials supplied to advertisers.

The course began like many others. A syllabus was supplied, along with a textbook, a list of advertising agencies to tour, required papers and assignments, and a project sheet. On this sheet was background information supplied by the WB, a timetable for the project, student assignments to teams, and the job description for each of the nine teams. Students were assigned to teams based upon the instructor's knowledge of their special skills, interests and career plans. Each team elected a team leader, who coordinated schedules and directed communications with other teams. Because teams are integral to business operations, student team projects are often employed in marketing curriculum (Bacon, Steward, and Stewart-Belle 1998). In this course, the instructor viewed the project as a way to enhance students' learning experiences as well as a realistic preparation for their roles as future business leaders (Nichols and Hall 1995).

Timeframe and Team Assignments

With a total of 17 weeks in the spring semester, each team was given 2-2 1/2 weeks to accomplish its assignment before handing off the results to the next team in the sequence. Rules were established that teams must gain approval from the professor before proceeding. Also, teams charged with writing survey instruments and running final statistical analyses were required to consult with an Augustana College statistics professor as well as their marketing professor. This interdepartmental alliance, or "community of collegial discourse," to help students learn through outcomes was paramount to students' success (Parker 1998). Teams charged with writing the first survey, buying media, writing the script and preparing the final client presentation were required to maintain ongoing communication with the client, Ralph

Steinhauer of the WB. The benefits of establishing routine communications were paramount in this environment (Meyer 1994).

Teams were comprised of 3 to 5 students, depending on the nature of each team's assignment. Smaller teams provide more opportunities for members to interact (Thomas and Fink 1963), reducing the tendency to "loaf" (i.e. leaving most of the work to certain team members) and increasing the likelihood of effectiveness (Campion, Papper and Medsker 1996).

Week 1 was dedicated to a classroom visit from the WB. Students were given an oral overview of the client and its products, target audience and goals. It was the ideal time to visit the WB's website, discuss the most popular shows, competition, trends, and to ask questions.

Team 1: February 19-March 4

Team 1 started the actual process during week 2 with a list of random number tables (Rosenthal and Rossow 1996) and a local phone book (Qwest 2001). Discussions between the statistics and marketing professors led them to decide that a telephone survey was the most convenient way to reach South Dakotans in February, despite the fact that those with unlisted numbers or non-land-based phone lines would be excluded from the telephone population. Also, the professors decided it would be most manageable for busy students to commit to a certain number of hours spent calling rather than setting a goal of completed surveys. And to enhance the likelihood that residents would agree to complete the phone survey, student research showed the survey must take between two and five minutes to complete. The final survey was comprised of 11 questions. (See Appendix A for complete survey.) Questions 1 and 2 weeded out those who were under 18 or who did not subscribe to the local cable service (the WB is viewable in Sioux Falls only through cable.) The remainder of the questions were designed to determine household size, residents between the ages of 18 and 34, who among household members watched the WB,

which shows were watched, which night of the week was most popular, if the home was owned or rented, the number of automobiles owned or leased by household members and how recently those autos were purchased, if home furnishings had been purchased within the past 12 months, and which other TV channels were watched frequently. Planted firmly in the middle of the survey, respondents were asked to supply the name of the 26th president of the United States as well as their level of confidence in their answer to this question.

Team 2: March 5-March 17

Team 2 took it from there, using pages from the local 2001-2002 Qwest Dex phone book where names had been highlighted according to the random selection from random number tables. For example, if the random number table indicated 76520, students used a highlighter to single out the 76th name on pages 52, 104, etc. When they reached the end of the phonebook, they started over again, randomly choosing another number from the table and going to the phone book.

Team 2 divvied up the 30 hours and pages of highlighted phone numbers among four callers. Despite a number of false starts due to the availability of the campus calling center, the team began their calls. In order to establish rapport as well as the local nature of the survey, students informed respondents immediately that they were students at Augustana College and they were conducting research for a class project. They reported that once they successfully completed a few surveys, they got over their nervousness and enjoyed the process. Team 2 reported many interesting interviews, but members were unable to capture some data because there was no place to record it. In one case an elderly lady missed the call, but used the *69 feature on the phone to return the call and complete the survey. One member transferred handwritten results to a spreadsheet kept on a laptop computer and another double-checked the

accuracy of the data transfer. Team 2 attempted 865 calls, and completed 179 surveys for a 20.69% response rate. Of the 179 completed calls, 17 respondents correctly named Teddy Roosevelt as the 26th president.

Team 3: March 19-April 1

Team 2 gratefully handed the project off to Team 3, which was charged with writing the 30-second TV ad that would educate WB watchers. This was a difficult feat, despite the creativity of Team 3. They debated the format, wanting the 30 seconds to be less like an advertisement or lesson and more like a fun and spontaneous “game.” They struck upon the Teddy Trivia theme and after much discussion with the camera crew about the viability of several approaches, used a “man/woman on the street” approach. The script was revised several times (see Appendix), mostly to trim the length. Finally, a script that met the approval of both the client and the professor was delivered.

Team 4: April 2-April 7

Team 4, the actors, also encountered a few rough patches. Coordinating the schedules of four college students and a camera crew taxed the most efficient PDA. Finally, the advertising professor agreed to allow students to miss a half hour of class for filming. When one of the actor’s grandmothers died and she needed to leave town, another student was “borrowed” from Team 3 to memorize her part and appear in the ad.

Flexibility was key to Team 4. With the leader of Team 3 on site for any necessary script revisions, Team 4 set to work. Two team members were to play dumb when asked by the Teddy Trivia hostess if they knew the name of the 26th president of the U.S. Using Mount Rushmore as a backdrop – because Teddy Roosevelt’s image is etched in granite there and because the national monument is located in South Dakota – students proceeded to wrap up their 30-second

TV spot in 1.5 hours. The WB handled all post-production activities, and was ready to air in time to fit into the media schedule planned by Team 5.

Team 5: April 2-April 7

Team 5 met with WB General Sales Director Ralph Steinhauer to determine the schedule, which was to run April 8-April 17. This timeframe was important, primarily because Team 7 was set to begin administering the follow-up survey on April 17. Given a budget of \$3275, a list of “avails” and research which showed second quarter prices, as well as the results of the first survey’s question about WB show popularity and which shows met reach and frequency goals, plus Nielsen ratings, the team set to work.

Team 5 set out some tough media goals. Primary among these goals was to reach 20 percent of the market four times, while choosing shows and times when 18-34 year olds were most likely to be watching television. These goals were somewhat compromised by the fact that the media buyers chose to buy several shows at the “selling” price, gambling that they could buy specific shows without having to pay the fixed or “guaranteed” price. This strategy worked for the most part, but resulted in the loss of two episodes of top-rated *Felicity* on Wednesday evenings, which in turn affected reach and frequency. In the end, the group chose to focus upon *The Drew Carey Show*, *Texas Justice*, *Elimidate*, the *Rosie O’Donnell Show*, and *ER*. *The Pretenders*, *The Practice*, Children’s Rotation (*Saved By the Bell*, etc.), *5th Wheel* and the *Gilmore Girls* were also prominent players in the media lineup. The 77 spots and the \$3275 budget garnered a reach of 22.5 and frequency of 3.7 (See Appendix). This was acceptable to Team 5 and the class, but much of this success was dependent upon the results of the follow-up survey, yet to be finalized by Team 6 and administered by Team 7.

Team 6: April 9-April 15

While most of Team 6's work was already done – they had the framework of Team 2's survey document – they attempted to clean up some inconsistencies in the survey format and improve the structure of the log sheets to be used by Team 7. In their zeal to duplicate the first survey but improve the dependability of the answers, the team added a data-gathering question that could not be compared to the first survey. This caused some angst among Team 8, charged with using SPSS to run cross tabs and draw conclusions between data gathered in March and data gathered in April with an educational campaign sandwiched in between.

The benefits derived from the new format allowed Team 7 greater speed in gathering information from respondents, and it offered the WB some insight into the most popular evening lineups on that channel as well as which networks were most popular among this randomly selected universe.

Team 7: April 16-April 29

Team 7 suffered none of the growing pains of Team 2. They benefited from the trials and errors of the earlier team, using phonebook pages already highlighted, and also found great acceptance among respondents. The team attempted 808 calls and completed 185 for a 22.9% response rate. Of the 185 completed calls, 21 adults correctly named Teddy Roosevelt as the 26th president. Respondents in this second survey not only answered this question correctly, their confidence levels in their answers were also much higher than in the first survey.

Team 8: April 30-May 6

Team 8 brushed off their statistics textbooks and went to work. After discussing with their professors which informational nuggets they were mining for, Team 8 ran crosstabs to determine the overall effectiveness of Teddy Trivia on TV viewers as well as which shows were

most popular, and even which presidents were mentioned most often and the degree of confidence with which respondents named them. And yes, former Presidents Bush and Clinton made the list. As mentioned earlier, changes in survey instruments caused problems for the statisticians. However, as shown in the Results and Conclusions section, there were a few startling revelations about the WB's demographics.

The team answered definitively that respondents to survey 2, administered at the conclusion of the Teddy Trivia campaign, were aware that Teddy Roosevelt was the 26th president. Survey 1 showed that 9.5% of respondents answered Teddy Roosevelt; survey 2 showed that 11.3% answered correctly. With a 95% confidence interval, the team and professors surmised that between 5% and 14% of the population should have known the answer in the first survey.

$$.095 \pm (1.96) (.0219)$$

$$.095 \pm .0429 = .05 \leftrightarrow .14$$

With that same confidence interval, they again surmised that between 6% and 16% should have known the answer following the educational campaign.

$$.113 \pm (1.96) (.0232)$$

$$.113 \pm .0455 = .06 \leftrightarrow .16$$

So it was no big surprise to the students and professors that 11.3% of the surveyed population knew the answer; however, it was helpful to the WB as they determined ways to approach advertisers about demographics and purchasing power. There were more surprises in store for the WB during the final client presentation scheduled for May 23.

Team 9: May 7-May 22

Team 9 began by meeting with client Ralph Steinhauer to determine what information he needed and wanted as well as how best to present information to potential WB advertisers. At the same time, the team gathered information from each previous team in order to put the presentation into sequential steps leading up to the findings.

Mr. Steinhauer's preference was a PowerPoint presentation illustrated with bullet points and other information that he could pluck directly from the student presentation and insert into one of his own. While Mr. Steinhauer was interested in the results of the educational campaign, he was most interested in the data gathered about home, auto and home furnishings purchases. He was also interested in understanding more about this elusive demographic.

Results and Conclusions

Strengths and weaknesses of research – Well-designed and executed research makes all the difference in reporting reliable results, students found. Strengths included random sampling, a large sample, and a good response rate. Weaknesses included tabulation inconsistencies, incomplete information, lack of complete control over the media buy, and lack of uniformity in surveys. Students also suggested that phone surveyors have the option of recording comments that could be used in qualitative analysis and incidental reports to clients.

Educational campaign produced results – In the first survey, 9.5% of those surveyed answered correctly that Teddy Roosevelt was the 26th president. This result climbed to 11.3% in the second survey following the educational campaign. However, among the key 18-34 demographic, knowledge of the 26th president jumped 14% with 19.7% of respondents knowing the answer. Students also found it especially important that confidence rose along with the correct answer between the two surveys, a fact that is attributable only to the WB advertising

campaign. Confidence levels among all ages rose from 2.25 to 4.38 on a scale of 0 (meaning no confidence) to 5 (meaning totally confident). Among the 18-34 demographic, 75% of those who responded correctly reported a confidence level of 5.

WB appeals to more than a younger audience – Older viewers are also watching the WB, utilizing network viewing habits that include turning the television on to one station and watching the entire evening's lineup of programming on that one channel. In the first survey, 155 or 87% of respondents were 35-93 years old. The mean age of those who knew our 26th President before the ad campaign was approximately 49. After the campaign, the mean age decreased to approximately 37. These results imply that the younger population was watching the WB and probably more influenced by the advertisement, thus were able to answer correctly and with greater confidence.

Favorite shows and networks among target audience – National statistics provided by the WB showed that *Dawson's Creek* and *Felicity* were the top shows among 18-34 year-olds. Local research showed that *Dawson's Creek*, *7th Heaven* and *The Drew Carey Show* were most popular among the demo. Survey respondents reported their favorite evening lineups on the WB were Wednesday (23), Tuesday (22), Monday (18), Thursday (16) and Friday (16). This group is busy on the weekends, with only 1 reporting watching the WB most often on Saturday nights and 2 reporting watching the WB most often on Sunday nights.

What else are they watching? Respondents ranked their favorite channels in addition to the WB in this order: NBC, MTV, CBS, FOX and ABC.

Demographic is buying homes, cars and furniture –

- Among 29-34 year olds who were surveyed, 63.8% owned their own homes.

- Forty-four percent of 18-34 year olds surveyed owned two cars; 36% owned one car; 11% owned three cars.
- Sixty-eight percent purchased a car within the last three years. (Due to the limitations inherent in the survey construction, surveyors were unable to determine whether these were new, used or leased cars. Many respondents did not name dealerships, but rather brands, limiting usefulness of this information in approaching specific advertisers.)
- Fifty-eight percent reported they had purchased furniture in the last 12 months. Most commonly cited places of purchase included Unclaimed Freight, Slumberland, Sears, Nebraska Furniture Mart and Home Depot.

Postscript: Action Taken by the WB

Ralph Steinhauer of the WB transferred much of the students' PowerPoint presentation into one of his own, geared toward realtors, home furnishings retailers and car dealers. Bolstered by new information for potential advertisers, he was hopeful that agency or in-house media buyers would not turn their backs on current research showing that 18-34 year-olds are buying homes, furniture and vehicles.

The PowerPoint presentation done by your class was presented to my sales team on the following Monday and received a favorable response. The team received the presentation for client use via email. We have a large selection of presentations available to use from the network. Standard operating procedure is to pull from a variety of presentations to create a specific presentation viable to a particular client. From what I have seen, the most used page is the "Increased Knowledge" (slide 26) page. It is core of the project. Also according to one sales professional, he often cites the information from the first survey regarding the unexpected viewing from an older demographic. The ownership pages --home and auto -- are also getting use.

Have sales increased because of the information provided? Probably. A sale is a process with many factors. Isolating a deciding factor is often guess work. To be able to point to a local experiment that increased awareness of a specific fact with a short flight carries weight. Combined with many other intangibles it is useful information (Steinhauer personal communication 2002).

Postscript: Student Comments

Generally, students were grateful for the chance to contribute to a project that was not merely an exercise. They could see the entire process from beginning to end, they felt guided and undergirded by professors and professionals who would not let them fail, and they had plenty of fodder for portfolios. Complaints were twofold: Teamwork can be frustrating when some contribute much and some contribute little, and membership on a small team in one part of a sequential process offered a limited viewpoint of the entire process.

One student team member confided that she was chosen for an internship at a prestigious advertising firm in Omaha, NE, due in large part to her portfolio and experience in the WB project. Yet another said via email that she used the WB PowerPoint presentation as the 30-minute oral presentation necessary to land a marketing job in Madison, WI. Another student said the project raised his confidence in entering the marketing ranks after graduation. His portfolio now included a SWOT analysis, a marketing plan for Hot Stuff[®] Pizza, and the report prepared for the WB. This portfolio is a concrete evidence of his competence and relevance to the marketing career to which he aspires (Barr and McNeilly 2002). He likened his growing portfolio to a sound investment portfolio.

Professors discovered anew the difficulty experienced daily by marketing managers, dealing with various levels of staff talent and willingness to accept responsibility, as well as keeping the project on schedule (and on budget) and the client happy.

Appendices

A= Client sheet

B = Survey 1

C = Survey 2

D = WB media plan

E = Teddy Trivia TV Script

F = Power Point presentation to WB's Ralph Steinhauer

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