

6.1 Effect of non-response on audience levels

The inability to complete an interview with a randomly selected respondent is becoming an increasingly frustrating problem for marketing and media researchers. The problem is, of course, more acute in large cities than it is in smaller urban and rural communities. For example, in Canada's PMB II, PMB III and PMB '83 the following response rates were achieved after up to six call-backs. (**Table 1**)

While the response rate in Toronto improved a little in the later studies, the results for the three major cities is still below acceptable levels, and the decline of Montreal is alarming. The most common reason for non-completion of interviews has been outright refusals, although there is some evidence to suggest that increasing mobility is becoming the more serious problem.

The analysis in **Table 2** demonstrates this trend quite clearly.

In the larger urban areas, we see an increase in the

'not at home' proportion between the surveys, and a decrease in the refusal rate. This, of course, does not allow us to conclude that the absolute refusal rate is down in these areas, since many of the 'not at homes' may well have refused had we been able to contact them. Out of the larger urban areas we find the refusal level has increased quite markedly.

Does this have an impact on the audience levels estimated by our studies? We would, of course, only be able to answer this question with certainty if we were able to interview those respondents who were missed by our interviewers. However, PMB II results in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, where the total response rate was only 58%, do give us some clues. **Table 3** from PMB II shows the results, by call at which the interview was completed, in these three cities

This table shows that the more-difficult-to-get respondents are more likely to be magazine readers, while the easier-to-get respondents are more likely to be

TABLE 1

<i>Population size</i>	<i>PMB II</i> %	<i>PMB III</i> %	<i>PMB '83</i> %
1 million + Toronto	52.0	57.4	61.1
Montreal	72.5	61.4	59.7
Vancouver	51.1	48.6	63.3
100,000 to 999,999	68.7	70.3	62.5
10,000(II) or 30,000(III) to 99,999	76.5	76.5	71.7
Less than 10,000/30,000	86.0	83.0	76.3

TABLE 2

<i>Community Size</i>	<i>No-one at home</i>			<i>Refused</i>		
	<i>PMB II</i> %	<i>PMB III</i> %	<i>PMB '83</i> %	<i>PMB II</i> %	<i>PMB III</i> %	<i>PMB '83</i> %
Cities (1 million +)	8.5	15.6	15.4	26.8	19.5	19.2
Towns	5.7	8.8	10.5	21.0	14.0	13.6
Villages	4.5	7.3	9.5	16.2	10.7	13.6
Rural/semi-rural	4.0	4.1	3.2	8.0	6.6	12.8

6.1 Effect of non-response audience levels

TABLE 3
PMB II results by call at which interview completed
Toronto/Montreal/Vancouver

Audience estimate from all completed interviews = 100

	Call at which interview completed			
	1	2	3	4-6
<i>Distribution of interviews</i>	59%	21%	11%	9%
<i>Average magazine</i>	93	100	115	118
<i>TV viewing</i>				
Less than 10hrs. per wk.	95	101	116	112
Over 20 hrs. per wk.	108	98	77	84

Overall completion rate 57.7%

heavy television viewers.

If one assumes that the penetration levels amongst the 42% of selected respondents with whom we failed to get an interview is about the same as the levels obtained amongst those we interviewed at call 4, 5, or 6, then our estimated audience for the average magazine would increase by about 7%, or by 1.2 percentage points of penetration. At the same time, the number of 20 hours or more TV viewers estimated would drop by about 7% as well, or by 2.2 percentage points of penetration. 100% sample completion would, therefore, show the average magazine in a significantly better light against television.

It can be shown that the respondents who are more difficult to contact tend also to be demographically younger, better educated and wealthier, than those who are easy to interview. This also has a marked effect on the levels of product usage that we find in our surveys. Airline travel, for example, would show significantly

increased incidence if we could complete interviews with the total sample selected.

In Canada, the Bureau for Broadcast Measurement achieves a response rate of about 35% of their original contact sample for their radio and TV diaries. If I were they, I would be looking for ways to reduce this to 25%! But for people concerned with print measurement, the difficulty of completing interviews should be a major concern. Any further reduction in the response rates would be disastrous. As the table shows, a further 20% drop would lead to even further erosion of the apparent audiences of magazines.

Substitution is not the answer, since all this would lead to would be more of the same easy-to-get people. No, I am afraid we magazine publishers, and print researchers will just have to live with the fact that the better the response, the better it is for us. Since this also means better research, fortunately, any additional expenses incurred are surely justifiable.