In the media world we are awash with statistics. We love the sanctuary of data. It’s safe. It’s predictable. But does it tell us anything new? Demographics, psychographics, and audience figures distract from the importance of personalizing marketing. Communication should be about focusing on people rather than consumers. People are individuals, new moms, an office worker on her lunch hour, or a young family buying their first new car. They’re not a number on a spreadsheet.

“Data is not information, information is not knowledge, knowledge is not understanding, understanding is not wisdom.”

– Cliff Stoll and Gary Schubert

As a communications planner, it’s crucial for you to be consumer facing rather than media facing. Remember, media planning is about reaching the right people at the right places; communications planning is about influencing people. And an important part of influencing is understanding
how the group you are trying to connect with thinks, behaves, and lives their lives. And yes, of course, how they consume media and respond to communications.

Analyzing audience surveys or syndicated media or product reports alone won’t give you those answers. Yes, they can tell you how many people are watching this or reading that. But clues to how they might respond better to different communication strategies? Much less likely. Media surveys commoditize consumers into common audience demographic groups. So a ratings point on the History Channel or ESPN is treated exactly the same despite being very different programming attracting viewers with different mind-sets.

Using the same syndicated data that all your competitors have will lead to the same strategies and solutions, hardly the formula for creating distinct and penetrating campaigns. Using the same research that others use encourages premium pricing, as advertisers in a category chase the same positions and the same titles or television shows. The old way of doing things assumes that media works the same way for every brand. This dictates that advertisers compete on share of voice by outspending competitors.

For a communications planner, having insight about your target is what differentiates your plan. To have insight, the communications planner needs to be the consumer’s best friend.

FROM WHERE TO HOW

Developing insights is the key to unlocking a way in for the Brand Media Strategy, insights into not just which media or marketing communication touch points to advertise in but also how to use those media.

Syndicated media audience surveys from the likes of Nielsen, Arbitron, TNS, and comScore provide extensive data on which media audiences spend time where. They do exactly what they are designed to do, which is to establish the scale of target audiences. Mass media strategies to maximize reach and frequency use this audience data to establish awareness.

Digital data from performance marketing campaigns has added more dimensions to traditional media research. For example, Google’s tools and