

## Digital TV Data Initiative Raises More Questions Than It Answers

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Top industry executives got their first public look at some rarely seen data that many believe could be the future of TV audience measurement. The data, a compilation of household-level tuning compiled from three different aggregators of digital set-top box data, was unveiled during two meetings hosted by Havas' MPG unit, as part of its so-called "Set Top Box Think Tank." The initial takeaway was that the data raised more questions than it answered, including, what might be the right questions to ask about how to collect, analyze, compare, and even think about the new data. And perhaps more importantly, how it should be used as part of media planning, buying, and programming decisions.

"It's directional," Mitch Oscar, executive vice president-televsual applications at MPG said Tuesday during the first of the two meetings - a gathering of top industry researchers - who saw the compilation for the first time. "We're trying to make this so that media people care about this, and it's not just in the lab for researchers."

On Wednesday, during one of MPG's regular Collaborative Alliance meetings to a broader cross-section of industry executives, Oscar added, "Researchers talk a very specific esoteric language that is hard for other people in the community to understand."

Oscar, who has emerged as the TV and advertising industry's de facto ringleader to bridge that gap, may have understated the degree of esoteric verbiage coming out of the meetings, which struck this reporter as more of a discussion about the nature of Babel, than an exploration of a new media marketplace currency.

During the meetings, the researchers showed three disparate sets of digital set-top data, showing completely different results for the audiences of networks and programs on an arbitrary night of prime-time TV viewing: June 18, 2009. The group did not disclose the identities of the three aggregators providing the data, but has previously said that seven - AT&T, DISH Network, DirecTV, Nielsen, Rentrak, TiVo and TNS - have agreed to provide data to the initiative.

The anonymous data shown included data from two aggregators with 100% DVR penetration, and one with 40%-plus penetration, but the results were wildly different, except for the relative rankings of the top networks' live audience delivery. The actual ratings delivery - a percentage of households viewing each of the networks - varied by multiples as great as four across the three aggregators.

Depending on which set of data someone used, "Each network could claim to have won the night, and they'd all be right," said Ed DiNicola, a TV research vet who helped analyze and present the data. "They'd just be looking at a different data set."

Frank Foster, vice president-media insight at AT&T, and another participant in and presenter of the research, said the absolute results of the data were less significant than the "delta" or the relative curves that the data showed, and said the real initial value of the research was in establishing patterns across the data provided by the aggregators, and methods for establishing common hooks for processing them in the future.

All of the executives agreed it was a good starting point, and that they needed more industry input to help develop more of a consensus around how to look at the data, and what to expect from it, and of course, how it might ultimately be used to make planning, buying and programming decisions when it begins to disseminate broadly.

During Wednesday's Collaborative Alliance meeting in New York, executives representing both the Nielsen-funded Council for Research Excellence (CRE), and the Coalition for Innovative Media Research (CIMM), also updated attendees on their own digital set-top research initiatives, but neither indicated when any of that data might be released for public scrutiny. Pat Liquori, senior vice president-research & electronic measurement for the ABC Owned Television Stations Group, and the chair of the CRE committee, however, said the data is now being analyzed by three industry consultants who expect to deliver a report to the CRE by the end of the year.