

The 25-54 Myth

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No matter what an advertising executive, agency representative or Arbitron trainer may tell you...every station in your cluster cannot appeal solely to the 25-54 demographic. They would lead you to believe that every radio station in the country is being programmed adults 25-54. That would be a big mistake since there are many flaws to this assumption.

- 1) Name 3 things that interest both a 25 year-old and a 54 year-old. You could might find two, but three would be pushing it. There are so many changes in a person's life over that 30 year span, that it would be impossible to make both a 25 year-old and a 54 year-old entertained for the majority of the time.
- 2) Consolidation was supposed to empower the sales executive with a portfolio of stations to sell to their clients that would appeal to a broad range of ages, sex and economic backgrounds. Instead advertising agencies have forced (especially in small markets) this idea that a radio station needs to put the blinders on and only serve this too large demographic...and they've controlled radio the only way you can, in the pocketbook. If you sell in markets 100+, name the last time a media buyer asked for any other demo than 25-54? It could be adults, women or men...but the overwhelming majority of agency buys are 25-54.
- 3) Some formats have no business programming 25-54. You could super serve a lower, middle or older cell out of that broad range – or possibly do well men or woman and rank well, but probably not consistently. CHR, AC, Country, Oldies, News-Talk, Classic Rock...we know these formats appeal to different people of varying ages, and depending on the market, could perform well 25-54. But say you have four of those six formats in your cluster, by programming solely 25-54, won't you just be cannibalizing ratings from your own brands?
- 4) Two of the biggest population bumps in the US are at the extreme ends of the 25-54 spectrum...the Baby Boomers and Generation Y. They both have a US population of roughly 76 million. The Baby Boomers grew up with radio, are comfortable and enjoy using it, and have more money in their retirement years than any other generation before them. Generation Y has shunned radio, a medium that abandoned them even before they were born, preferring to use internet radio, iPods and downloaded music in its place.

Years ago, there were fewer forms of entertainment options competing for your listener's time and that was when this idea was created and established. As was Arbitron, created in a different time long ago. The same company that uses diaries in the overwhelming majority of markets to track radio listening...a system that was developed for block programming which was invented in the 1930's. But this is 2008 and a 25 year-old is probably texting while the 54 year-old is reading a newspaper. AND it's more than likely that both of them spend zero time doing the opposite.

Knowing that Generation Y is a lost cause (it would be impossible to even try to change their habits without a revolutionary new talent or content delivery method) and knowing that the radio industry is in a downturn (and that's being kind), the only way to weather this storm of bad economic times and buy some time to train the next generation to embrace our medium...WE NEED TO ATTRACT AND KEEP THE BOOMERS.

I'm not saying abandon the younger formats. After all, we do need to train the preteens and kids how to listen to us. But if you have a Gold based AC or Oldies...don't try to skew it too young, too soon...you may just be pushing away the only available listeners we have, at this time in radio's history, with the discretionary income that our advertisers covet the most.

Are your stations out of demographic focus? Do you know who is really listening to your brands? Call Bob and find out @ 706.358.9103.