

Arbitron & Public Radio: A New Twist Going Forward . . .

Arbitron and Public Radio station representatives meet to explore next steps

A team of Public Radio executives met in late July with senior executives from Arbitron Inc., including new President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Skarzynski. The discussions were open, positive, and productive. Attendees have agreed to plan semi-annual meetings, with the next session targeted for early 2010.

Vincent Gardino, (WNYC New York), Chairman of the Public Radio Arbitron Team, reflected on the discussions. “A couple of years ago when we first sat down to talk about public radio and the PPM radio ratings service, we didn’t know much about each other. I can’t overstate the night-and-day difference between then and now. We’ve had deep conversations about things that matter to each of us.”

Public Radio team participants gave an overview of the field and a briefing on current station issues, mostly centered on the conversion to the Portable People Meter (PPM) service. Arbitron staff presented updates on implementation of the PPM service, the integration of PPM and diary data, and some of their ideas on how Arbitron might better serve Public Radio as a client.

Among the items that surfaced for further discussion between Arbitron and Public Radio are:

- Platform measurement. Arbitron and Public Radio will explore how PPM technology might be used to demonstrate the value of Public Radio on multiple platforms.
- Listening by ethnicity. Arbitron can provide Public Radio broadcasters with additional insights into listener behavior, including listening to stations other than Public Radio.
- Public Radio Today. There is a new 2009 edition of this Arbitron report that tracks listening to public radio’s major formats. The group discussed ways to make this publication a more valuable resource for the field.
- Programming insights from the PPM service. Public Radio asked for any insights into what is different and what is the same in the world of the PPM service when it comes to programming. In addition, the difference in geographic granularity in the PPM service is a special concern for Public Radio. Arbitron will set up a webinar to share what it has learned, describe options for targeting zip codes with PPM data, and explore training options.

- Managing constituency expectations through the change to the PPM service. The group identified the need to have a clear and simple explanation for board members and other important constituents of what happens when markets convert to the PPM service so public radio stations can better manage expectations. Arbitron will share insights on how to communicate key points.

The members and staff of the Public Radio Arbitron team who met with Arbitron included Public Radio Arbitron Team chair Vincent Gardino (WNYC), Tim Roesler (Minnesota Public Radio and SRG representative), Corey Lewis (WBUR), PRPD President Arthur Cohen, DEI President Doug Eichten, RRC board member Craig Oliver, RRC President Joanne Church, CPB Senior VP for Radio, Bruce Theriault, Director of System Investments, Jeff Luchsinger, and Station Resource Group/SRG co-CEOs Terry Clifford and Tom Thomas. SRG provided support and coordination for the meeting for the Public Radio Arbitron Team. Arbitron attendees included Michael Skarzynski (CEO and President), Alton Adams (Executive Vice President), Bill Rose (Senior Vice President, Marketing), and Chris Meinhardt, (Account Executive).

The Team agreed that, as the issues and agenda warrant, other representatives may be asked to join in the future Public Radio/Arbitron meetings.

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For additional information, contact Vincent Gardino at vgardino@wnyc.org or Tim Roesler troesler@mpr.org