

## Syndicated Research Helps The Birmingham News Sell Against Competitive Media



Sean Ireland

By Sean Ireland  
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The competition is more relentless than ever – TV, radio, the Internet – but no matter what the competitors claim, newspapers still have the widest and deepest reach and best grasp of consumers in most advertising markets.

While there has been a steady stream of negative headlines about newspapers, the similar problems that other forms of media have been experiencing haven't been nearly as prominent.

Their problems are just as large, but not as well known, and while competitors point to declining circulation numbers at many newspapers, they ignore the fundamental truth that newspaper print versions remain the strongest single media reach vehicle in most every market. With electronic media audiences fragmenting to cable, satellite, Internet and iPod devices, printed newspapers, (and the unique context they offer for ad placement), have just as much value for advertisers – if not more – than they have ever had.

The problem is often how to demonstrate that to advertisers. How is an advertiser to clearly understand what the differences in newspaper readership figures and TV/radio ratings mean for his business? And why do media sales representatives assume that he does?

[The Birmingham \(Ala.\) News](#) has been answering those questions with a unique approach to sales in its market. By using a set of research tools, the newspaper can compare the specific audiences of various local media outlets and show how the newspaper remains the best way to reach consumers. "We feel strongly that The Birmingham News should be a part of every customer's media mix, and these research tools allow us to make a definitive, empirical argument for including The Birmingham News," said Amy Soverow, market research manager for The News.

Soverow has been conducting media research for more than 25 years. She has a Master's degree in market research, and has worked as an analyst for both television and radio consultation firms. She has been with The News for almost two years after spending eight years as the research director for a television station.

Soverow is using her background in research and other forms of media to help The News demonstrate that it remains the best vehicle for advertisers to reach specific audiences. "The Birmingham News – and the industry as a whole – has historically been very strong in custom perceptual research, both for the newspaper itself and for the advertising community, which is extremely valuable for planning, strategizing and assisting clients in defining target markets," she said. "What we have been doing over the past couple of years, that is different, is using syndicated pieces of research, specifically Scarborough, Nielsen, Arbitron and TNS Media Intelligence, to underscore the strength of The Birmingham News compared with other competitive media.

"First, we ascertain a client's TV schedule using TNS. Then, we determine the average viewership of each spot in the schedule using Nielsen. This allows us to compare the reach of The Birmingham News using Scarborough readership figures. We can also compare radio and newspaper audiences. We do all of this by converting rating points into thousands, which allows an apples-to-apples comparison."

It's a data-based approach to advertising sales, allowing The News to break down its client's target audience and how well various forms of media reach that audience. "We have probably been doing some form of this for many years, but have only recently invested in Nielsen data so that we can actually compare detailed television schedules to newspaper schedules," Soverow said. "We can now pull an advertiser's complete TV schedule and the average audience delivered, which allows us to make specific arguments about the power of The Birmingham News. There are also similar databases available to ascertain outdoor and radio schedules as well.

"We have had success with advertisers because we can now have a concrete discussion about what portions of their TV buys are best reaching their target markets and what portions are not. In turn, this knowledge allows us to reinforce not only our strength as the most powerful reach vehicle in the market, but also showcase new and different forms of creative or other products in our portfolio that can get results for our customers."

In essence, The News is becoming more technical about selling the strength of newspapers versus any other form of media, Soverow said. "Given the level of fast-paced technological changes and the most challenging economic situation in decades, newspapers need to reinforce their power with advertisers at every opportunity and these syndicated databases allow us to do just that."

*For more information, contact Amy Soverow at (205) 325-3351.*

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