

# Q & A

**WE DISCUSS ASPECTS OF THE ABA'S RESEARCH PROGRAM WITH NICK HERD, HEAD OF RESEARCH**

## **Why is the ABA doing research?**

One of our functions is to conduct research into community attitudes around issues relating to broadcasting. We have a statutory responsibility to conduct research and the results of that research are used to inform the general policy making role of the ABA and its other functions - standards, codes and conditions, planning for new services.

We are also required, under the Act, to conduct research into community attitudes in R rated material on pay TV.

## **What are the ABA's current projects?**

At the moment we have two major projects. The first is pay TV research.

Before the Parliament can approve R rated programs being shown on pay TV, the ABA has to conduct Australia wide qualitative and quantitative research into attitudes relating to depiction of sex, violence and offensive language in R rated material.

## **Could you first explain what qualitative and quantitative research are?**

Qualitative research can involve a range of techniques but in market research is often used to mean indepth questioning of groups chosen from the community to explore issues relating to the topic being researched. This type of research is most often used to draw out issues and hypotheses to be explored in the questionnaire for a quantitative stage, usually telephone survey/face to face interviews in standard market research.

In this type of research, quantitative research consists of a larger survey of a random sample of the population that yields numerical data.

In regard to pay TV, our research began early in 1993 and we have conducted both quantitative and qualitative phases. We are currently awaiting the results of the quantitative stage.

We have worked very closely on the project with the Senate Select Commit-



*Year 3 students from Moree East Primary School answer some questions about what their attitudes to television. From left: Jamie-Lee Harrison, Christopher Clyne and Amanda Cooke and researcher Elizabeth Chan.  
Photo: courtesy Moree Champion*

tee [on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies] who have taken a keen interest in the conduct of the research. We have had a lot of discussion about the methodology and the content of the questionnaire. We will be briefing the Committee on the results early this year.

## **Will there be a report on this research?**

We intend to issue a report on the research and also on the question of disabling devices that will be used by pay TV operators to restrict access to R rated material. For example, parents who want to ensure that their children do not get access to R rated material if they are subscribing to pay TV will have access to smart cards and/or PIN numbers. The ABA has a statutory function to approve the disabling devices used by pay TV operators to perform those functions. We are researching the development of those technologies and their application around the world so that we are as informed as the operators as to what their options are.

## **What is the other project?**

The other research we are doing is into children's attitudes to what they see on television, particularly in relation to depictions of sex, violence and offensive language in G and PG programs. In the past, we have only done research into what adults think of these issues, not what children think of them.

The research was conducted in 1993 and involved both quantitative and qualitative stages. Through the co-operation of NSW Department of School Education, the Catholic Education Office and other independent schools, we were able to conduct face-to-face surveys with more than sixteen hundred primary school children in NSW schools. We intend to report on it in 1994.

This is the first stage of a larger project which will examine what it is that children like and dislike about what they see on television. It will look at their attitudes to particular programs and programs which are designed specifically for them, as well as programs they watch on a regular basis.

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### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The research is related to the children's television standards and is also designed to inform the application of codes of practice by commercial broadcasters by giving them information about issues of concern to children. For example, it should assist network classifiers deal with issues in programs that are on when significant numbers of children are watching. They will have hard information about what concerns children, what upsets them, what they like about what they see, what they don't like about what they see.

### **Is any more research planned?**

We have a joint project planned with the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC). We want to explore the content of family viewing in the home. The ABA has most interest in broadcast television in the home but we are also aware the television set is used for home entertainment - home video and computer games - which are of concern to OFLC since they have to classify them.

We are in the very early stages of developing the project. We want a clearer idea of what kinds of family entertainment are being used, how they are used, who is using them, why are they using them, what sort of gratification they are getting - to set the context in which both free to air television and home videos, games are being used in the home.

### **Is this the ABA's first joint research?**

The [former] Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) conducted a project with the OFLC on classification issues.

This new project is a joint initiative which sprang from a desire of both organisations to continue the process of working together on projects. There are areas of concern to both organisations and we will pool resources to

improve the quality of the research. The results will be of use to both organisations, broadcasters and other people involved in the home entertainment industries.

### **Is any radio research planned?**

A project has been started which is designed to assist the ABA's planning process. It will look at both how people use radio, both in and out of the home, and get some feel for what sorts of new services for which there might be demand. It is also designed to assist the ABA in the advice it is giving the Minister in regard to reserving spectrum for community broadcasters and national services.

The planning process involves wide public consultation. The Planning Branch of the ABA is conducting a series of public meetings and seminars and has called for public submissions on issues relating to services. This research is designed to complement that process by using the techniques of focus group discussions and national surveys to complement the other public input into the ABA's planning process.

### **Could you expand on the methodology used in the ABA's research?**

We use a fairly standard social science and market research methodology. We engage a reputable market research firm to act as consultant to the ABA and work collaboratively with the research section of the ABA and on the design of each particular research project. We do not have the resources, for example, to conduct a national telephone survey, so we tap into the resources of market research firms. We are generally following widely accepted methodology of conducting focus group discussions as initial stages to draw out issues around the project.

The advantage of focus groups is that you can spend two to three hours with a group of people, who are not meant to be representative of the community at large, exploring issues and

concerns. This can assist with forming an hypothesis you want to test with quantitative group survey.

The quantitative survey is usually face to face or telephone, usually 15-20 minutes. Using telephone or face to face depends on what we are researching and cost factors. Typically, when conducting a national survey, with a random sample across the demographic range of the population, we may talk to between 1500 and 2500 people, depending on the detail required. The larger sample allows disaggregation of the national sample into small groups to cross tabulate by sex and age, or age/socio-economic factors or sex/response to particular questions. The larger sample will still retain statistically valid numbers to make generalisations to the wider subgroup in the community.

We go for national survey sample sizes of 1500 plus so that we can make valid generalisations.

### **Is the children's survey limited because it is in NSW only?**

To the extent that it can't be used to generalised to the whole of Australia. But, it does form the basis for further work.

We used a very large sample for one state and the reason for that was logistics. In reporting results, we only report what the data is saying.

The issues apply generally to all children but there may be different results state to state. The survey is state wide so we can pick up differences between country and metropolitan.

### **On what basis are research topics selected?**

The R rated research is required by the legislation and the ABA also has a mandate to conduct research. The topics are developed by ABA staff and are constantly changing as new issues arrive. For example, the issue of context of viewing was seen by both the ABA and OFLC as one which required further work.

