A Stroll Through Media Gardens

The name 'Media Gardens' might conjure up visions of a BBC series on the Great Gardens of England, or for the more technologically minded, a computer-generated series of garden images using virtual reality.

In fact, Media Gardens is a new research tool developed by A C Nielsen, operators of the people meter system, which allows the user to analyse the television ratings in order to extract detailed information about people's viewing habits and patterns. Media Gardens can show who did **not** watch a particular program as well as what they did watch, and can track their other viewing over the same week on the same station, as well as on other stations. It makes it possible to define an audience by program type.

Nielsen's Richard Basil-Jones told *CU* that Media Gardens was originally intended for use by programming departments, so that they could schedule their promos at times when they could be sure that they would reach the audience most receptive to a particular promo. 'Programming departments find it indispensable and will not schedule a promo without re-

ferring to it', he said. All networks are now using it.

It has however proved to have much wider application: for example, advertising agencies can target audiences by the type of program; and stations can use it to target people who watch a particular program on another station and might watch a similar program on their own station. Nearly all major ad agencies are subscribing to Media Gardens, Basil Jones said.

The data provided does not include **all** demographics, which would make it extremely large and unwieldy, but includes about half a dozen - enough to allow the user to build up a broad demographic profile. This could provide insights into the kinds of people who avoid certain programs, as well as the kinds of program which might not attract a particular type of viewer.

As an example: the SBS, on behalf of the 1993 Documentary Conference, is undertaking a project analysing the viewing of documentaries in key documentary timeslots on national and commercial stations, in order to build up a picture of who does and does not watch documentaries. The results will be used as a background paper for the

conference, and could prove extremely valuable to documentary makers in providing a profile of their viewing - and non-viewing - audience.

The system allows analysis of all viewing to one station across a standard day, and can also track viewers across multiple stations. Data is available by the week for each capital city, and packages can cover whole years or other selected periods.

The software for Media Gardens presents information in the familiar form of a worksheet - rows and columns representing times and days of the week (see illustration). Ratings and other types of data are colour coded to provide a contour map of high and low rating programs. It requires an IBM compatible PC with a minimum of 2Mb RAM and a 40 megabyte hard disk.

Subscribers pay $400 a month to obtain the software and receive the ratings information. A diskette with a week's information for one city costs about $300. Asked if it would be possible for academic researchers to gain access to Media Gardens, Basil-Jones said that Nielsen's were flexible and would be happy to negotiate deals on packages of information.

This software application was conceived and developed in Australia, and has already caused considerable interest overseas, where other Nielsen offices are likely to adopt it.

Footnote: Meanwhile, AC Nielsen is moving its people meters into regional markets, an area where its competitor AGB McNair formerly held sway. Nielsen has lined up contracts with stations in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. AGB McNair has contracts with many clients until 1995. Some advertising interests are expressing concern that the people meter data in regional areas will not be an improvement on the diary system because of the relatively small samples proposed by Nielsens. (*AdNews*, 13 August 1993). ❑

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