

MAGAZINE ISSUE AGE IN PUBLIC PLACE

In the United States, public place reading appears to contribute materially to total average issue audiences. SMRB and MRI report on reading which occurs other than at home, at work, or while traveling. The bulk of this reading is public place reading. According to SMRB, for the top twenty magazines in terms of circulation, such reading occurs for 20.9% of all issues read. The MRI level reading is 25.5%.

The question is: Is there likely to be substantial reading in public places which is missed because of issue age? If substantial numbers of magazine issues in public places are older than the age at which they are tested for readership, one can assume that a non-trivial amount of reading of such issues is distinctly possible if not probable.

It must be stressed that the concern here is with first-time readers. We are not concerned with people who read an issue before the five week or 10 to 12 week cut-off points and then read it again subsequently. Presumably these readers would be captured by the aged issues that are used in the standard Through-the-Book procedure.

The data being presented are based on the actual inventory of all magazine issues found in a probability sample of 1,215 establishments which:

- (1) Are accessible to the public
- (2) Have a waiting room or sitting room
- (3) Have an inventory of one or more magazine issues available to the public using the waiting room or sitting area.

The study was conducted in 1984 by Audits & Surveys in two major metropolitan areas, Chicago and Los Angeles. The geographic universe in each city included those zip codes which contained households of average or higher income and/or up-scale business districts. The geographic universe included 81% of the establishments of the 101,000 establishments in both ADI's.

Within each selected zip code area, individual establishments were selected at random from a list of business establishments.

As will become apparent, these establishments carry a large inventory of consumer magazines, both weeklies and monthlies, and many of these magazines are not the most recent issues.

1,215 establishments which had a total of 11,192 issues of weekly/bi-weekly magazines and 20,315 issues of monthly magazines.

The average magazine inventory per establishment was roughly the same in the two markets – 26.5 in Chicago versus 22.0 in Los Angeles.

Similarly the number of different titles per establishments was comparable: 6.4 in Chicago versus 6.0 in Los Angeles. And the percent of issues which were weeklies versus monthlies was identical: Weeklies comprised 38% of magazine inventories in both Chicago and Los Angeles.

	<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Los Angeles</i>
Average number of magazine issues per establishment	26.5	22.0
Average number of magazine titles per establishment	6.4	6.0
Weeklies share of magazine inventories	38%	38%
Monthlies share of magazine inventories	62%	62%

Across a total of six major weekly magazine titles, 61% were six weeks old or older. First-time readers of these copies could not be captured by the Through-the-Book method. For monthlies the picture is equally if not more severe. 64% of all issues of monthly magazines were 13 weeks or older. The results for Chicago and Los Angeles do not differ materially.

These findings vary by type of establishment, but in all instances a very substantial portion of magazine issues are ages to such a degree that first-time readers of them have no legitimate chance of being included in average issue audience estimates.

In many establishments there is a mix of copies such that some are newer and some older than the age at which they are used for measurement. However, in many establishments the only issues of a given title are over-aged. For the average weekly 33% of the establishments carrying a specific title only have copies of that title which are beyond the age at which they are measured. For the average monthly the level of establishments have only over-aged

issues is 44%. Clearly all first-time reading of these titles in these establishments is not captured by the usual recognition technique.

A further analysis was made to determine whether or not the overall results varied for establishments differentiated by their total amount of traffic and waiting time. For this analysis we obtained an estimate of the average number of people who use each waiting room or sitting area per day. We also obtained an estimate of the average amount of time spend per person in each such area. We then assumed that opportunity to read magazines in a public place is related to total people traffic *times* average amount of time spent.

Whether such first-time reading of over-age issues occurs with greater or less frequency for weeklies versus monthlies is an important question. The answer to this question would not only help estimate the magnitude of issue age in contributing to an understatement of audience size – it will also determine whether these underestimates generally help weeklies more than monthlies or monthlies more than weeklies.