
The Ratings Game

How to design and evaluate your TV programmes using Audience Ratings

By

Howard Thomas

(Revised Second Edition 2004)

About this book

Television in South Africa has come of age. There is now a public broadcaster, a pay-TV station, a pay satellite bouquet and a commercial broadcaster. There are more on the way, so the environment is going to get even more competitive.

In all, viewers can receive some 40-odd TV channels in a wide variety of languages, origination both locally and abroad. All (except a few satellite channels) carry advertising.

Since advertising revenue is the mainstay of the broadcaster, and since advertisers need to know exactly who is watching a station, (and when,) audience measurement is the basis of the success of television.

The broadcaster has to measure the audience, so that it can tell the potential advertisers exactly who is watching, at every moment of the day or night. The advertisers will buy advertising time according to which station offers the advertiser the most suitable audience profile, and at the lowest cost.

Since the channels compete with each other for a limited pool of advertising revenue, the broadcasters buy programming that will meet the needs and wants of the audience watching at that particular time, and that will also attract audiences away from other channels.

This is where the programme producer first comes into contact with audience measurement. The process is usually like this:

The producer gets an idea for a programme. He analyses his concept to see what audience it will appeal to, and at what time of the day this audience may be available. Then he looks at the positioning of the stations to which he can sell the concept, and chooses the one whose positioning best suits his concept. (Of course, your choice of transmission time may not be available in the future, but you have to plan and design for a slot - you can always make adjustments later.)

Then he approaches the broadcaster, and if the broadcaster likes the concept, the two of them start analysing audiences in order to fine tune the concept so that it keeps the existing audience in that slot, and also attracts audiences from competitive channels. They will also look at audiences, which in turn attract certain advertisers in order to attract advertisers that could suit the merchandising and spin-off marketing opportunities (anything from T-shirts to competitions) that the programme presents.

It is common practice to test the programme in various ways, and at various stages of production, to make sure that it is relevant and appealing to the target audience. Once the programme is made, both the producer and the broadcaster will analyse the audience that the programme attracted, and see if the programme achieved its objectives. If not, the programme will require even more fine-tuning.

The science of being a TV producer consists of the ability to analyse audience research, and

creatively manipulate programme concepts and design, and so meet the needs and wants of a target audience.

This is where this book comes from.

In the matured South African television industry, the international methods of programme design and evaluation are needed. At the same time, producers are gearing up to sell programming to the international markets, and these skills are needed in that competitive environment.

This book is an introduction. It is directed to the producers fresh out of a non-commercial or non-competitive environment. It outlines the principles and suggests certain tools to get the producer going. It can never pretend to be a cure-all or a permanent answer in the world's most changing environment: media.

I wish to thank Dr Daan van Vuuren of the SABC, Judith Hartley of M-Net, Martin Urry of Telmar and Alison Barsby of IMS-SA, and Dr Piet Smit of the SAARF for their assistance in researching and compiling the contents.

Why measure audiences?

Audiences are measured to provide the advertisers with data on which they can make their advertising time (media) buying decisions.

There is no point in spending the large amounts of money that TV advertising costs unless you are sure that the people you want to advertise to are watching at the time of the slot you have bought.

Audiences are also measured so that the broadcaster can buy the programming that will keep the audiences watching, and draw more viewers from the competing channels.

No broadcaster can ever operate without measuring its audiences constantly, keeping track of minute changes and shifts. This has to be done on a minute by minute basis.

Some principles of audience behaviour

Remember, no one is forced to watch television. It's a matter of choice. Although a favourite hobby of the population is to complain about television, they complain as much about the Receiver of Revenue, the bus service, the boss and the weather. If TV were so bad, they would not tune in, and listen to the radio instead. And they do. When TV is bad, they first of all search for an alternative channel, and if that fails, they seek an alternative to TV.

That leads us to Principle Number One:

You have to market your programme to let people know that it is showing, at what time, on what channel, and on what day. You have to tell them why your programme is "not to be missed."

Once you have them viewing, you have to grab them from the start, which leads us to **Principle Number Two**:

Once they are viewing, you have to keep them viewing. The competitive channel is only a click of the remote away. Audiences are not patient. They may give you as much as two minutes to keep their attention, but not more.

If you have a different programme showing at the same time each day, or even each week, you have to market each one with as much effort each time. Therefore, it is preferable to run a series which develops loyalty, and reduces the marketing costs. So **Principle Number Three** is:

Go for a series where you can "cliff-hang" them into the next episode, or keep a consistency of characters within different stories, or keep an identity that the viewers can identify with, or do anything to develop loyalty to draw them in again and thus cut down on marketing costs.

All this adds up to **Principle Number Four**, which is:

Know what audience you want to attract, get to know that audience (its needs and wants), and get to understand how you are going to attract it, and even more, how you are going to keep it.

How audiences are measured

The principle behind audience measurement is known as sampling. There is no way a broadcaster could ever count the number of people watching on an individual basis.

Sampling is similar to a model of a building. When an architect designs a building, he makes a scale model. The only difference between his model and the actual building is that the model is a lot smaller. Otherwise, it looks exactly the same. He can use the model to test how it will shape up to bad weather, how it will look on the skyline, and the measure how people will travel around within it. It will give him all sorts of information about air-conditioning, comfort, climate control, parking, wear and tear, and appearances.

The only thing is that it is a lot smaller.

Here's how Nielsen describes its research:

“Actually, a representative sample doesn't have to be very large to represent the population it is drawn from. For example, you don't need to eat an entire pot of vegetable soup to know what kind of soup it is. A cup of soup is more than adequate to represent what is in the pot. If, however, you don't stir the soup to make sure that all of the various ingredients have a good chance of ending up in the cup, you might just pour a cup of vegetable broth. Stirring the soup is a way to make sure that the sample you draw represents all the different parts of what is in the pot.”

While a sample doesn't have to be very large to represent the population, the sample does need to be selected in a way which gives all members of the population the same chance of being chosen.

If 50% of the vegetable pieces in a huge pot are carrot cubes, the only way to know it for sure would be to examine and count the contents of the entire pot. Let's say we stir well and pour a cup of soup with 10 vegetable pieces in the cup. If sampling were a perfect process, we would get five carrot cubes out of ten pieces. What actually happens is that we usually get close to five carrot cubes-sometimes a little more and sometimes a little less and sometimes exactly five. It is possible, but really unlikely, to stir well and get no carrot pieces-or to get all carrot pieces. So we could get a rough estimate of the proportion of carrots in the pot from counting what is in the cup.

If we wanted a closer estimate, we would take a larger sample. Imagine if we stirred well and then poured out enough soup to contain 5000 vegetable pieces. We probably wouldn't get exactly 2500 carrot pieces, but the chance of getting no carrots at all is very remote. In fact, according to sampling theory and a very tasty laboratory test, 19 out of 20 times we take a well-stirred sample of soup containing 5000 vegetable pieces; we get between 48% and 52% carrots. There is no guarantee that the percentage of carrots in a sample of this size will be between 48% and 52% (one time in 20 it will be outside this range, but usually not far outside this range). The same sampling errors apply to a representative sample of television viewers.

Audience measurement is the same. Trained statisticians look at the type of people that make up the total audience, and then choose one from each individual part, and put them together into a sample. The sample is an architect's model of the total society.

To cope with the constant changes in the society, the model is changed on a regular basis. It is no use unless it is always an exact model of the total society.

The sample is gathered by sophisticated electronic equipment called People Meters that measure viewing habits and behaviour on a minute by minute basis. This data is collected daily and analysed by computers to provide the information needed by advertisers, broadcasters and producers.

By analysing the data, you can:

- Get a picture of the South African viewer, his likes and dislikes and his preferences.

-
- Get to know who is watching television, at what time of the day, and on what channel.
 - Look for gaps in the programming, what needs are not met, and what programming is missing from the schedule.
 - Analyse the market in the gap you have identified, and find out whether it is a viable market.
 - Plan, design and schedule programming to attract the greatest possible audience, and consequently also the greatest possible advertising revenue.
 - Find out if your programming is liked, and if not, what you need to do to change it.

What is measured?

The number of TV sets in the market naturally, defines the television audience. At the time of writing, the number in South Africa is about 8 000 000. (It's probably much higher, so there is a 20% error built into this, but that's the subject of more advanced studies which you can take on our training courses). This is known as the universe. We also know that the total viewership is 17 500 000, so that means an average of 2.18 people watch per TV set

Looking at it in a very simplistic way, an Audience Rating (AR) point is one percent of the universe. This means that an AR of 1 is 145 590 viewers.

In fact, ARs are calculated in a very complicated way to reflect the number of viewers over a certain period of time. Here is the official explanation:

An AMPS rating is the proportion of viewers, averaged across some time period (a commercial spot or break, a quarter-hour or a programme) and percentaged on the total number of individual panel members in the relevant group (e.g. 'all adults' or 'housewives').

ARs are calculated by summing the products of numbers of viewers and relevant times spent viewing (within the period concerned) and dividing by the product of the total number of potential viewers and the length of the period concerned. An AR is thus, in effect, a time-weighted average of audience size, indicated by an index that varies between 0 and 100, although, because visitors are included, a maximum AR greater than 100 is theoretically possible because visitors are not included in the base.

Theoretically, visitors to metered households compensate in part for panel members who view in non-metered homes. Informant numbers in the tables exclude visitors. No female visitors are classified as housewives.

Whilst the AMPS meter scans the status of sets and individuals at a rate of approximately 16 times in 30 seconds or at roughly two-second intervals, any viewing session of less than about 20 second duration is ignored by the meter and therefore forms part of the AR calculations for the station being watched prior to such a brief change.

At present, all weekly report ARs relate to real time, off-air viewing only; the deferred viewing of a taped programme, at some late date, is excluded.

Within this universe, we divide audiences into as many groupings as you want. The main groupings are age, gender, race, and Living Standards Measurement (LSM) groups. Then you can subdivide them into sub groupings, so that you can have a group consisting of black women, age 25-34, in LSM 6. This then becomes a sub-universe, and an AR of 1 pertaining to this sub group will be 1% of this group.

It is important to understand this as you could have a total AR of 10, meaning that 17 500 000 people are watching. However, your AR of women, age 24-36 in LSM 6, could be 12. This would be because the total number of women in this group are say 31 000 and 3720 (or 12%) are watching.

So your AR refers to a particular group, and is a percentage of that group. This means that if you add up the ARs within sub-groups, they will always total much more than the AR for the total universe.

In theory, the data will give you audience data over any permutation you want, provided it's in the data.

In practice, you have to be careful when the base gets very small, and fluctuations show up as dramatic changes.

In practice, the main categories used for audience research for programme designing and evaluation are:

Language – All official

Gender - male and female

LSM - 1 to 10

Age - 7-15, 16-24, 25-34, 35-49, and 50+.

LSM	Monthly Income	% population
1	832	10.2
2	1075	13.9
3	1318	14.1
4	1724	14.0
5	2421	12.4
6	3897	12.5
7	5859	6.3
8	8053	5.8
9	10,732	5.9
10	15,931	4.9

NOTE: Classification by race has been dropped, although you can get them on request. It has been found that language is far more reliable to distinguish between groups than race. For instance, if you take language and place of residence (or size of town) you are far more likely to get a better feel of the type of person that you are trying to research.

How it is measured

Television audiences are measured by means of People Meters. They are installed in the homes of the sample by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) using the methods devised by the Nielsen Organisation. Nielsen has pioneered audience research internationally and its methods are regarded as sound and accurate.

People Meters are electronic boxes placed on the top of the TV set, and connected to a telephone line. The data is gathered by means of a handset (looking like a TV remote control). The members of the household press buttons that tell the People Meter which person is watching. They key in when they start viewing and when they stop.

Of course there are inaccuracies - you cannot expect people to push the buttons all the time, especially if they just getting up to answer the door. But these inaccuracies are evened out statistically, and even with the imperfections, it remains the best system we have at the moment. The system also works well enough to give advertisers, broadcasters and producers the information they need on which to base their decisions. However, broadcasters never make major programming changes simply on the basis of small changes in the ratings.

Every night, the People Meter dials into the central computer and downloads the information. The computer takes all the information for a full day, once all the People Meters have phoned in, and produces the raw data from which all the information can be extracted.

Generally, the data is available within 14 days. (Overnight ratings have been started and they will be standard soon.) SAARF publish the data as part of AMPS research, and the data is also sold to bureaux who in turn process it into specialised information for their clients, who are the advertising agencies, broadcasters and producers. You can also subscribe to the software and data, and so the analysis yourself.

This means that a producer can ask a bureau to produce data for a specific time of broadcast, and get an audience profile over all the TV channels. You simply specify the time, the channels you want, and the type of audience in terms of age, gender, language and LSM. This profile can be as detailed as the producer wants. The more detailed the data, the more it will cost.

In addition to the data provided from the People Meters by the SAARF, channels also commission their own research such as Enjoyment Ratings, Image Tracking and so on.

How to plan programming

There are two ways to start planning, depending on what you are looking for.

If you don't have a concept, but are looking for a gap in what the broadcasters are giving the public, you will go through all the channel schedules, and look for a type of programming, or a subject matter that is missing. You decide on the type of viewer you want to attract, and you search the schedules for that profile, and look for peaks.

This is not a common method, as most producers look for a gap when they have a concept in mind.

You may have picked up an idea from the programme schedule of another broadcaster somewhere else in the world, or you may have picked up some feedback from friends that they would like to see a particular type of programming. You may even have had a revelation in the bath. Lying there, you may have thought of a programme subject or format that you are convinced will pull in the crowds.

Your next step is to write it down in standard programme proposal format. First and foremost, this is to protect your copyright. Secondly, it helps you define the type of people who will want to see it.

Supposing you believe that the target audience consists of females, 25-49, LSM 5 to 7, and all languages. You go to a research bureau, and ask them search for peaks where the highest concentration of that profile of viewer is watching.

Now you study the schedules of all the broadcasters at that time, and see what is showing. Does the existing programming meet the needs of that target? If not, why not? Is your target audience big enough to warrant your programme being shown at that time, or will the broadcaster lose audiences?

You look at the schedules and find a slot or slots that will:

- deliver the audiences of the profile you have selected.
- keep the rest of the audience that is watching at that time.
- pull in additional audiences from the competing channels at the same time.

Having narrowed down the field, you now go back to the bureau, and call for audience profiles (as you have defined them) for the slots you have chosen, the slots immediately before and after your chosen slot. You also call for profiles for the slots at the same time on all the competitive channels, and the slots before and after those slots.

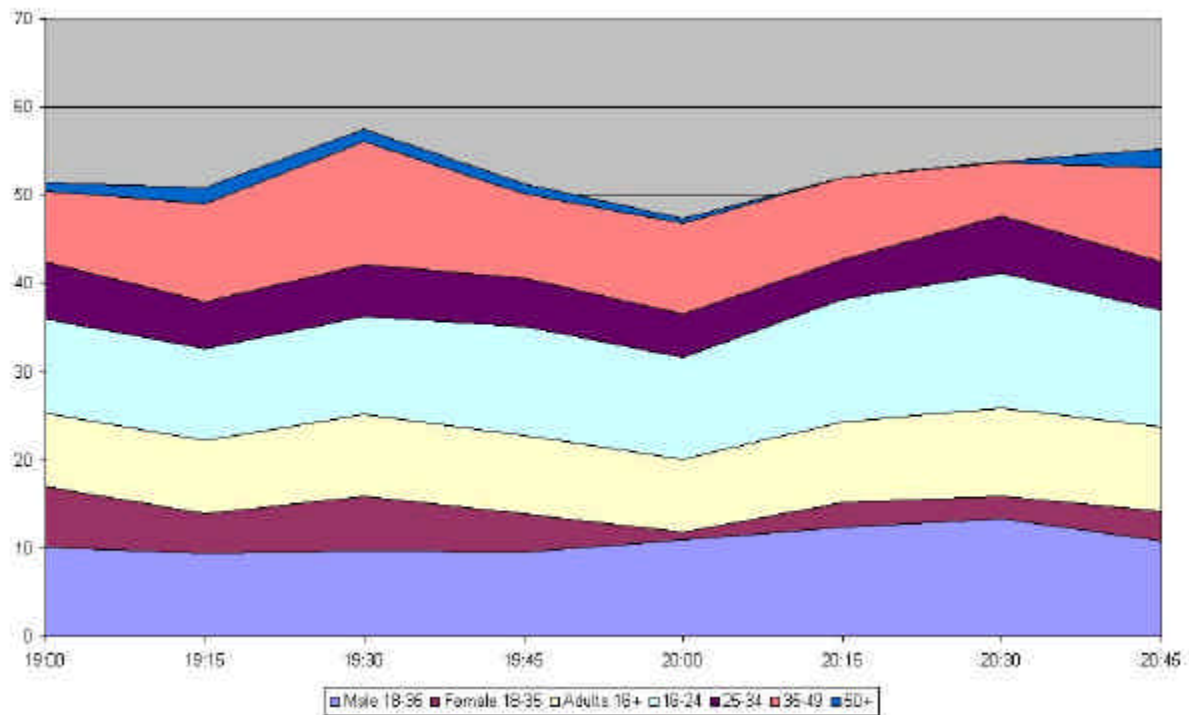
You now have data on audiences for slots that look like this:

	19:00	19:15	19:30	19:45	20:00	20:15	20:30	20:45
Male 18-35	10.1	9.46	9.75	9.6	10.9	12.4	13.3	10.8
Female 18-35	6.94	4.49	6.19	4.25	0.88	2.75	2.58	3.43
Adults 16+	8.23	8.26	9.16	8.93	8.39	9.22	10	9.59
16-24	10.7	10.4	11.1	12.4	11.5	13.9	15.3	13.1
25-34	6.54	5.41	5.9	5.38	4.9	4.47	6.44	5.55
35-49	7.99	11.1	14	9.68	10.2	9.24	6.08	10.7

50+ 1.01 1.83 1.38 1.13 0.61 0.05 0.1 2.06

You now have to visualise the audiences across the slots. The rows of numbers you are presented with are just a confusing jumble of figures that you need to transfer to some visual representation.

Eventually you will find the method that suits you best, but an easy way is to use a coloured graph or pie chart. Select a breakdown of no more than 8 categories. You can choose say: Male, female, some languages, LSM 5&6, LSM 7&8, 25-34, 35-49. Enter the data into a graphics package like Microsoft Excel, and pull out a pie chart for your targeted slot, the slots before and after, the slots at the same time on the other channels, and their before and after slots. Now you will have a series of charts on a row that looks like this:



Now just by looking across the row of charts, you can see differing concentrations of different colours.

The statistical and mathematical work is now over, and you have to resort to your knowledge, experience and creativity.

You now want to determine whether your programme concept is going to work with the audience profile you have selected. There are a number of criteria you use.

1. Historical precedence. Has this type of programme been successful in the past? This is important, but it should not hinder your innovation. If this type of programme has been successful, then the concept has a pedigree. If not, then you are in a high-risk situation, and broadcasters the world over are not known for their sense of adventure.

At the same time, television the world over suffers from the malaise that "everyone does what everyone else does differently, but no-one does anything different." Maybe that's why television is perceived to be so boring, and why people do nothing but complain that there is nothing worth watching.

This is due to the fact that broadcasters have to make money, and they do that by delivering audiences to the advertisers. What better way of doing the job, but to broadcast "safe" programming that has a good pedigree, and delivers the audiences in the cheapest way and at the lowest risk? You can't blame them - they are after all in business.

On the other hand, audiences bore quickly, and are hungry for choice, innovation, adventure and excitement. If you want to be different, you have that on your side when you present the broadcaster with something innovative and different. What you don't have on your side is a guarantee that it will work for the broadcaster.

Even safe programming with a massive pedigree is no guarantee for success. The best made programmes that are in the same vein as a previous hit have bombed for no apparent reason. TV is a risky business. After all, it's just show business, and show business is the riskiest business in the world.

So the ideal situation is to present the broadcaster with a programme proposal that is different, and in place of a pedigree, you have a detailed analysis of the elements of your concept, and the reasons why the audience you have targeted, will go for each element.

2. Available audience. You cannot ever assume that you will get audiences that are not already watching. People are creatures of habit, and most of their habits are imposed on them by the hurly-burly of modern life. They go to work, they come home and socialise, they play sport, and they sleep. It is mainly their working life that dictates their daily schedule.

If they watch TV from 7.00am to 7.15am, that is because that is all the time they have in the morning. If they watch from 6.00pm to 7.00pm, that is because they have dinner at 7.00pm, and Dad doesn't like the kids watching TV during dinner. And there is very little you can do to change that.

It's going to take a blockbuster to get the whole family to change their dinner habits by a whole hour, and perhaps even upset the time the children go to bed.

Where you are lucky, are that no two families follow the same schedule. Everyone has different values, different schedules, different needs, and different priorities. If you average them out over the whole nation, you can get a fair slice of people at any time. You can even get an audience at 5.00am, when the night shift people come off work, and want to watch TV to unwind. There may not be many, but they are there.

By the same token, you can never expect *everyone* to watch TV at the same time. The Universe is 11-million, and the highest rating any single programme at primetime can expect to get is an AR of 11, if you take into account all the channels available at the same time. In the USA, the top programme is Monday night football. It is always the top hit, and that only scores a 17. At the same time, the competitor channels score a rotten 8 or 9. At that time in America, some 60% of the public are watching TV, which is phenomenal. In South Africa, you rarely get more than 40% of the Universe watching, even at prime time. The usual is around 30%. Our weather is too good, and there's too much else to do.

3. Quality of audience. A broadcaster won't buy your programming on the basis of its appeal to the total audience. The advertisers are not interested in quantity (except for mass-market products). They want quality. And to them, quality means the people who want to buy their products. There was a case recently where a programme at prime time relied on the support of an oil company as a sponsor. The overall ratings were phenomenal. It was an outdoor programme, and the theory said it would be a hit. But when they came to analyse the audience, the subject appealed to people who watched because it involved visiting places they could never afford to go to. They were poor, and many did not even own a car. This didn't suit the oil company, so it withdrew the sponsorship, and a supposedly successful programme went down the tubes.

This is why we need a public broadcaster. A broadcaster that is only a commercial venture is not interested in broadcasting to people that will not attract advertising. Commercial broadcasters aim to get the LSM's 6-8. That nets them the prime advertisers who are prepared to pay good money to get exposure.

For television to be a public service, it has to be broadcast by a public broadcaster with a mandate to subsidise programming aimed at the lower income groups with the money it makes from its commercial programming. Only on a public service can producers get programming broadcast that is wanted by the lower income groups. Often, they are the most satisfying audience to have, because they appreciate your efforts all the more.

Broadcasting to the rich reaps monetary rewards. You seldom get social or upliftment satisfaction from it.

However, there is another sector of broadcasting, and it is coming more and more to the fore. This is the niche broadcasting you get on satellite. This is South Africa's version of the cable TV that has been successful in the rest of world satisfying niche audiences.

When a service such as DStv is able to carry so many channels on one carrier band, it can afford to carry channels that cater for small or niche audiences. When this programming is carried on niche services all over the world, the total audiences become enormous, and the overall monetary potential spells "big business".

A good example is the horse racing channel which may only have an audience of 30 000, but it has 100% market penetration. This means that every horseracing lover watches it - often all day long. When you can target a niche market like that, and sell your programming to similar services the world over, your potential world audience is vast, and so your budgets can be equally generous.

To put it simply, there are three categories of broadcasting: public - where the profits from commercial primetime programming are used to cross-subsidise programming that appeals to audiences less favoured by the advertisers; commercial - which aims primarily to the LSM 6-8 group; and niche where the audiences are potentially smaller, and the income is generated from a mixture of subscriptions and advertisements targeted to that niche audience.

4. Buying power. Not all audiences have the same buying power as regards the same products. Lower income groups have a higher buying power for mielie-meel than do upper income groups. Advertisers will tell you that children are the decision-makers when it comes to the buying power of such things as toothpaste. Specific sectors of the audience buy different things and in different quantities, and with different priorities. It is important, if you are targeting specific advertisers to make sure your programming attracts their target audience, and the decision-makers for those products. In some cases, women are the decision-makers, and in some cases men.

These things are important when designing programmes like game shows, youth magazine programmes, music programmes and others where there are spin-off marketing opportunities, sponsorships and merchandising.

If you intend to tie your programme to competitions with prizes, you have to make sure that your audience will want the prizes you are offering, and will buy the T-shirts and caps that relate to the characters in your programme.

Every programme has opportunities for spin-off marketing, be it a website, products in shops, licensing designs, comic books, toys, competitions or even school textbooks. All these elements have to be carefully co-ordinated into the programme design, and its appeal to the target audience.

5. Need for innovative programming. The public wants new types of programming. In general, the broadcasters don't. But if they are presented with a good case, they will take the risk, because they know that successful innovative programming is more likely to be a bigger hit than successful "copycat" programming.

The very nature of entertainment is to take people out of their humdrum lives and transport them to places they cannot go themselves.

You may think that soaps disprove this statement. If you look at the soaps that are on offer worldwide, they seem to be the same. Don't be fooled. The genre and format may be the same, but the situations, the characters, the plots, the locale and the social settings all vary from soap to soap.

Each is targeted to a specific sector of the audience, available at that time of the schedule. The designers have analysed the potential audience, and found a formula that is directed to the dreams, aspirations, wishes and fantasies of that audience. In that way, each is innovative. There are soaps set in the upper classes, the slums, hospitals, law firms, and the police. They appeal to different and specific audiences.

You have to be super-creative, and a television genius to come up with a new genre. The genres that exist have evolved over many decades of television, and they form patterns of what the public as a whole goes for. But new genres are possible, especially in young societies like South Africa. In a

multi cultural, multi lingual society, it is possible to come up with something new, but in general any new genre will be specific to a sector of the audience. Don't let your imagination be hindered by dyed in the wool broadcasters who tell you that programming has to fit into a pattern or genre. Who knows, you may be the one to break the mould?

Planning for the audience

You start off with a concept. You break it up into its constituent parts in terms of how it appeals. You define the audience that will like the appealing elements. Then you find a slot and a channel that will suit your concept.

Now you have to refine the concept to make sure it is finely targeted.

You will ask yourself three questions: What does the programme do? How does it do it? What are the elements that produce which reactions?

Look at the concept as a whole. Ask yourself what genre it fits into. Is it a soap, a sitcom, a drama, a game show - whatever? What does it offer the audience? To answer this question, ask yourself "What will my programme make people do as a result of the programme, what will it make them feel?"

A successful programme has to entertain, inform, and educate - in varying proportions. To achieve any of these things, the audience must get something out of it. They must feel happy, sad, but elevated in some way. They must be informed, or intrigued, or excited. They must learn something, or they must be taken out of their boring lives and transported to somewhere in their imagination. Whatever it is, they must get something out of your programme, otherwise they won't watch again, and they won't tell their friends to watch.

Your programme has to get people talking, especially to their friends. Word of mouth is the cheapest and most effective form of marketing your programme.

So, what does your programme give people, what do they get out of it? Once you have isolated this critical quality, you are well on the way to designing something of relevance. And remember, even the most trivial programme has to be relevant.

Never assume that audiences are all just couch potatoes. If you assume that, you will produce couch potato programming which never won anyone an Emmy.

How does your programme get the audience to do or feel what they do? Break the programme into elements and make a list of all the reactions you expect each sector of the audience to experience.

Your list will look like this:

Reaction	In whom	Caused by

You may at this stage, add to the "in whom" column, an approximate proportion of the audience that experience the reaction.

Now look at the audience profile for the slot you have chosen. See if you can find a reaction that is glaringly missing. Cast your mind back over all you have learned about people. What do people like to experience, what do they want to experience? With all the experiences (reactions, feelings, calls to action) my programme causes, is there anything that should be there to make it perfect, to make it an experience they will never forget?

You will appreciate now that the scientific part ended with the pie charts you drew earlier. This is all creativity, drawing on your knowledge of human nature.

Now go back to your list of reactions, and what caused them. Rank them in order of impact, and by

the quality of the audience affected. From this ranking you will see the principle points of appeal, and those which affect either the least amount of people, or most of the people in the least way.

Is this satisfactory? Is this the recipe for a successful programme, or even the biggest hit ever?

At this point remember that as a television producer, you are designing programming for the audiences and not for yourself. All successful producers have a gut feel for what other people want, and do not allow themselves to be influenced by their own tastes, interests, likes and desires.

Now summarise what you have found out. Write up an objective evaluation of your concept, and how it will appeal to the audience you have selected as the target audience. If you are doing this on your own, you are out of your mind. You need objective input, and you should be relying on your respected colleagues for their views.

Planning for station branding

Finally, ask yourself if this programme concept fits in with the branding (the look that expresses the positioning) of the broadcaster you have chosen. Station branding is not covered in this book, as it is an extensive subject all on its own.

But it is important to check that the type of concept fits in with what the broadcaster says it is all about. The SABC channels, M-Net, e.tv - all have specific branding statements that describe what they are all about. You just have to make a point of watching the programmes on each channel for about a day, and you will get a feel for their positioning. Pay particular attention to the promos and station indents. They are statements of the branding.

You would hardly expect M-Net, which is a sport, movie and entertainment channel to accept a documentary series on malnutrition in children. SABC may take it, but only at a certain time of the day. If you want to approach Discovery Channel with this series, you will have to make it fit into their positioning of "Explore your world".

Pitching your proposal

The process that has been described is all you will be expected to do in terms of audience research before you make a pitch for your programme.

No matter what amount of audience analysis you do, no matter how much detail you go into, it will never match the experience and knowledge the broadcaster has of its own audience.

Broadcasters are only in business because they know their audiences better than anything else. They have to. It's their business. You may have access to the same data that they use, but they work with it all day long.

The old way of doing things was to come up with an idea, and then pitch it with passion to a broadcaster. He would accept it or reject it. If he accepted it, he would find a slot and then order the changes he thought needed to be made.

However, the amount of material being presented to broadcasters today has made commissioning editors rather inaccessible. They don't have the time to see everyone, and you can never put across your passion in a fax.

It is important therefore that you do all the homework you are expected to do in terms of making your concept applicable and targeted. If you have done good research, objectively tailored your concept to a broad timeslot, analysed the concept and isolated the elements of appeal, you will get a good reputation for presenting worthwhile product. Then you will have no trouble getting into the commissioning editors' offices.

Broadcasters are desperate for good product. Television chews up material. Budgets are only reasonable when there is the prospect for a wider audience than just one transmission. This means sales to other broadcasters and repeat transmission over the years.

New channels are opening all over the world every day. The prospects for overseas sales are improving all the time. Furthermore, as more broadcasters come onto the market, the audiences

become fragmented, and the competition gets steeper.

There is only so much advertising revenue available, and new broadcasters can only survive if they rob other broadcasters of their audiences.

This means that product is always in demand. But audiences have so much choice, that they will only watch good product. So while the broadcasters are desperate for product, they only want good product.

There are thousands of people out there with ideas that they believe are the makings of the greatest programmes ever. The commissioning editors cannot see every one of them. So they tend to favour those producers that come up with ideas that are well researched in terms of audiences, and designed to create definite and desired appeal among those audiences.

Your programme proposal need not contain audience data at all. If you have researched and targeted your concept, the commissioning editor will see it straight away.

Your proposal should be in two parts. The first part is never more than a page, and is designed to be handed out freely, and to get you an appointment. The second contains the details you and the broadcaster need to discuss the next step, which is of course, a development budget.

Handout

Working title - the name you propose until a final title is agreed and copyrighted

Genre - Drama, documentary, game show etc.

High concept line - no more than 20 words that excite the viewer, the type of thing that will be in the entry in the TV Guide.

Transmission time - Morning, afternoon, prime time, late night, etc.

Budget - high, medium or low.

Background - a paragraph or two on the gap in the market, the market in the gap.

The programme - There is seldom any reason to go over 300 words to describe what the audiences will see, and what they will feel.

Proposal

Working title - the name you propose until a final title is agreed and copyrighted

Genre - Drama, documentary, game show etc.

High concept line - no more than 20 words that excite the viewer, the type of thing that will be in the entry in the TV Guide.

Transmission time - Morning, afternoon, prime time, late night, etc.

Budget - high, medium or low.

Background and Target Audience - Details of the market gap, and the audience in that gap. You do not need great detail. You just have to show that you understand audience measurement, and that you have gone to the trouble to research the gap so as not to waste the time of the broadcaster. You can briefly mention the type of audience on competitive channels. Remember that the data you have to go on is at least two weeks old. If your programme is accepted, it will only be broadcast in at least 6 months time. By then the audience profile will have changed in detail, but probably not in general. However, you can get your audience research analyst to "trend line" the data, and make a logical prediction.

You can also describe the pedigree of the genre, or the programme type, or any similar programmes in the past. When detailing the pedigree, remember to quote the name of the past programme, the channel it was on, and the dates of the season. (Most of this information is available on the Internet.

The programme - In the case of a once off, summarise the story. This applies to whether it is a

drama, documentary or variety show. The reader wants to know what the audience will see. In the case of a series, describe what will be seen over the whole series.

The appeal - Describe what the audience will do and feel as a result of watching the programme.

Marketing opportunities - What spin-off marketing is there, opportunities for merchandising, competitions and other activities that either promote the programme, or increase its income earning potential.

Attachments - In the case of a series, it is customary to attach a draft script of the first episode, and script outlines for at least 13 episodes.

Production

Once you are in production, and the actual transmission time is more of a reality, you and the broadcaster will both want to consult the ratings more closely and fine tune the programme to ensure (as much as it is possible) that it applies to the targeted audience.

There is some times an element of tension between the broadcaster and the producer in that the broadcaster may want to broaden the appeal to the detriment of the content, and the producer will be more concerned with concentrating the content. The two can usually reach agreement once the target audience is clearly identified, and the content is targeted.

Evaluation

In South Africa ratings come out about fourteen days after the broadcast. This is not a satisfactory state of affairs. In Europe and the United States they are available almost immediately. This gives the producer, in the case of a daily programme, a chance to modify the next day's programme.

The problem in South Africa is that it takes time for the data to be collected. Sometimes the People Meter cannot get through on the telephone line for some days, as it only dials through at a specific time, and often the lines are busy. This situation is being rectified, and data is being collected sooner by the day.

The raw data that is collected into reports usually shows the ratings divided into fifteen-minute segments, and broken up into the following groupings.

	21/1/98	28/1/98	4/2/98	18/2/98	4/3/98	11/3/98	18/3/98
Adults 16+	8.23	8.26	9.16	8.93	8.39	9.22	10.03
English 16-34	2.54	2.84	1.3	1.87	1.21	0.7	0.82
Afrik 16-34	6.48	8.96	12.02	6.2	5.12	5.5	4.82
Zulu 16-34	4.08	6.49	6.88	5.68	8.37	8.41	10.82
Sotho 16-34	18.73	15.27	15.13	17.82	14.88	20.3	21.26
Xhosa 16-34	4.15	1.71	4.56	6.21	9.78	7.41	4.87

The example above shows audiences in various language groups measured against the total audience over a seven-week period.

It is important to look at the viewership before and after on the same channel, and the viewership on all competitive channels at the same time, and also before and after.

Analysing this data will show you which sectors of the audience have switched channels, and to which channel. From this you can derive information as to who tuned into your programme, and more important, who tuned out.

In the case of an actuality or live programme, it gives you a chance to make changes and to try and grab audiences on a fortnightly basis. You only get the data every fortnight, but you can make changes as soon as the data is collected.

In the case of pre-produced programming, you may be able to make changes in the marketing, or even the scheduling.

The data is available on a minute by minute basis, as the following example shows. This is a valuable exercise, and the data should be requested like this on a regular basis. For instance, if you take data on a minute by minute basis for the first fifteen minutes of the transmission, you can see who tuned out and when. Ask yourself:

Who came into the programme late?

By looking at the data for the competitive channels, where did they come from?

Who left the programme after only a few minutes, and where did they go?

Then ask yourself: *Why?*

If there is a sudden dip or increase during the transmission try and determine why. By drawing detailed information, you may be able to identify an incident in the programme that caused a sudden shift in viewership. There may be something that offended a part of the audience.

Other research

Ratings are a valuable guide to the planning and evaluation of programmes, but they should never be used as the only research tool. There are other systems and methods, and they should be used to verify each other.

Focus Groups

Qualified market research specialists conduct focus groups. The group consists of a panel of respondents carefully chosen to represent the Universe, or the particular sub section that the broadcaster wants to sample.

The group can either watch a programme, and information is gathered from them by various means: electronic polling systems, audience response systems, cameras recording their facial reactions, questionnaires, surveys, or even open discussion under the control of a qualified moderator. Focus Group sessions are usually recorded.

Telephone and Face-to-face Surveys

Market research specialists also conduct these, and again the secret of success is in the sampling.

All these surveys can give you valuable information about the success of your format, plot, storyline, attitude, the level at which you are communicating, the artists and the script.

Your own research

You can also get a preliminary idea of how your idea will go down by simply discussing it with friends, or even assembling your own small focus groups. However be careful to talk to people who are representative of your target audience. You will get a warped impression of a proposed game show if you presented it only to a group of professionals or academics.

Mapping and graphing the audience

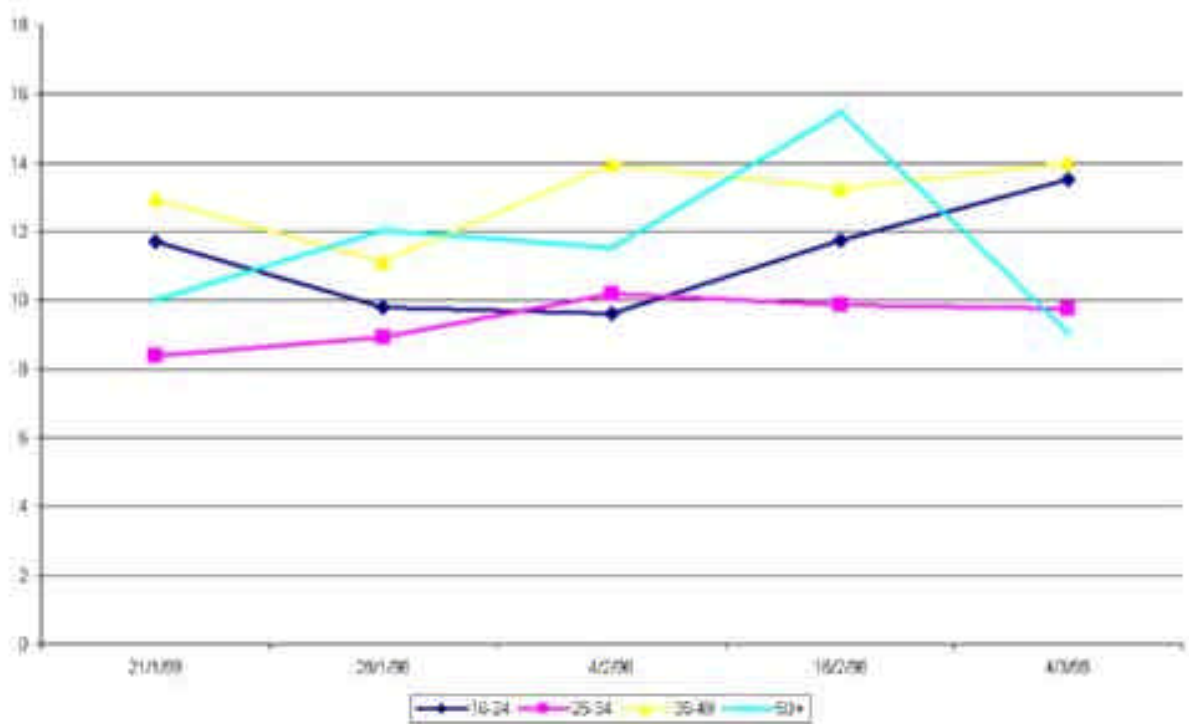
Earlier we looked at a way of visually mapping the audience from the ratings using pie charts. There are other ways of doing it, and eventually you will find the way that suits you best. Here are some other methods. They all enable you to quantify visually, so that you can see changes and variations in the various parts that make up the total audience.

Here are some of the visual ways you can make the same data visually easy to interpret.

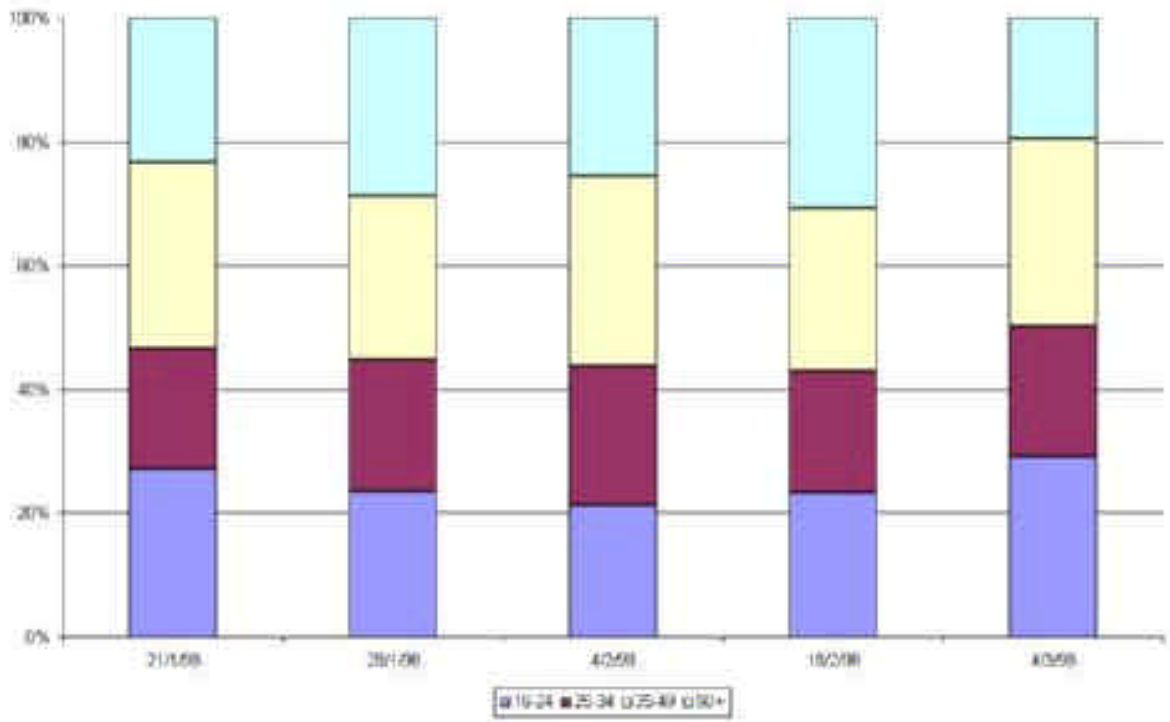
Here is the raw data

	21/1/98	28/1/98	4/2/98	18/2/98	4/3/98
16-24	11.72	9.8	9.61	11.73	13.52
25-34	8.39	8.94	10.2	9.86	9.77
35-49	12.97	11.12	13.99	13.27	14.04
50+	10.03	12.03	11.54	15.48	9.08

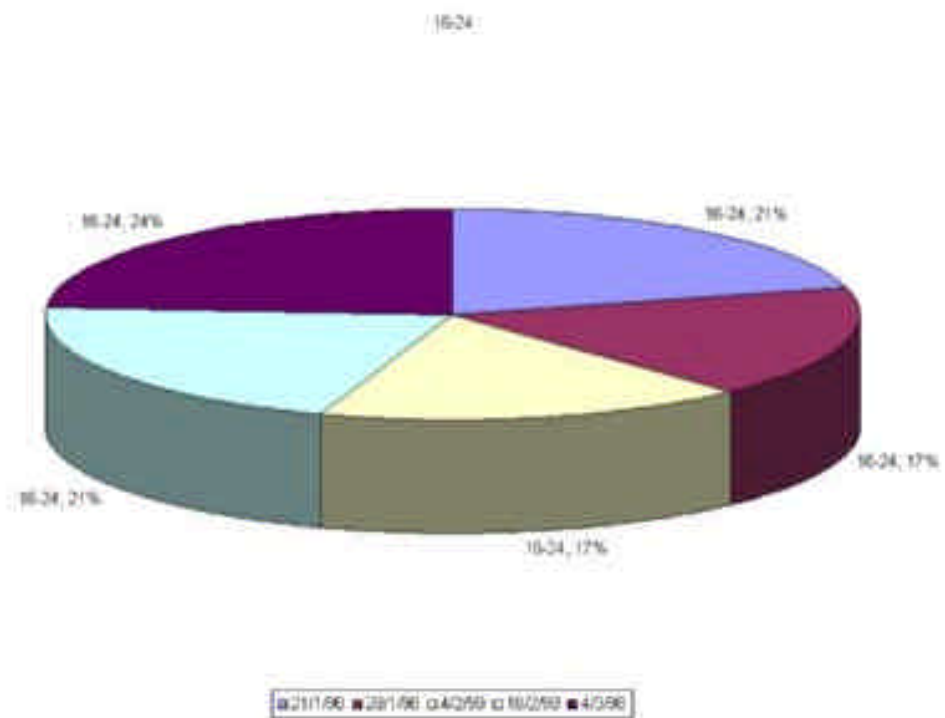
This is a line graph, where you see the changes in the form of horizontal lines.



In this graph, you see the audience changes in the forms of blocks up the bars.



The conventional pie chart is very visual for showing areas, as long as there is not too much data.



Here is another way to view a number of different weeks.

