There's More to Your DMA Than Meets the Eye

Like your personal DNA, understanding Nielsen's Designated Market Area ® (DMA®) can be complex, until you know what you're looking at.

Let's start with some basics: In order to measure the broadcast and cable viewing habits in the United States, Nielsen researchers divided the country into 210 separate markets commonly known in the industry as DMA®s. Each DMA® is comprised of television households within specific counties and zip codes that all receive the same local stations on their television sets. Nielsen looks at every county to see which television stations receive the majority of viewing and assigns counties and zip codes based on this majority. So you might live in an urban area and your brother-in-law lives in a rural area – two different zip codes and two separate counties, but, if you're in the same DMA®, you will both get the same local programming.

This premise is important to understanding the representation of ethnic populations in each DMA®. The households we randomly select to participate in our viewing measurement studies (we call this our sample) are not based on city population, they are based on DMA® population. In Washington DC for example, the African American population within the city limits, is estimated at approximately 60 percent by the US Census. However, the Census total for African Americans in the entire Washington DC DMA® stands at approximately 23.5 percent. Nielsen's African American sample composition of the DC DMA® is at 23.6 percent . That's because Washington DC viewers come from a total of 34 counties throughout parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania,Virginia, and West Virginia in addition to the District of Columbia; and also includes seven independent cities created by the Commonwealth of Virginia , including Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericks Fredericksburg, Manassas, Manassas Park and Winchester.

It is our job to measure viewing habits by DMA®. When we say "Every View Counts" we mean all views in all areas, even the suburbs!

SHIVERING OVER SHIVA

If that's not enough to make you shiver, let's tackle the SHIVA act of 1999. The Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act (SHIVA) was about giving you choice. SHIVA was designed to promote competition among multi-channel video programming distributors , including satellite companies and cable television operators. SHIVA uses DMA® definitions to determine which local stations are provided to a given household.

Believe it or not, the U.S. government determines when and where the satellite companies may provide local service. The satellite and cable providers use Nielsen's DMA® geographic designations to help determine which local stations are most appropriate for certain areas. Nielsen's DMA®s were not intended to be used this way.

In 208 out of 210 Nielsen markets, satellite providers determine which local service they'll provide to your household. Although Nielsen's DMA® in formation is used, Nielsen Media Research is not actually involved in these decisions. The two exceptions are Hawaii and Alaska, where predefined local service is mandatory.

What does this mean for some households' television viewing? A local station is not always local! For example, if you live in Florence County, Wisconsin you could very well receive local news, politics, and sports information from Marquette, Michigan . That's because the providers determine the local service to assign to households.

If you find your local station out of sync with your community, you may wish to contact your Congress member for more details on this ruling.

You can also contact your local stations directly to get a waiver for access to another market's television stations. And if all of this hasn't made your head spin enough, wait until our next issue when we explain sample data collection and validation!

http://www.nielsenmedia.com/E-letters/Vwpnt_Nov_05.pdf