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Australia's Nation-wide Research Organisation
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Beware of Media Schedules which include Magazines Published with Newspapers

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When is a Roy Morgan readership figure not a Roy Morgan readership figure? When it's a newspaper inserted magazine readership figure.

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Well at least sometimes anyway. It seems that newspaper publishers continue to incorrectly attribute the readership of newspapers such as The Weekend Australian and Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald/Age to the free magazines distributed with them (The Australian Magazine and Good Weekend).

They're doing it in trade advertisements, promotional brochures, and in schedule evaluations - and it's wrong.

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It wouldn't matter quite so much if the stakes weren't so high. The fact is though, this abuse of readership data can have a significant impact on the allocation of magazine advertising budgets.

Publishers of these titles argue that the readership of inserted magazines should not be measured separately (because they're 'part of the paper') and that the Roy Morgan methodology understates the 'true' readership of inserted magazines. One of the publishers debunks Roy Morgan figures by citing 'overseas evidence' from the United Kingdom. In the UK (it's argued) the ratio of an inserted magazine's readership to the readership of its host newspaper can be up to 105%. (In other words, more people read the magazine than the host newspaper).

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Here are the facts as we see them:

- i) Although inserted magazines are distributed with newspapers, (and therefore, at least initially, are 'part of the paper') they quite clearly also have a life of their own. Moreover since they compete with standalone magazines for advertising revenue, their readership should be separately measured, and measured using a method appropriate for a weekly magazine.
- ii) There are logical reasons why any given part or section of a newspaper may not be read by everyone who reads or looks into the newspaper. For example, it would be fair to say that many people who read the Saturday Sydney Morning Herald/Saturday Age look at these newspapers solely for the classifieds. Moreover these papers are large, cover many topics and have several independent sections. Some people read only the sports pages, others only the political news, others only the financial news, etc..

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Inserting a magazine in a newspaper doesn't necessarily mean the magazine will be sought after and read by people who read the newspaper.

In fact, to our knowledge, in NSW, Good Weekend is not even inserted in Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald, but available separately at distribution points. Perhaps Fairfax should provide separate circulation information on Good Weekend?

- iii) In Australia we measure the readership of The Australian Magazine and Good Weekend using the 'Through-the-Book' (TTB) method, in which respondents are shown an actual copy of a specific issue.

Using this approach (similar to that used by Simmons in the USA), we obtain a magazine to host ratio of about 55% for The Australian Magazine and Good Weekend. (Although this has not always been the case. As shown in Figure 1 and 2, the readership and the 'magazine to host ratio', for both magazines has shown progressive growth since their respective launches.)

- iv) In contrast, the UK results quoted by newspaper publishers were obtained using the 'Recency' method. (Essentially, this involves asking respondents which magazines they have read or looked into in the 'last 7 days').

Before using our 'specific issue' method to measure readership of business and general weekly magazines (Bulletin, Time, BRW, Australian Business, Good Weekend, The Australian Magazine and West Australian Magazine) we used a 'recency' question similar to that now used in the UK. However, in 1983/84, experimentation conducted by the Roy Morgan Research Centre in conjunction with publishers, showed the Roy Morgan 'Recency' method inflated weekly magazine readers-per-copy by up to 30% or 35%.

The UK 'Recency' questions make no attempt to eliminate replication or telescoping. Because of this, the UK questions inflate readership levels. The 'specific issue' method eliminates these errors.

- v) The Roy Morgan Research Centre has experimented with a number of approaches to measuring inserted magazines, using both door-to-door and telephone surveys.

Probably the most interesting and significant experiment was conducted February and May 1990. In this experiment, an approach very similar to the UK 'Recency' method was used.

As shown in Figure 3, when compared with Roy Morgan's standard survey results (using 'Through-the-Book') for April to September 1990, the magazine to host ratio increased from 55% to about 75%.

Therefore even by simulating the UK 'Recency' approach, we did not obtain ratios of 100% or higher. (And of course, as noted earlier, due to replication, the 'Recency' estimates are inflated.) The experimental results do, however, highlight a real difference between the readership of Australian and UK inserts. Using the same methodology (Recency), UK inserts achieve significantly higher magazine to host ratios. We believe this is simply because UK inserts are better established, and more substantial than their Australian counterparts.

Probably the most convincing evidence that RMRC's 'Through-the-Book' method does not disadvantage inserted magazines comes from the Roy Morgan Readership Survey in New Zealand. In New Zealand we use exactly the same 'Through-the-Book' approach to measure the readership of a free magazine inserted with the Friday issue of National Business Review, called 'NBR Magazine'.

Guess what 'magazine to host' ratio we get? A little over 100%!

There is absolutely no justification in Australian publishers attributing host newspaper readership levels to inserted magazines.

So next time you see an ad. or read a brochure about these magazines, ask yourself the question: "Is the readership information based on the magazine, or the newspaper with which it is distributed?" (Check the fine print in the ad. or the brochure).

Perhaps more importantly, whenever you ask a publisher to run a schedule evaluation which includes these magazines, always specify that inserted magazines are based on the Roy Morgan magazine figures, not the newspaper readership figures.

FIGURE 1

Magazine to Host Ratio

Australian Magazine and Good Weekend

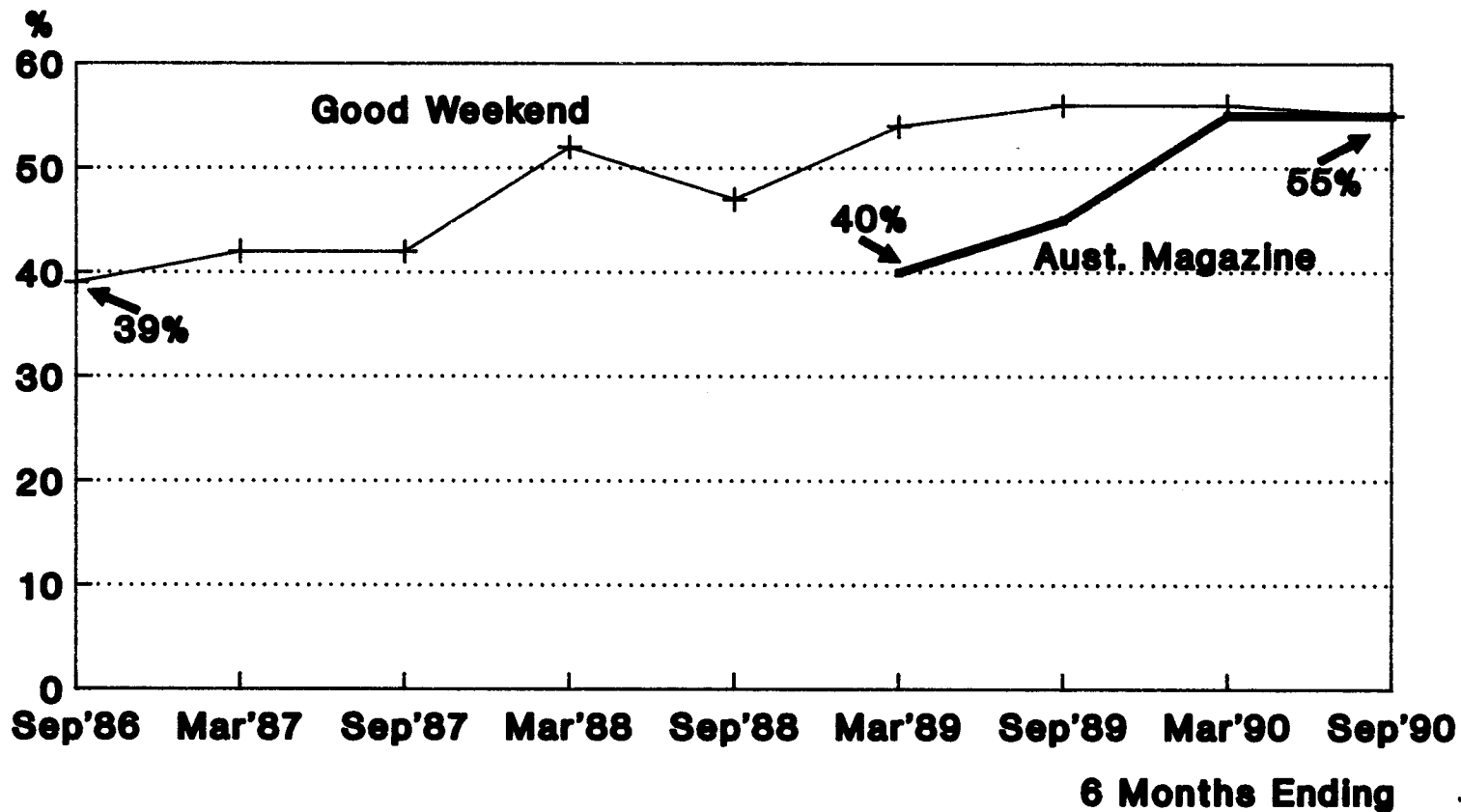


FIGURE 2

Readership

Australian Magazine and Good Weekend

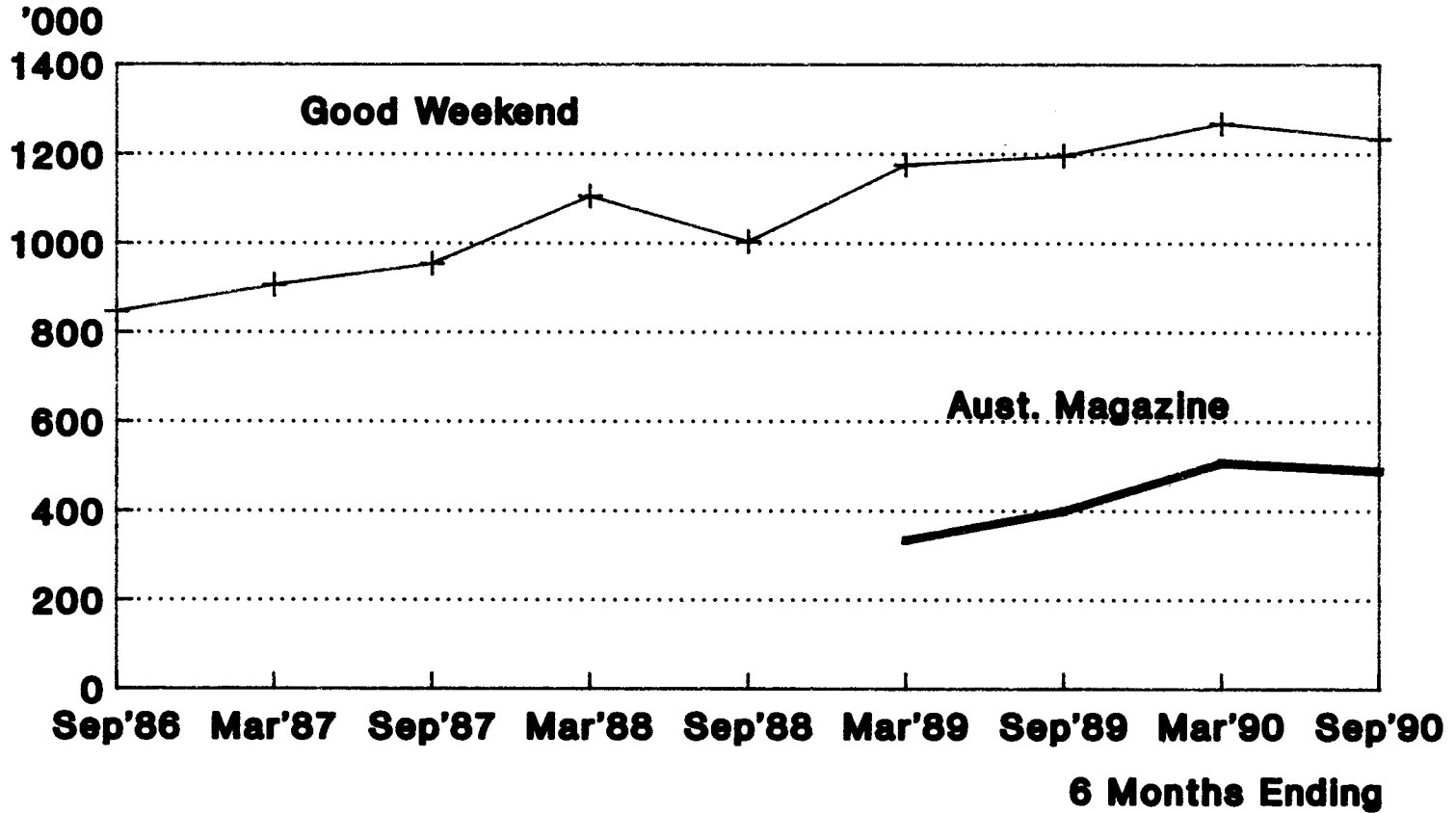


FIGURE 3

Magazine to Host Ratio

Australian Magazine and Good Weekend

