



AN UNCOMMON SENSE  
OF THE CONSUMER™

# JUST FOR PROGRAMMERS

April 23, 2014

## Stop the Madness

Lions and Tigers and Bears... oh my. Hourglasses, bowties and stopsets... oh dear! What's a Program Director to do?

Since the earliest days of PPM conventional wisdom has been to place your stopsets so that they overlap the quarter hours starting at the end of one and carrying over to the first few minutes of the next. If you have six minutes of spots to play you would start at :12 and :42 so you are back to content by :18 and :48 (or :27 and :57 to be out by :33 and :03).

This stems from needing five minutes of listening from a panelist inside a quarter hour to get ratings credit. The minutes don't have to be consecutive but they have to add up to five before the next quarter hour starts. Placing stopsets across the quarter hours minimizes the impact on any particular period enabling you to strive for maximum credit in every 15 minute segment of the clock.

Another theory is to place stopsets so that they take up the last minutes of a quarter hour – say from :09 to :15 or :39 to :45 – so that you have two completely clean quarter hours to sweep through. This again could help maximize the number of listeners who will be tuned in for five minutes during those 15-minute stretches.

The most amazing part of the discussion though is how often it comes up with clients. Maximizing stopset placement is very nearly an obsession in PPM markets and today we're here to say stop the madness! In reality the hourglass, bow tie and two clean quarter hour approaches are all statistically and strategically valid and it would be very difficult to prove any one is better than the other.

Instead, think of evaluating where to put your stopsets as a market-specific challenge. Consider what your competitors are doing. If everyone in the market is using the bowtie it could make sense to be the only hourglass so when the rest of market is playing spots you have content. Or it could be smart to pre-stop your direct competitor by using the two clean quarter hour approach so you are out of spots first. Analyze your situation, make a decision and go with it.

The point is to not get too caught up in the minutiae because listeners don't schedule their lives around our best laid quarter-hour plans. People tune out because they have to; the baby is crying, the boss is yelling or the car is parked. Effective teasing and compelling content that convinces them to come back for another occasion of listening is as important, if not more, than perfect stopset timing. Plus, most stations aren't precise enough to hit scheduled spot times down to the exact second so you wind up obsessed about something that may not work right anyway.

Sure it's important to use sound PPM-related programming strategies and that includes being smart about placing stopsets to maximize ratings credit. But don't overthink it; make a smart decision, strive to hit your target times every hour and move on. Instead obsess about improving your content and imaging because in the end that's more likely to result in credited quarter hours than starting your spots at :42 vs. :41.

