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## Good News: Waiting Room Mags Bring Lots of Engaged Readers

**Bad News: They're Less Likely to Act on Ads**

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Those magazines lying around doctors' offices, hair salons and airports are in fact worth advertisers' money, according to a study commissioned by Time Inc. and Mediaedge:cia, a surprising conclusion from business partners more often antagonistic over issues like this.



The study found that readers in waiting rooms doctor's offices and beauty parlors do not respond to ads as strongly as people reading newsstand or subscription copies -- but that the gaps are overcome by the much greater number of people who read each public-place copy.

Photo Credit: AP

Publishers have generally promoted the value of public-place copies, but advertisers and their agencies have often questioned the practice because magazines peg ad rates to their official "paid" circulations -- which until now have included thousands of public-place copies for which readers pay nothing.

"Intuitively, we thought that people perused the copies, but we had questions as to the level of engagement they had versus newsstand or subscription readers," said George Janson, managing partner and director of print, Mediaedge:cia.

### **Circulation changes**

Those questions grew louder recently after the industry's chief arbiter of such things, the Audit Bureau

of Circulations, decided to end its policy of calling public-place magazines "paid" as long as a sponsor somewhere paid something for them. Starting with this reporting period, the first half of 2006, the audit bureau will require public-place copies to go in a new category called "verified."

"There was never a question that we were generating a lot of readership," said John Squires, co-chief operating officer, Time Inc. "Now all of a sudden there are a lot of questions about it because of the change."

The study, conducted online in January by independent research firm M&RR, actually found that readers in waiting rooms, beauty parlors and the like do not respond to ads as strongly as people reading newsstand or subscription copies -- but that the gaps are overcome by the much greater number of people who read each public-place copy. Respondents were part of a 4.5 million household internet panel in the U.S.

About 29% of respondents, for example, said they have bought (or at least intended to buy) something advertised in a magazine from the newsstand or a subscription. Only 19% of respondents said the same thing about public-place magazine ads. And 27% said they had "followed up" on an ad from a newsstand or subscriber copy, compared to just 15% for public-place magazine ads.

### **Absorbed readers**

But by other measures -- like absorption in magazines and engagement with their information -- the differences were smaller. Moreover, public-place readers said they had more time to devote to just reading magazines, felt less guilty about reading them instead of doing other things and multitasked less while reading them.

While the study shows that readers engage with and value the free magazines they find in waiting areas, it doesn't answer everything, Mr. Janson said. "You have to look at this on a magazine-by-magazine and category basis," he said. "It's important to put data into a historical context as well. If over time, individual paid subscriptions are decreasing and public-place copies are increasing, this would wave a red flag."

Mr. Squires said the study was a first step in legitimizing public-place circulation for advertisers. "If we're going to be charging for this and we expect our advertisers to pay for it, let's be honest, dig in and show them what it's worth," he said. "If we do some more work like this, we get a little bit out of this box of only valuing circulation on the basis of whether it's paid for and how it was paid for."