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PPM Panels: A Guidebook for Arbitron Authorized Users



Introduction

In any given month, more than 70,000 people are serving as Arbitron Portable People Meter™ (PPM®) panelists nationwide. Arbitron recruits and manages these panelists through a series of procedures and techniques developed through years of experience. This guidebook will discuss the selection, recruitment, retention, and retirement of panelists, and will provide insights into the benefits of using panels in radio and research audience measurement.

The Advantages of Panels

Arbitron Diary service uses a survey methodology in which each household member participates for one week, actively writing his or her radio listening in a survey diary. Because diarykeeping requires active participation by respondents, the quality of diarykeeping would likely diminish if households were asked to keep diaries for extended periods of time.

PPM methodology asks comparatively little of panelists. The panelist must wear or carry a meter during waking hours and dock the meter at bedtime. The meter captures the panelists' radio listening and other media exposure on a passive basis. Because the PPM system is a passive measurement system, panelists are able to reliably participate for extended intervals. Each PPM household is part of a panel whose members generally participate for a number of months¹.

Each panelist (aged 6 or older) receives his or her own meter. A household is comprised of individuals who reside together (e.g., in a house, apartment, or mobile home) and may contain people who live alone, families, unrelated persons, or combinations of relatives and non-relatives.

PPM panels have at least two key advantages over survey methods in which people participate on a "one-time-only" basis:

- The PPM service captures media exposure passively. Panelists need only wear or carry the meter with them and dock the meter at bedtime. The meter captures their radio and other media exposure automatically. Panelists may therefore find that compliance with the researcher's instructions is a routine matter that requires little conscious effort.
- Panelists who participate for an extended period add stability to the ratings and audience measurement research by enabling a larger sample to be available on any given day and by providing more total observations of behavior compared with one-time surveys.

Although members of PPM panels may be replaced with new panelists for a variety of reasons, many panelists participate for an interval sufficient enough that participation becomes a part of their daily routines.



¹ At the time of publication of this guidebook, PPM panelists participate for an average of 12 months.

Sample Acquisition²

Arbitron uses an address-based sample frame, which includes: households with landline telephones; households with cell phones, and landlines they rarely or never use; households with cell phones and no landlines; and households without telephone access.

Address-Based Sample Frame

The sample frame begins with randomly selected addresses. Addresses are matched to landline phone numbers where a match can be obtained. When a match cannot be obtained, the address is mailed an Arbitron questionnaire that confirms a household's telephone usage and contact telephone numbers, while also authorizing Arbitron to contact the household by phone. Households for which phone numbers are available, or that provide telephone numbers on their returned questionnaires, may be contacted for recruitment by phone.

In-Person Recruiting

Addresses for which Arbitron does not have a phone number or which cannot be reached by telephone are eligible for in-person recruiting. In-person recruiting of eligible households occurs in all markets.

Panel Recruitment²

Panel recruitment is a multi-step process. Arbitron attempts to recruit selected households through a series of written communications, telephone calls, and/or in-person visits, introducing the household to Arbitron and PPM measurement, obtaining information about the household, and encouraging the household to participate as PPM panelists.

Basic and Alternate Households

Prior to the start of recruitment activities, Arbitron randomly designates PPM sample as "Basic" or "Alternate." This distinction helps Arbitron organize the sample and focus recruitment efforts while preserving panel stability. Should a Basic household refuse to participate in the panel, Arbitron may attempt to recruit an Alternate household to take its place. Alternate selection is stratified by demographic composition, as explained below, so that the selected Alternates appropriately represent the refusing Basics.

Sample Preparation

Sample preparation is used to gather household characteristics and effectively manage composition of the panel (see Stratification). At this stage, the household's address is confirmed and household-level characteristics are determined—such as the presence of an 18- to 24-year-old in the household and the household members' race/ethnicity.

Sample Recruitment

During the recruitment of households to participate as panelists, Arbitron obtains demographic and other information for each household member. Arbitron recruitment specialists also employ various techniques to help ensure that household members understand how to participate as panelists.

Media-Affiliated Households

Media-affiliated households are not eligible to participate. All households are asked questions before recruitment and during their time in the panel to determine whether any household member is media-affiliated.

² The descriptions apply to all Arbitron PPM markets except Houston-Galveston, which employs a different, but comparable, sampling and recruitment approach.

Stratification²

Sample stratification is a sampling method designed to enable greater control over sample selection. Stratification identifies households for recruitment using a variety of characteristics that were obtained during the sample preparation process for selection, including age, race/ethnicity, and language-usage characteristics.

Stratification entails the classification of eligible Alternate households into categories (or “strata”) based on the information obtained during sample preparation. Alternate households are recruited to replace refusing Basic households. Arbitron selects an Alternate household for recruitment at random from among those demographic strata from which a sample is needed to better represent the demographic characteristics of the market.

Stratified households are classified based on variables collected during sample preparation that include:

- Presence of person 18- to 24-years-old
- Presence of person 25- to 44-years-old
- Race/ethnicity
- Language usage of Hispanic households (where applicable)
- Geography within market

For further information about the management of geographic proportionality within stratification, please see the *Description of Methodology*.



PPM Panelist Equipment

Once all household members agree to participate, the household receives Arbitron PPM equipment.

At present, Arbitron uses two generations of PPM equipment—PPM 14 and PPM 360. PPM 14 is the original PPM equipment; the PPM 360 system was deployed in Spring 2012 as part of the Arbitron continuous improvement program. While PPM 360 involves a new look and feel for the meter itself and less equipment for the household to install, the code and motion detection technology is identical in both generations of the meter. Arbitron expects that most panelists will be using the PPM 360 meter by the end of 2014.

The meter collects exposures to encoded radio stations and other media sources via a small microphone. The meter also contains an internal clock, a rechargeable internal battery, a motion detector, and a small green light that remains steadily illuminated while the meter is in motion. Routine body movement is sufficient motion to keep the light illuminated.

An accessory—the headphone adaptor—is available for both generations of PPM equipment. This adaptor connects the meter, headphones, and audio source, allowing the meter to capture the panelist’s listening when using headphones.

² The descriptions apply to all Arbitron PPM markets except Houston-Galveston, which employs a different, but comparable, sampling and recruitment approach.

PPM 14

Households installed with PPM 14 hardware receive a meter and a docking station for each panelist and a single household data collector.

The docking station is generally kept by the bedside. Panelists are instructed to dock their meters when they retire for the day. The docking station includes an LCD display through which Arbitron may provide information and messages to the panelist. The docking station charges the battery in the panelist's meter and transmits listening and motion data to the household data collector.

The data collector transmits the household's collected listening and motion data to Arbitron via a landline telephone line or cellular telephone modem. The collector also emits a signal, detectable by the meter, which allows Arbitron to distinguish between media used in-home versus out-of-home.

The headphone adapter is supplied to all panelists who indicate having listened to radio and/or other media using headphones at any time in the past year.



Household Collector, Docking Station/Recharger and Meter

PPM 360

Households installed with PPM 360 hardware receive a meter, a charging cord, and a headphone adaptor for each panelist. The PPM 360 uses mobile cellular technology to communicate with Arbitron, eliminating the need for a household collector.

The PPM 360 is slightly smaller than the PPM 14. It has a more rounded design and resembles a small cell phone. The PPM 360 features an LCD readout that displays the panelist's preferred name along with other information, such as a "low battery" message. The internal components (microphone, battery, etc.) are the same in both meters.

The battery in the PPM 360 meter is charged by means of a mini-USB power cord, which Arbitron provides. Arbitron also provides a charging cradle, similar to the PPM 14 docking station, for panelists to place at their bedside. The charging cradle encourages the meter to be charged bedside, which helps instill routine and reinforce good compliance habits.

Each PPM 360 household also receives two location beacons, which are small devices that plug directly into standard electrical outlets inside the household. Arbitron provides two in order to ensure better coverage in the house and to provide redundancy in case one is inadvertently unplugged. Once plugged in, the location beacons emit a signal that is detectable by the meter. The presence of this signal allows Arbitron to distinguish between media used in-home versus out-of-home.



Panel Management

Arbitron has a staff of Panel Relations Specialists who act as liaisons between Arbitron and the panelists. These Panel Relations Specialists help panelists install household equipment, train new panelists, monitor panelist compliance, and provide coaching. Panel Relations Specialists interact with panelists by telephone, email, text messages, and other means in accordance with the Arbitron Privacy Statement. They also arrange for visits to the household by field staff.

The household must install the equipment and provide sufficient motion data before the panelists are eligible to be included in audience estimates and research.

Wearing the Meter

Panelists are asked to wear or carry the meter during their waking hours. The meter contains a motion detector that helps ensure that the meter is being worn or carried by the panelist when exposures to encoded radio stations and other media sources occur. When a panelist meets the eligibility criteria and becomes part of the In-Tab sample, the media exposures detected by the meter are considered for crediting regardless of whether the meter was in motion at the exact time of the media detection.

Panel Relations Specialists contact PPM households as necessary throughout the household's tenure in the panel, encouraging panelists to wear or carry their meters and to comply with other requirements for participation. Arbitron has several ways to assist panelists in complying with these requirements, including:

- **Incentives.** Arbitron employs a combination of incentives for panelist compliance, including monetary premiums, gift cards, and various promised incentives.
- **Reminders.** In addition to instructions from Panel Relations Specialists, panelists receive visible reminders to comply with Arbitron instructions. When the meter has been without motion for 20 minutes, the green light on the meter flashes to remind the panelist that he or she has put the meter down, and to prompt the panelist to resume wearing or carrying the meter.
- **Accessories.** Arbitron makes accessories available to panelists to allow them to customize their meters and provides clips and lanyards to help ensure the meter can be readily worn or carried.
- **Special Measures.** Arbitron provides special instructional materials for children aged 6 to 11 and will provide young panelists with customized letters for school authorities, where requested, explaining the importance of participation in the audience measurement ratings and research.
- **Panelist Homepage.** Each panelist has access to a personal online homepage. The "My Meter and Me" homepages allow panelists to review their carry time, keep track of incentive points, ask questions, make suggestions, and chat with Panel Relations Specialists. The site also reminds panelists to keep the meter with them 24/7.
- **Coaching.** Panel Relations Specialists make every reasonable attempt to gain cooperation from noncompliant panelists. Compliance coaching may take place via telephone, email, text messages, in-person visits to the household, or other means. Households that fail to respond to these and other initiatives may be deinstalled at the discretion of Arbitron.



Docking the Meter

Panelists are instructed to charge their meters at bedtime each day. Panelists receive visible reminders to dock their meters each day, as well as reminders from Panel Relations Specialists.

Minimum Daily Motion Requirement and In-Tab Status

A panelist must meet the minimum daily motion requirement to be eligible for In-Tab on the media day (eight hours for adults 18 years old and over; five hours for persons 6 to 17). On average, In-Tab panelists carry their meter between 14 and 15 hours per day.

Demographic Characteristics Updates

Arbitron periodically contacts each household to reconfirm or update the household's demographic characteristics and media affiliation status.

Traveling Panelists

A panelist who is traveling or away from home for a brief interval may be instructed to take the meter while traveling. This helps keep the panelist accustomed to wearing or carrying the meter.

Travel and Meters

The meter's battery will retain a charge for several days. Travel chargers are available upon request for PPM 14 panelists who travel, as well as for PPM 14 panelists vacationing for up to two weeks.

The mini-USB power cord that is provided with the PPM 360 equipment can be used as a travel charger.

If the meter is unable to connect to Arbitron, the meter's memory may retain listening and motion data without being downloaded. When a panelist docks the meter, exposures from the last seven days may be included in the ratings calculations and research. The audience measurement data will be counted for the market in which the panelist was sampled.

Temporarily Ineligible Panelists

Household members who are known to be away from the household for two or more weeks (but for less than six months) may be classified as "temporarily ineligible" and are not included in the reported data or reports. Persons who will be away for more than six months are not considered to be part of the household and are deinstalled.

Panel Integrity

Arbitron takes the importance of preserving the integrity of its audience estimates very seriously. A number of analytical tools and policies are in place to help reasonably ensure, to the extent that Arbitron can influence such situations, that panel integrity is not compromised by panelists either intentionally or unintentionally. These include reasonable safeguards to protect the confidentiality of panelists, media affiliation guidelines, rating bias and rating distortion guidelines, and other efforts aimed at identifying the use of Arbitron meters or household equipment for purposes other than those for which they were intended.

Panelist Privacy

Arbitron treats the identity of all panelists as confidential. Panelists are never identified by name, address, or telephone number in syndicated reports. Additionally, Arbitron only uses the panelist information in a manner consistent with Arbitron privacy statement, or if required by law.

In turn, Arbitron requests panelists do not discuss their role in the research with people outside of their household. This includes posting or sharing comments about participation online with anyone on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Arbitron also asks that panelists keep their participation private until they have been out of the ratings and research panel for at least one full year. Households with panelists who do not adhere to these guidelines are deinstalled.

Station Contact with Panelists

Arbitron may treat as rating distortion any effort by a station to learn the identity of PPM panelists, or to gain control over meters or other PPM household equipment. Such activities may result in a station being delisted from all Arbitron reports.

Improper Use of PPM Equipment

A key feature of the Arbitron PPM methodology is its capability to measure the listening behavior of each household member by issuing each person his or her own personal meter. Throughout the household's tenure in the panel, the panelists are instructed to wear or carry their own meters.

Arbitron uses proprietary software programs and procedures to help identify instances in which panelists may be carrying another household member's meter or attempting to circumvent compliance requirements. Although details regarding these programs and procedures must remain confidential to help ensure their effectiveness, Arbitron will investigate and take appropriate action anytime the results of the investigation warrants it at Arbitron's discretion. Depending on the specific circumstances, responses may include special coaching, deinstallation, or other actions.

Turnover and Sample Retirement

On average, households remain in the panel close to one year, but may participate for up to two years. Households may retire from the panel for a variety of reasons—either self-initiated or at the discretion of Arbitron. Reasons for retirement from the panel include, but are not limited to, moving out of the market, failure to comply with instructions, and reaching the scheduled end of their tenure on the panel.

Contact Information and Resources

We hope you find the information in this guidebook helpful, and welcome questions. Please feel free to contact us and to review the materials available on the Arbitron PPM website www.arbitron.com/ppm:

- PPM Data Delivery Schedule
- PPM Encoding Handbook for Radio
- Arbitron's Rating Distortion and Rating Bias guidelines for PPM markets

Arbitron Contact Information

- Nick Freeling (410) 312-8424
- Bob Lloyd (410) 312-8427

Additional Arbitron Information

- www.arbitron.com
- www.arbitron.com/ppm
- www.arbitrontraining.com



PPM ratings are based on audience estimates and are the opinion of Arbitron and should not be relied on for precise accuracy or precise representativeness of a demographic or radio market.