

PSA Exposure During an Election Year

Letting the data do the talking

WILL YOUR PSA SEE REDUCED AIRTIME DUE TO THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS?

PREPARED BY:

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Julia McDowell

Vice President
Williams Whittle

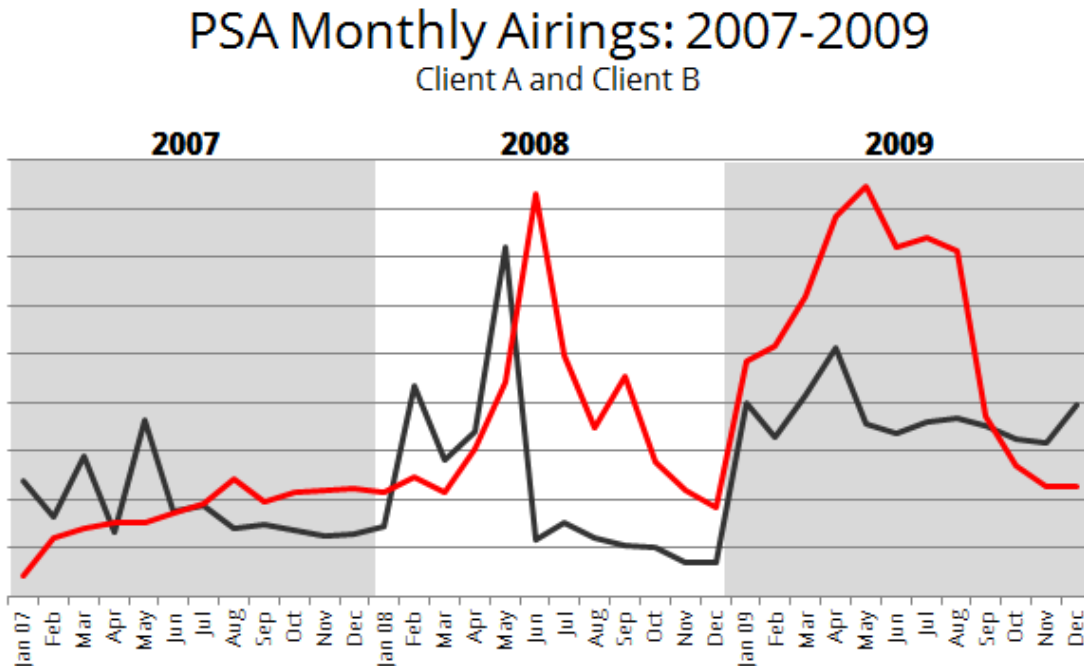
In presidential election years, the most frequently asked question we get is, “will my PSA see reduced airtime due to the November elections?” We’ve even heard of nonprofits completely forgoing a PSA during an election for fear that they will receive no airtime! Because Presidential elections come only once every four years, their impact on media availability is assumed to be unknown. We thought it best to not go on assumption and let the data do the talking.

While there is sure to be excitement and controversy in the election news cycle (hasn’t there been enough already?!) there will be, no doubt, plenty of advertising messages to be placed. That is a guarantee. But, will that completely push out PSA messages? To get a well-informed answer, we analyzed how this has affected PSA airtime in past elections. We looked at the data of two particular clients who had regular, yearly PSA campaigns running full calendar years before and after the election.

General trends

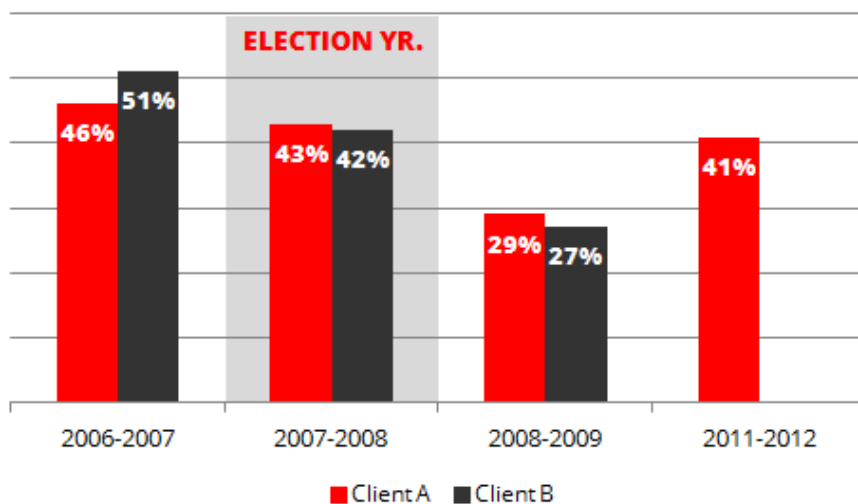
Year over year, PSAs receive different levels of coverage per station and per market for an unending list of reasons – station commitments, local news events, natural disasters, PSA directors’ personal commitments, etc. One year, your PSA might get oodles of airings in one market and the next year see a big decrease; and not because your message is no longer relevant, but because of factors out of your control. That’s the nature of securing free media.

So, when we look at it from a 10,000 foot view, the increase and decrease of a PSA campaigns’ airings the years before and the years after an election look very similar for both clients. This data indicates these fluctuations happen equally for all campaigns year over year **and the election year was not an outlier.**



About half of the markets had more TV airings in 2007 than in 2006 because only about half decreased (46% and 51%)—for both client A and B in the chart below. They had two different messages and strategies, but very similar airings trends. And again, the election year (2008) had an almost even split between markets that had more or fewer airings than the year before. While more markets saw increases in 2009 compared to the election year, the percentages for both clients were again similar—a very close split.

Number of markets where TV airings declined year over year



And if you stack those with the 2012 election, the stats look very similar to the 2008 election year. Note: Only Client B was running a campaign for the full calendar year in 2012.

Our takeaway: ***the factors that affect PSA airings in each particular market are equally felt by all PSA campaigns vying for avails. Your PSA has an equal chance of getting on as long as you do everything you can to get your cause in front of the PSA Directors.***

Market trends

Drilling deeper, another assumption is that airings would be affected in highly contested states (or swing states), where candidates flood the airwaves with messages in an attempt to influence the vote. [In 2008](#), there were 11 states where it was anybody's game and the nation watched with baited breath whether those states would end up red or blue.

Here's where it gets inconsistent. Client A saw decreases of airings in more than 50% of their DMAs in 9 out of 11 states. And Client B only saw decreases of airings in more than 50% of their DMAs in only 5 out of 11 states.

No. of Markets in Swing States where PSA Airings Declined Year Over Year

Based on President Election Swing States in 2008

	# DMAs in state	Client A	Client B
Colorado	3	1	0
Florida	9	6	2
Indiana	6	3	4
Missouri	1	1	0
Nevada	1	1	0
New Hampshire	1	1	1
New Mexico	2	0	1
North Carolina	7	3	2
Ohio	8	2	5
Pennsylvania	4	4	1
Virginia	5	2	3

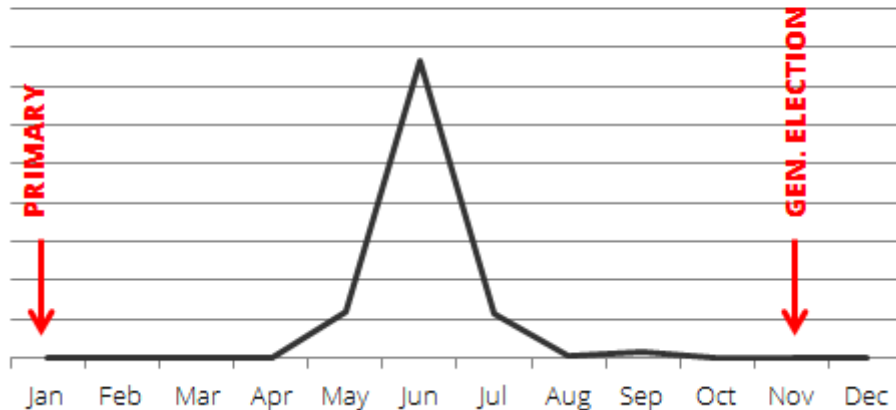
With no strong trends there, we went even deeper into the airings trends within those states and looked at monthly airing trends based on when the primary fell.

We took a month-by-month look at airings in each market in a swing state. And we still came up with no conclusive trend. Some markets had sharp decreases in airings during their primary month as well as November, but other markets didn't.



One market that had “textbook” airing patterns was Miami—with no airings Q1 during the Florida primary and no airings during the election season Sept-Nov.

Miami PSA Airings Client B/2008

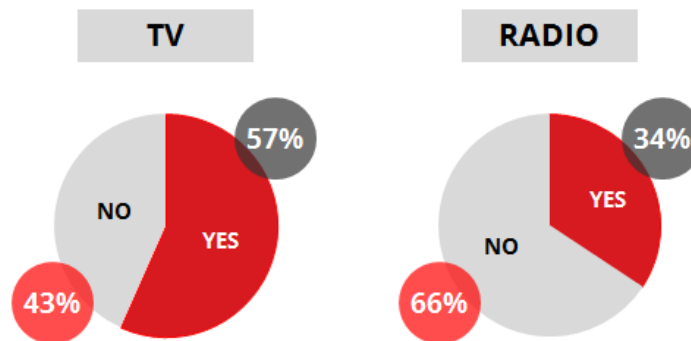


Our takeaway: PSA availability during primary time is that it is unpredictable per market and per state, especially swing states, so **be sure to promote your PSA in between those times.**

Anecdotal opinions

In our annual PSA preferences survey, we also asked PSA Directors at hundreds of TV and radio stations across the country “Do you expect your station to have less PSA inventory due to the 2016 elections?” While some of them acknowledged that they really aren’t sure (as they only submit PSAs and don’t actually place them in advertising slots), their answers were not dramatic: 57% of TV stations and 34% of radio stations said yes. (This is also why we focused on TV airings trends for this report.)

Do you expect your station to have less PSA inventory due to the 2016 elections?



That is certainly far from the majority, even on TV, and is only further evidence that any individual PSA campaign ***will probably only see a limited reduction of airtime during the months leading up to the election.*** It does not mean that PSAs will completely be off the air and your campaign will be a bust.

PSA Planning tips for an election year

Do's:

- Get your PSA message into the hands of PSA directors early in the year and not during September and October.
- Make sure to pitch PSA directors early and regularly throughout the 2016 election year so that your message gets aired before peak political season.
- Since the reduction in avails will most likely be most impacted on TV, translate your PSA for other media like TV, print, OOH and online.

Don'ts:

- Expect less coverage in swing states where the race is hot during the fall. But, remember that is confined to 7 states and approximately 35-or-so markets out of 210.
- PSAs with politicians or a political message will probably not receive much airtime in the election year (stations would rather they pay.)
- Take a breather from PSA activities between Labor Day and Election Day, September through Mid-November, when election coverage is top priority for the media. Use your resources wisely and redirect your efforts to other important marketing endeavors!

**Does your PSA need an “umph” before the elections get red hot?
We're here to help.**

Contact us.



jmcdowell@williamswhittle.com



twitter: @jrodmcld



(703-888-4146