



TV

MRC Strips Nielsen Of Its National, Local TV Accreditation



By Tony Rifilato

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The Media Rating Council stripped Nielsen of its National TV ratings accreditation Wednesday and formally denied its request for a hiatus after the measurement giant underreported viewers during the pandemic.

Nielsen asked the MRC last month to put its accreditation on hold in order to address issues with its panels and focus on the development of Nielsen ONE, its media measurement currency across linear, CTV, mobile and desktop, which is expected to launch beginning in Q4 2022.

“While we are disappointed with this outcome, the suspension will not impact the usability of our data,” a spokesman for Nielsen said in a statement. “We will also take the opportunity to focus on innovating our core products and continue to deliver data that clients can rely on, ultimately creating a better media future for the entire industry.”



Watching TV and using remote controller

The MRC also removed an existing hiatus designation for Nielsen's Local TV services and instead suspended that accreditation.

The MRC's decision comes weeks after its TV Committee rejected Nielsen's request for a temporary pause and voted to revoke its accreditation. Wednesday's decision was in keeping with the committee's recommendations, a spokesman for the MRC said.

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Nielsen CEO David Kenny said on the company's [website](#) that the MRC cited several areas that Nielsen needs to address in order to restore accreditation, such as fixing issues with its panel size and maintenance and adding transparency in its reporting. He added that Nielsen is working with the MRC to resolve the suspension

"We understand and accept the issues laid out – which is why we recently requested a hiatus in accreditation to address them," Kenny said. "In fact, we have already taken considerable action on these items."

The MRC said that a request for a hiatus must be provided to the agency 30 days in advance in order for it to take effect.

Nielsen, however, was informed on August 12 that it was facing a possible suspension by the MRC for its National TV ratings – the same day the company announced it was seeking a hiatus. The MRC told Nielsen on

August 20 that its Local People Meter and Local Set Meter Markets were also facing suspension.

A hiatus can last six to 12 months, but never more than a year. Nielsen had been granted hiatuses for its Digital Ad Ratings (DAR) as well as Local TV beginning late last year.

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DAR accreditation was temporarily shelved after Facebook pulled back on sharing its registration data with Nielsen to assign demographics to digital ad impressions, according to one person familiar with the matter who declined to be identified. With its local ratings, Nielsen had issues maintaining a quality sample size in local markets.

Nielsen's decision to add broadband-only (BBO) homes to its panels in October 2021 was cited as the primary reason for suspending its local TV accreditation.

"Based on continuing issues with the Local Market services, some of which parallel those of the National Television service, as well as the board's assessment of Nielsen's ability to appropriately integrate BBO viewing at a local market level at this time, the board additionally suspended the accreditation for the Local Markets as well," the MRC said.

The hiatus period for DAR, meanwhile, is set to end later this month, “at which time we expect it to be reengaged in the accreditation process,” an MRC spokesman told AdExchanger.

Nielsen plans on waiting until the launch of Nielsen One to resubmit “the whole product for accreditation,” according to two people familiar with Nielsen.

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The Video Advertising Bureau – a TV industry trade group that called on the MRC in July to suspend Nielsen’s accreditation – claimed the underreporting cost TV networks anywhere from \$468 million to \$2.8 billion in national TV ad revenue over 12 months.

“The undercounting was the obvious symptom of something that was very broken, that they were saying was unbroken,” VAB President and CEO Sean Cunningham told AdExchanger.

He added that the hiatus of DAR and local ratings also created a lack of confidence in Nielsen because the measurement giant had not made the necessary fixes.

“That’s part of the reason why we weren’t enthusiastic about the idea of granting them a hiatus nationally because we didn’t have any real precedent of behavior from them that granting a hiatus was the fix they

needed,” Cunningham said. “We didn’t believe that any real progress was going to happen.”

Networks would still continue to use Nielsen’s measurement services without the MRC’s stamp of approval. But a lack of accreditation further erodes confidence in a company that has long been synonymous with traditional TV measurement.

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The underreporting sparked calls for an alternative to legacy TV currencies. As viewers consume content across multiple devices, it requires solutions to measure how often people view ads across linear, streaming and digital in order to gain a unified view into how ad spend performs.

Last week, competitor Comscore told AdExchanger that it asked to be audited by the MRC for both national and local TV measurement accreditation – a clear dig at Nielsen’s MRC disaccreditation for National TV ratings.

Many said that the industry also can’t wait for Nielsen One to launch when rivals like Comscore and digital-first players such as VideoAmp and iSpot are in-market already.

“Billions of dollars are transacted each year based on information provided by audience measurement services,” said VideoAmp Chief Measurability Officer Josh Chasin. “Advertisers expect and deserve that these services meet the highest levels of both transparency and operational excellence.”

NBCUniversal called for “measurement independence” from Nielsen and urged the industry to use multiple measurement providers who use advanced data and analytics rather than the traditional panel-based surveys the measurement giant is known for.

NBCU said in an email last week that it issued an RFP to more than 50 measurement companies – including Nielsen – for measurement alternatives. NBCU said it’s reviewing more than 70 responses.

“Measurement innovation requires us to collaboratively explore our options, evaluate multiple independent yardsticks and expand the possibilities for our industry – because that’s how we become independent from our past and interoperable for our future,” Kelly Abcarian, NBCU’s EVP of ad measurement and impact, said Wednesday.

Nielsen, however, said it would continue to be the “currency of choice” for media companies, advertisers and agencies even without the MRC’s seal of approval.

“The majority of the industry will continue to transact off of Nielsen’s metrics regardless of the current MRC status – it is too engrained into the buying systems,” iSpot CEO Sean Muller said. “However, the MRC is doing its job with these moves. What’s important to recognize is that as things shift to streaming more rapidly, there is a great need for a new currency or set of currencies.”

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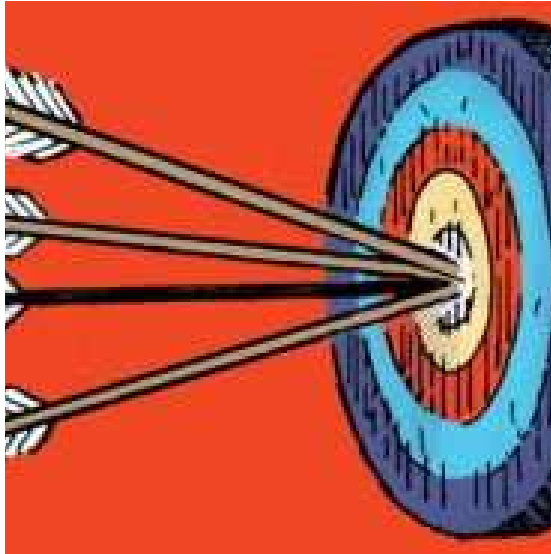
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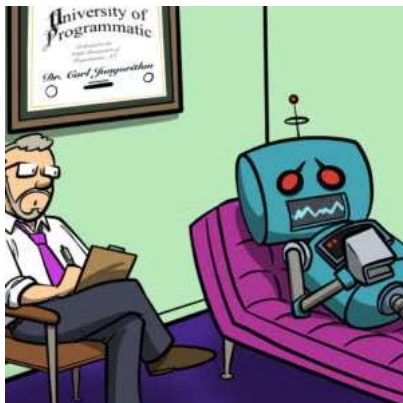


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