

AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATIONS

Austen Hawkins

ABC's role is to provide accurate, independent and comparable validation of circulation data to assist effective buying and selling of advertising space.

*Austen Hawkins is Head of Sales & Marketing, Audit Bureau of Circulations Ltd, Black Prince Yard, 207-209 High Street, Berkhamsted, HP4 1AD.
Tel: 01442 870800
Fax: 01442 877998
E-mail: austenh@abc.org.uk
<http://www.abc.org.uk>*

For many publishers advertising revenue is the life blood of their business, without it their publications simply would not survive. Conversely a company's decision on where to spend their hard earned sales & marketing budget is one of the most crucial decisions they make. New business is vital to a company's success.

What is needed is a mechanism that provides a reputable publisher with an effective tool to attract advertisers and gives advertisers a guarantee on their buying decisions. The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) provides the industry with such a mechanism.

What is ABC?

ABC is a not-for-profit distribution organisation formed in 1931 by advertisers who were tired of the national newspapers' circulation claims of the day. It was calculated at the time that if all the circulation claims of the national press were true every man, woman and child would have to have bought seven daily newspapers. ABC's role, laid down by advertisers from the beginning, is to provide accurate, independent and comparable validation of circulation data, to assist media buyers and media owners in the effective buying and selling of advertising space. All members of ABC must meet the highest standards to achieve ABC certification.

ABC's independence continues to be assured by its tri-partite membership structure of advertisers, advertising agencies and media owners who have equal representation on the ABC Council which governs all aspects of ABC's work.

How does ABC help the advertiser?

If, at a company board meeting, you were asked for your opinion on the acquisition of 'AH Company Ltd', you would, of course, first carefully study your accountants report on the company. The report would assess the company's assets, market penetration, brand recognition, profitability, etc., as well as advise on the cost and impact the acquisition of the company would have on your business. Such a decision would never be based on a hunch or a salesman's word, or desire for annual acquisitions, or cheapness. But ask advertisers why they choose a particular journal or to identify and quantify the goals of their marketing campaign and

you can be met with a deafening silence. It would be nice, in an ideal world, if you could ask your accountant to check the quantity and quality of a publication's circulation data before deciding whether or not to advertise in the journal, in exactly the same way as you would if you were buying a company. The ABC is the media buyer's auditor and does check the quantity and quality of the circulation of all its members. Not only does ABC undertake these checks, it will disseminate the data free of charge. If you require an ABC certificate for a particular journal I will be happy to send it to you or, if you prefer, you could ask the publisher concerned for a copy. Alternatively you can become an Information subscriber to ABC. For £250 per year you will be given access to ABC's range of products and services which includes:

ABC Circulation Review

Produced six monthly, the three editions of the review list the latest ABC certified figures for all ABC members.

ABC certificates

The result of every ABC audit is published as a certificate, copies of which are available on request.

ABC fax back service

This service allows members to dial in on their fax machine to receive a report of the latest ABC certified figures on national newspapers, regional newspapers, consumer and business magazines.

Concurrent release

ABC concurrent releases provides circulation figures delivered to the market place in a single day. Members receive them first.

UK national newspaper figures

Access to monthly updated circulation figures for all UK National newspapers.

ABC FOCUS

Produced quarterly, it lists all new ABC members, resignations, rule changes and publications that have been expelled, as well as general news about ABC.

Historic data

Access to ABC's extensive archive of ABC audited data.

Review and Focus advertising

Only members of ABC can place an advertisement in ABC's *Review* and the *ABC Focus*. With a circulation of over 3,300 ABC members it can provide you with a unique marketing opportunity.

Internet

Access to ABC website which includes ABC audited data of all ABC members.

How does it help publishers?

Readers have a strong affinity with the magazines they read. They regard their trade magazines as a unique source of information which is vital to their jobs, and their consumer magazines as a 'friend' who talks to them about the things they enjoy.

Magazines' special relationship with their readers and their niche market circulation can provide advertisers with a unique and cost effective environment in which to present and sell their products and services.

However, this can only be achieved with high quality circulation. An ABC certificate is a guarantee of the quality of a publisher's circulation.

Not all publishers are honest. I received a call from a publisher who had set up his own company after leaving his previous employer because the managing director insisted that he told advertisers that the circulation of the magazine was 14,000 when the print run was only 1,700. I was at the top of his list of people to call when he formed his new business because he was determined to differentiate himself from his previous employer.

ABC can and does help not only a publisher like this, but all ABC member publishers, by providing a cost effective sales and marketing tool which not only demonstrates the integrity and confidence a publisher has in their publication but provides unequivocal proof of the quantity and quality of the circulation. ABC's independent, accurate and comparable figures are accepted by media buyers and

planners as a prerequisite to their buying decisions.

How does ABC demonstrate the quality of a publisher's circulation?

The ABC certificate provides the industry with not only an average net circulation figure but, more importantly, the quality of the circulation by breaking it down into the following categories.

- *Newstrade and other single copy sales:* the number of copies for which the publisher received payment
- *Subscription copies:* the number of copies sent to *individual addressees* where there is payment for a regular copy within the stated payment bands
- *Multiple copy sales:* the number of copies sold to individuals/companies in multiples for onward distribution; examples are copies to airlines, hotels, etc. ABC does not audit the onward distribution.
- *Society/Association/Institution circulation:* The publication must be the official journal of the organisation for circulation to be claimed under this heading. Circulation is analysed by: copies paid for; those requested by members, in writing or by telephone; and those copies sent to members at the discretion of the Society/Publisher.
- *Paid and qualifying circulation:* All addressees claimed in this category must be shown to meet the publishers 'Terms of Control' (a statement which defines the targeting of the publication) and must also have paid for the publication.
- *Controlled free circulation:* All addressees claimed in this category must be shown to meet the publisher's 'Terms of Control'. Controlled circulation comes in three main categories (with further sub-divisions):-
 - *individually requested in writing / by telephone* - copies sent to individual addressees who have specifically requested their own copy within the last three years. The form of request must meet strict ABC requirements.
 - *company requested in writing/by telephone* - copies sent to individual addressees

which have been requested on their behalf, within the last three years, by an employee of the same company.

non-requested by name / job title - copies sent to *individuals* either by name

and/or job title for which the publisher has source documentation that proves the addressee meets the terms of control.

- Sources will include directories, reader enquiry cards, competition entries and broker lists and must be less than three years old.
- *Non-controlled free circulation : free copies by name/not by name:* copies sent to individual addressees deemed by the publisher to be interested in the field covered by the publication
- *Exhibition/conference bulk free supply:* copies distributed to an exhibition or conference for which there is third party evidence of delivery for the copies

The certificate also carries data in support of the circulation breakdown that includes; cover price, society details, terms of control, age of request, duplication levels, variance (highlights any issue where the net circulation differs from the ABC average by more than 10% up or down), distribution dates of the issues and the number of copies that were distributed to individual exhibitions.

Why not

ABC has over 3,300 members which includes national newspapers, regional newspapers, consumer magazines, business magazines, consumer and business exhibitions, advertisers, advertising agencies and information subscribers. ABC //electronic now audits Internet sites and ABC is soon to launch a scheme for list providers in the direct marketing industry.

Our non-profit status ensures that cost is not a reason to avoid an ABC audit; a third of our Business Press member titles only own one or two journals. No system is too complex, no frequency too strange, no title too young, no circulation too low, no company too small - ABC audits them all. ABC is run for the industry by the industry to help media buyers and media owners buy and sell better.