

Nielsen finally launches a big data currency, but with worrying timing

Article

The news: Nielsen is marching forward with plans to launch a big data currency before it has had the chance to receive accreditation from the **Media Ratings Council (MRC)**, which meets on August 31.

- Nielsen says the big data currency will provide new figures for Spanish-language content and provide data for historically “zero-rated shows”—programming with smaller audiences that traditionally didn’t register using Nielsen’s panel-based data.
- But arriving just days before the MRC gathering and shortly after the end of the upfront season, Nielsen’s surprise launch has raised questions about how the currency functions and why it didn’t simply wait a few more days.

What is big data? Nielsen has historically traded on panel-based data gathered from individual households with ratings meters attached to their set-top boxes. “Big data” refers to measurement and analysis of *much* larger datasets than panels can provide.

- Over the last few years, Nielsen has been prepping cross-media measurement products like the much-anticipated **Nielsen One**, which it began rolling out earlier this year. Nielsen’s big data currency will be an aspect of Nielsen One but is currently being considered part of its existing **Digital Ad Ratings** product.

Strange timing: Nielsen has had a long road to providing big data currencies. It backed out of plans to use big data currencies at this year’s Upfronts in large part because they were not yet accredited by the MRC, upending advertisers’ plans to trade on them.

- That makes the timing of this announcement all the more unusual. The upfront season just came to a close, which means Nielsen’s new currency will only be used to make scant deals until next spring—why, then, couldn’t Nielsen hold off for just a few days?
- There are also unanswered questions about how the currency works. Nielsen says Spanish-language shows are the biggest beneficiaries of big data but failed to say why some networks benefit more than others.

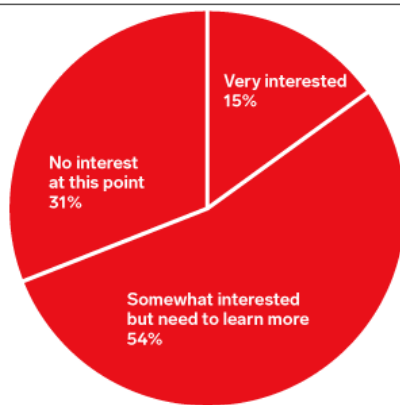
Measurement wild west: Linear and digital TV measurement have become incredibly fractured and competitive since Nielsen first lost its (now-restored) accreditation in 2021. But in recent months, clashes between networks, digital video providers, and measurement companies have created a lack of clarity around measurement accreditation.

- After taking their measurements mostly in-house following Nielsen’s accreditation loss, TV networks this year formed the **Joint Industry Committee**, a group that’s seeking to increase transparency and even create its own certification process.

- But the JIC has struggled to unite the industry. Conflict over standards, like an attempt to create a distinction between user-generated and “premium” content, has led digital leaders like **YouTube** to [shun the group](#).
- Nielsen also refused to join the JIC after it said the group wanted to devalue panel-based data, which it made its name on and still primarily uses. The announcement of a new currency days before the MRC meeting throws into question the place of any measurement authority in a landscape where there are many competing options.

Interest Level in Transacting on Non-Legacy Currencies at This Year's Upfront According to US Brand/Advertising Professionals, March 2023

% of respondents



Source: iSpot.tv, "2023 Upfronts Survey Results," April 20, 2023

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