

## 8.5 The way ahead – a British view

I believe that I am one of the three people here who represent an advertiser. And we advertisers generally spend 85% of our time talking about how to spend 15% of our money. Such important topics as 'should we make the commercial in the Bahamas or in Bali?' occupy us a great deal. It is very gratifying, therefore, that so many talented people should be meeting here to find better ways of helping us in an area where we spend a lot of money, and to which we should devote more of our time.

In fact, however, I appear here not so much as an advertiser but as Chairman of the Technical sub-Committee of the British National Readership Survey.

The title of this final session is 'The Way Ahead'. We have had fine individual pieces, but despite what we have heard the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the one thing we have not discussed at any time here is the totality of media research. What is it that we are doing?

First, a filter question. Among the mass of papers produced at this symposium, have you read, glanced at or paged through the NRS report 'Readership Measurement Reviewed – a study of development options for the NRS' by Michael Brown and Pym Cornish? It was for no idle reason that we distributed this: we gave it to you because we thought it important. Brian Allt has given a brilliant exposé of some of the things we have to think about: we in the United Kingdom want to start a real debate on this issue.

We have created an instrument of measurement so intricate that we cannot change one part of it without affecting the whole survey. Someone asked me the other day if we were embarrassed by the results of our Cumberland Lodge experiment. We were disappointed because it did not produce the miracle of a simple solution, but not embarrassed, because it brought us back to face the truth – that we needed to look at the whole problem. From Cumberland Lodge was born the report to which I have just referred.

Paul Chook has said earlier that methodological research must precede methodological change. I would add that hard and logical thinking must precede methodological research. To quote from this report: 'it cannot be underlined too strongly that this report neither comprises a fully detailed blueprint of future development research, nor – even less – points out any quick easy route to a better NRS. Rather it essays a map of the problem area, on a fairly large scale. If we set out at all, the route we follow will depend on careful consultation of the signposts at each junction, and frequent consultations with the compass. Even then we may still encounter cul de sacs the map does not show, and have to retrace our

steps'. So that is what we in the United Kingdom are setting out to do.

This is the task that we shall be considering in the next few months. I realise that you have not had time to absorb the meaning and the message of this study, but I would like today to invite you individually to join us in looking at this map of the problem and to help us to find the signposts to the future. Are there any areas in the map that you believe are not correctly drawn? Can you show us how to construct a superior compass, which will indicate true north rather than magnetic north?

If there is one message this symposium has for us all, it is that despite the differences between us because of our different cultures, because of the different situations we find ourselves in, we are trying to solve the same problem. But there is no one answer: the problem is much too complex for that. And no one country has sufficient resources of time, talent or money to solve the problem on its own.

Here I come to the problem of money, which is something we have very carefully tried to forget – most media researchers do! It is fair to say that the biggest problem of going forward is finding sufficient money to do the research. Publishers, advertisers and advertising agencies are loath to invest in this sort of area without assurance that they will get something better, but an absolute assurance is something we cannot give them. We can only try to give them good reasons why they should spend the money.

We are all in this situation, and it is quite possible that if we approach the problem as a whole, and all of us get involved, then maybe we shall find that we can each do research to help one another. We are all testing, probing, trying to improve or change what we are at present doing, and together we have the talent and the time. If we can convince our sponsors, we can find the finance to research our mutual problem.

I am not asking for some supernatural organisation to oversee our activities. We have enough examples in the EEC, the Organisation of American States, let alone the United Nations, to frighten us off that one. I am inviting you, as individuals, to join us in a study of the totality of the whole problem, on an ongoing basis, amid the fogs and mists we have been in for the past few days – physically as well as mentally. We all need to find the signposts to the way ahead.

It is perhaps fitting that here in the country that gave birth to the Declaration of Independence we may discover, in one very small area of activity, that we can actually state a Declaration of Interdependence.